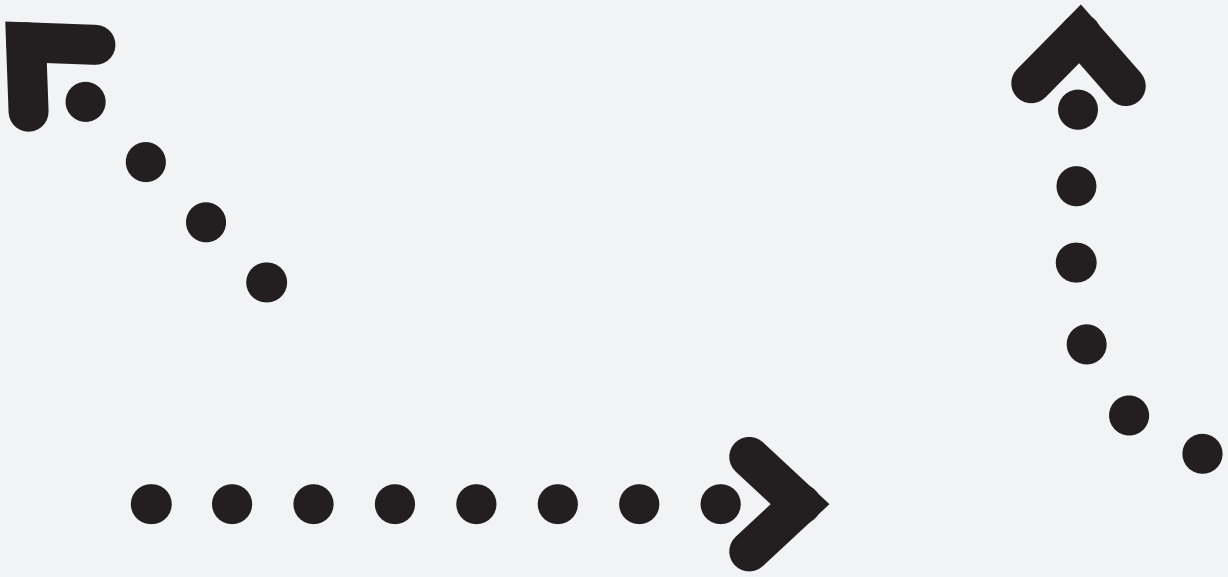
Updating the Grand Tour.
Memory and Invention of the
European Built Environment

Workbook of Affinities



The *Workbook of Affinities* comprises 7 sections that synthesise the results of the exercises undertaken by the UpGranT Consortium in the conception of a learning by travelling pedagogical model, re-empowering the Grand Tour's long-standing practice.

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Mapping Grand Tourists' works in Milan

– *Francesca Bonfante, Tommaso Brighenti*

1 Grand Tour(s)

This contribution presents buildings designed by ten Grand Tourists in Milan, spanning three generations. Gio Ponti (1891-1979) and Giovanni Muzio (1893-1982) were already active in the interwar period. After the Second World War, in Italy, particularly in Milan, the city's concrete historical dimension became dramatically evident in its continuous transition from past to future. With this awareness, many Italians distanced themselves from the canons of the Modern Movement, among whom were Piero Bottoni (1903-1973), Ignazio Gardella (1905-1999), Franca Helg (1920-1989), Franco Marescotti (1908-1991), and Ernesto Nathan Rogers (1909-1969). Vittoriano Viganò (1919-1996) anticipated the third generation, including Gae Aulenti (1927-2012) and Guido Canella (1931-2009). A possible itinerary emerges, expanding the scope of the "urban section" covered in GT#1.

I North-East

"Art comes from afar and goes afar. This is the fascination of art and the reason why people crowd around it and look at it as they look at a traveller returning from very remote lands, from whom marvellous tales are expected". Thus, Alberto Savinio (1944, p. 172) reflects on architecture as an art in his autobiographical portrait of Milan, written before the 1943 bombings. Walking through the city, Savinio finds himself at the corner of Corso Principe Umberto (today via Turati) and via Moscova, facing two façades: the *grim, surly, unlovable* one of Giovanni Muzio's Ca' Brutta (1919-22) and the *arctic* one of Gio Ponti's Montecatini building (1936-38).

In Veneto during the First World War, Muzio and Ponti encountered Andrea Palladio's works, reigniting interest in Neoclassicism, a style they gradually merged with other architectural languages. In the Ca' Brutta, realised at the outset of his professional career, Muzio brought classical language back into a functional, constructive attitude, foreshadowing the new bourgeois city. In his later works, he engaged in a constructive figurative exploration, blending the Lombard–Venetian horizon with the expressionist elements of Northern European architecture, which he studied during his travels. An exemplary building in this respect is the Palazzo del Popolo d'Italia (1938--42) in Cavour Square, for which Muzio visited the headquarters of major newspapers in Germany and Great Britain to familiarise himself with the most modern layouts.

Equally undeniable is Ponti's commitment, for his part, to an all--encompassing internationalism through the direction of *Domus* (1928-41, 1948-79) and *Stile* (1941-47), in which he brings together the activities of the Italian and European protagonists of modern architecture. In 1925, the meeting in Paris with Tony Bouilhet, owner of the Christofle manufactory and a client of the villa *l'Ange Volant* in Garches, would open the way for him to many projects abroad.

Following the period of designing typical houses for the Milanese bourgeoisie from 1931 to 1936, Ponti made a clear shift towards modern architecture. His Montecatini building is an exemplary *palace of labour*, created for work and measured by it, an expression of a progressive bourgeoisie open to European debate. The external façades and the internal layout of the Montecatini building anticipate what Ponti would later write: "Let's make Architecture! Let's make all the things that can only be made with Architecture! architectures, organisms rigorous and compact outside, playful and surprising inside: outside a crystal; but, inside, a life!" (Ponti 1957, p. 204).

Starting from via Turati and heading towards via Palestro, near Villa Reale, Ignazio Gardella, who was a few years younger, designed the Contemporary Art Pavilion PAC. (1947-54). Here, Gardella achieved a modernity

capable of engaging with tradition without resorting to mimesis, and a sensitivity to the themes of the built environment that surpassed any prior ideology statement. The diaphragm effect of the metal meshes that diffuse and break down the internal light, as well as the roofing system that regulates and filters the luminosity of the exhibition space, showing his ability to master the use of light, an almost Scandinavian sensitivity that reveals certain Nordic influences.

For Gardella, travel takes on a form that is less explicitly theoretical than that of some of his contemporaries, yet no less meaningful. Experiences of study and observation, mainly in Europe, helped him build a design knowledge rooted in measurement, judgement, and a deep understanding of the city. Travel does not produce direct quotations or formal transpositions; rather, it operates as a process of sedimentation, influencing proportional control, the choice of materials, and the relationship between building and city.

The architectures mentioned so far are mainly located around Cavour Square.

One must move outward along Ampere Street to visit the Faculty of Architecture of the Politecnico di Milano, designed by Vittoriano Viganò (1974-85). This work proves that the relationship between travel and design may also be conflictual. Viganò ventures into an orthogonally woven configuration that alters the conventional spacing of levels, thereby emphasising inhabitable voids. Floors, diaphragms, joints, and accessories extend from the main volumes of the construction's primary elements. The resulting typological narrative – reflecting a school, factory, or collective dwelling – goes beyond mere construction to embody a space that acts as a museum of itself (Canella 1992, p. 20). The confrontation with international post-war architecture, namely Brutalism, is evident; Viganò makes a personal selection of the masters' poetics based on a view of architecture as an ethical and social practice. Viganò's approach to structure and spatiality offers a profound critique of traditional pedagogical models, reflecting the influence of Anglo-Saxon architecture, which typified English experimentation after the war, exemplified by Denys Lasdun and Cedric Price.

II North-West

Moving to the beginning of Corso Sempione. Here, Giò Ponti's RAI headquarters (1939) face the INA building by Piero Bottoni (1953-58): a long, high-rise residential block perpendicular to the main road, almost an erratic fragment of the unrealised "Milano Verde" plan (1938). The building is also an homage to Le Corbusier, whom Bottoni admired while at university and whom he met at the CIAMs in Frankfurt, Brussels, Athens, and Paris. A central figure of Italian Rationalism, Bottoni conceived modern architecture "not as a stylistic repertoire but as an intellectual discipline, a 'tendency' that imposes precise norms of behaviour on its adherents, a way of life even before an architectural style" (Portoghesi 1973, pp. 6-7). Following Corbusian principles, Bottoni arranged the INA building's ground floor as a porticoed street, serving as a "great distribution gallery." His original design included a roof terrace for recreation, while the tenth floor was to accommodate a roof garden intended for communal use. In the completed building, only the extensive, uninterrupted horizontal fracture persists on the façades.

The Triumphal Arch at the end of Corso Sempione marks the entrance to the park north of Sforza Castle. On its western side, heading towards the city centre, runs the railway line, which reaches Cadorna Station. The station's current layout was designed by Gae Aulenti (1997-2000), an architect who inherited and critically reworked the lessons of Milanese Modernism.

Travel, as a critical tool for knowledge, was central to her approach. Aulenti viewed European cities as stratified palimpsests, in which modernity did not erase memory but rather overlaid it through successive additions. This attitude is expressed in the project for Piazzale Cadorna, which Aulenti interpreted as an urban and infrastructural node, a place of arrival and departure where travel becomes an urban experience, a threshold between the centre and the hinterland. Like Ponti's "palaces of labour" and Bottoni's residential unit, Piazzale Cadorna interacts with the city's complexity, while architecture interprets the symbolic and perceptual aspects of public space. Aulenti constructs a poetics founded on historical continuity, on the interpretation of contextual characteristics, and on an idea of design as an act of cultural translation, also matured through an intense experience of travel. Aulenti's travels and professional work abroad, from France and Germany to the United States, Russia, and China, do not translate into adherence to international models; rather, they nourished her ability to recognise the symbolic and urban value of places.

III South-West: from the historic periphery to the Milanese hinterland

We are now on Milan's western edge, near Naviglio Grande canal, where the cooperative social centre "Grandi e Bertacchi", designed by Franco Marescotti (1951-53), is located. From the beginning of his career, Marescotti focused on social housing. In 1948, he published *Il problema sociale, costruttivo ed economico dell'abitazione* (The social, constructive and economic problem of housing) with Irenio Diotallevi. This was an inventory of construction methods and practices, with around one hundred plates of the typological solutions adopted in Europe between the two World Wars. Marescotti moved a lot across Italy, from Pesaro to Rome, Milan, Florence, and Catania. A turning point, however, was his 1932 meeting with Irenio Diotallevi, who, having recently graduated, travelled to Germany, bringing back several architectural journals and key texts on architectural and urban debate. During Reconstruction, Marescotti designed several housing complexes for the Social Housing Authority (IACP) in the Province of Milan. He nonetheless argued that "the solutions adopted, even if they contributed to revitalising the public housing sector [...] were neither capable of solving nor even clearly defining the housing issues for the less affluent classes" (Marescotti 1980, p. 15).

In 1948, Marescotti travelled to Warsaw, which had been devastated by the war and was at the centre of an intense international debate about city reconstruction (Cantone 1979, p. 68). At the cooperative social centre "Grandi e Bertacchi", he sought to provide a centralised headquarters for the cooperative organisations widespread across Milan's periphery. Social housing was to be integrated with welfare, recreational, and cultural activities, and housed in a partially independent, ad hoc building that would also be open to the neighbourhood's citizens.

Moving outward within the same quadrant of the city, we find works by Guido Canella, a central figure in Italian architecture in the second half of the twentieth century. While, for Marescotti, the integration of dwelling and collective services presents itself as an eminently social and moral problem, Canella instead approached the periphery, starting from the *invariants* of Milanese architecture. According to him, these encompassed *polycentrism, discontinuity, introversion, promiscuity, and contamination*, up to *anachronism*. Although morphologically incoherent, Canella considered all these aspects "structurally organic" because they reflect the frequency, intensity, and polarity of exchanges, which bear witness to a frontier culture and an archipelagic settlement configuration sedimented over a long period of time (Canella 1989, p. 59).

According to Canella, town halls and schools were embryos of civic life. From the 1960s onwards, he realised a series of public buildings in the municipalities of the Milanese hinterland, including the INCIS village (1968-1982) and the town hall of Pieve Emanuele (1971-78), as well as numerous school complexes, conceived as strong urban landmarks in peripheral contexts often lacking a consolidated symbolic structure. In these projects, architecture serves to integrate communal spaces and activities that foster associative life, thereby establishing the settlement core. Much like Marescotti's cooperative social centres, Canella's works bring to the fore the civic dimension of architecture, tasked with collective representation. For Canella, travel held a primarily political and structural significance, focusing on European cities and socialist countries to highlight architecture as a collective and infrastructural element.

IV From the sky to the depths of the city

Returning to the city centre, we encounter a monument, a symbol, almost a "manifesto" of a rich cultural season, "a high point that is at once a point of arrival and of turning" (Bordogna 2017, p. 6) for Milan: the Torre Velasca, designed by Ernesto N. Rogers and his firm BBPR (1950-57). The tower rises towards the sky, conveying a new idea of modernity, founded not on rupture but on continuity, in the dialectical relationship between past and present, between historical memory and the tension towards the future.

This building reflects on the historic city, the meaning of the monument, and the civic role of architecture in the context of post-war reconstruction.

For Rogers, travel was a fundamental component of architectural reflection and intellectual formation. His movements across Europe and the United States, as well as his direct engagement with international experiences developed within the CIAM, define the profile of a cosmopolitan architect who takes a critical stance toward functionalist orthodoxy and its ideological simplifications.

Travel thus becomes an instrument for testing theoretical categories and an opportunity to recognise the value of history as a living material for the project, not as a formal repertoire but as a repository of meanings to be critically reinterpreted. This awareness translated into his ability to decode the urban context as an active interlocutor, avoiding both mimetic imitation and abstraction. This approach is clearly expressed in the Torre Velasca, which reworks medieval, typological, and constructive suggestions into a contemporary synthesis, as well as in the direction of *Casabella-Continuità*, a laboratory in which international experience was filtered by a vision rooted in the historical and cultural specificity of Italy.

A few steps from the Torre Velasca in Duomo Square, we descend into the depths of the city, entering one of the stations of Metro Line 1 (1964), designed by Franco Albini and Franca Helg, with the collaboration of Bob Noorda for the graphics. Albini and Helg operate on an already completed structure and, despite the limited possibilities for action on the distributive level, conceive a unitary intervention extended to the entire city, based on the standardisation of materials (exposed concrete, linoleum, steel, prefabricated panels) and consistent with the concepts of seriality and replicability. In the stations – large collective spaces that are theatres of everyday life – the architects facilitate passenger orientation through repeated elements, such as curved metal handrails, modular, demountable wall cladding panels, and marble seating.

Franca Helg, "the grand dame of Italian architecture" (cf. Piva, Prina 2006), shared much of her professional activity with Albini from 1952 onwards, intelligently securing a fundamental role within the studio. In 1965, to cultivate her interest in developments in other European cities, she took part in a journey organised by Volkswagen to Wolfsburg to visit the factories and the city, an experimental construction site focused on the themes of post-war Reconstruction (AA.VV. 1965, pp. 107-108). Helg worked in many Italian and international contexts, always with a sensitivity to context matured through her teaching and professional activity.

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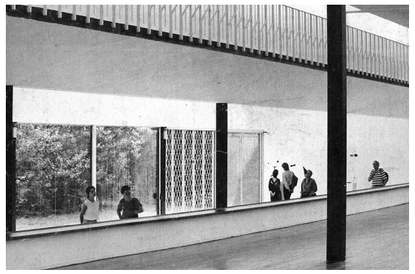
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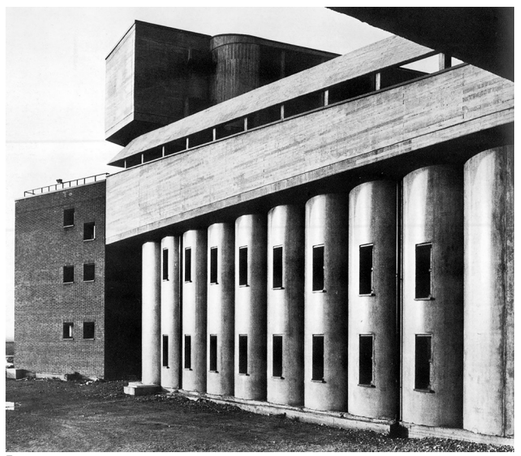
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Wall Atlas

Images and credits

1 Giovanni Muzio, Ca' Brutta, 1919-22 (right), and Gio Ponti, Palazzo Montecatini, Milan, 1936-38 (left), seen from Via Moscova.

2 Ignazio Gardella, Padiglione d'Arte Contemporanea (PAC), Milan, 1947-54, interior view.

3 Vittoriano Viganò, Faculty of Architecture, Politecnico di Milano, 1974-85, view of the entrance from the Via Ampère.

4 Piero Bottoni, INA Building in Corso Sempione, Milan, 1953-58, view of the north-west façade. Piero Bottoni Archive.

5 Gae Aulenti, Cadorna Square, 1997-2000. View of the covered space at the entrance to the metro. Photo by Guia Sambonet.

6 Franco Marescotti, Centro Cooperativo "Grandi e Bertacchi", 1951-53, view from the Naviglio Grande Canal.

7 Guido Canella, civic centre with town hall, middle school, and sports field, Pieve Emanuele, 1971-1990. Guido Canella Archive.

8 BBPR (Belgiojoso, Peressutti, Rogers), Torre Velasca, Milan, 1950-1957.

9 Franco Albini and Franca Helg, Line 1 metro station, Milan, 1962-1964.

10 A group of participants at the 4th CIAM aboard the Patris II en route to Athens. From left to right: Pier Maria Bardi, José Luis Sert, Siegfried Giedion, Piero Bottoni, Cornelis van Eesteren, and Gino Pollini.

11 Gio Ponti and his son Giulio at the New York Alitalia offices with the Superleggera chairs, 1957.

12 Ignazio Gardella and Franco Albini visiting Murano with Marcel Breuer in 1952. CSAC, Gardella Archive.

13 Gae Aulenti, Journey to China, 1974. Gae Aulenti Archive.

14 Vittoriano Viganò during a scuba dive.

Milan in a day-long cross-section

– Cristina Pallini, Luisa Ferro

If we agree with Antonio Acuto[1] (1984, pp. 1-2) that cities are not organisms that grow and decay according to internal logic, then their identity is understood through the dialectical relationship between structural factors shaping society and the settlement's organisation within a territory, expressed in productive activities, infrastructure, and the built environment. Guido Canella suggested that Milan, with its system of artificial waterways and Gothic cathedral, has historically been a city of innovation and resilience, and it might regain that role once more. For architects from central Italy, however, such as Filarete, Bramante and Leonardo, it was a kind of "anomaly." The city acquired a modern, rather homogeneous townscape during the Neoclassical period, which later inspired the federalist visions of Carlo Cattaneo and Camillo Boito.

Within the scope of the UpGranT project, we could not help but follow Canella's focus on 20th-century architects, who remain decisive "for those who must engage with design in a school of architecture" (2010, pp. 16-17). Along this line, our one-day walking tour in Milan covered three main areas: Piazza del Duomo and nearby squares; the Sforza Castle and the Park; Corso Sempione, stemming from the Triumphal Arch and heading northwest towards France.

The tour concluded at the newly developed City Life district, alternating between works by our ten Grand Tourists and other notable buildings that reflect Milanese formal rigour rooted in Lombard tradition. In many instances, the architectural quality also highlights the importance of the urban projects they represent. Thus, these three areas can help us understand the city's possible changes over time. It is no coincidence that they have been the subject of in-depth studies within the Milan School. It is precisely this repository of projects that enables architects to engage with the city's time, revealing the *raison d'être* of some of its unfinished or unresolved parts.

1 Antonio Acuto (1940-2004) taught at the Politecnico di Milano's Faculty of Architecture starting in 1970, working with Guido Canella and Lucio Stellario d'Angiolini. He served as the Director of the Department of Architectural Design (1997-2000) and was the first Dean of the Faculty of Civil Architecture (1997-2000).

2 The scheme dates to the late 1920s and was embedded in the 1934 plan. It involved significant demolition of the old urban fabric to improve car traffic across the historic centre (De Finetti 1969, pp. 221-247).

3 The Roman matrix, a hidden chthonic structure only partly uncovered, has hovered as a mythical precedent, shaping layouts and meanings over time (Torricelli 1997, 2007).

4 Gian Luigi Banfi, Ludovico Barbiano di Belgiojoso, Enrico Peressutti, Ernesto Nathan Rogers.

8:30 am: Missori Square

We met on a winter Sunday morning outside Metro line 3 in Piazza Missori. On our back, we had the National Social Insurance Fund Building by Marcello Piacentini and Ernesto Rapisardi (1929-1931), modern yet rich in stylistic attributes, aligned with a sober 17th-century brick elevation. In front of us, the curve of Hotel Cavalieri by Enrico Lancia and Giò Ponti (1949) exemplified the Milanese Novecento style. Nearby, the remains of an early Christian church marked where the Grand Loop scheme (*Racchetta*)[2] came to a halt. It clashed with another project aimed at restoring the ancient urban form in its monumental spaces.

In Milan, the relationship with antiquity cannot be entrusted solely to the (scarce) vestiges; it must be mediated by a plausible interpretation of the subsequent footprints that have overlaid one another, whose concrete evidence survives in artefacts and traces still in dialogue with one another from afar. At different moments in history, *Mediolanum* suggested a "latent order" to which architectural and urban projects could refer.[3] Carved out of the old urban core, the unfinished Grand Loop acquired its distinguishing townscape after the Second World War. The widespread devastation cleared the way for several residential and office buildings, including the three by Mario Asnago and Claudio Vender (1947 to 1959) and another by Giovanni Muzio (1948-1952). Paraphrasing Umberto Boccioni, "the city rising" around Piazza Missori included two outstanding tall structures, which complement each other in expressing the dialectic with the city: the Velasca Tower by BBPR[4] (with Arturo Danusso, 1950-1958), and the complex for housing, offices, shops, and garage by Luigi Moretti (1951-1956). While the latter features a dense urban fragment whose volumes acquire figurative autonomy against the block's boundaries, the Velasca Tower embodies a new idea of modernity, fed by historical memory and a sense of place.