

Transatlantic Proximities/ Ambiguous Opportunities: The Multiple Paths of Italian Designers in Argentina, 1948-58

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It is very well known that Italian emigration strongly contributed to an increase in the Argentine population. The high amount of hybridizations provoked by such a transfer in almost every sphere of life, from language to food and music, is likewise well known. Architecture offers an effective perspective on this kind of relationship. Indeed, since the end of the nineteenth century Italian architects found great opportunities on the banks of the Rio de la Plata, making a recognisable contribution to the shaping of Argentine cities. The paper observes the Argentine experiences of a number of Italian designers between 1948 and 1958, a decade in which the post-war wave of architectural migration started and developed. Those were also the years in which Argentine architecture, after CIAM 6 (Bridgwater 1947) started to attract the attention of international observers. At the same time, Italian culture was engaged in redefining itself, overlapping new issues and values on the die inherited from the Fascist years, most of which would have concurred to define the then emerging category of “made in Italy.” Therefore, the paths of those Italian designers who had the opportunity to work in Argentina in this period can offer an effective perspective on the ambiguous outcomes of the interaction of cultural proximity with physical (but also political) distance and professional opportunities.

Keywords: Made in Italy; Argentina; Peronism; post-war; transfer

Distance as a Lens

La ciudad italiana más grande del mundo. Etcètera.

*Más pizzerías que en Nápoles y Roma juntos.*¹

In the novel *Sobre heroes y tumbas*, published in 1961, Ernesto Sabato, referring to Buenos Aires, offers a somewhat unsettling but effective description of the transatlantic proximity of Argentina and Italy, which, in a handful of words, joins the quantitative consistency of migrations with the qualitative transmission of customs and traditions. Both resulted from a stratified process tracking a period of intense exchange in the years of Fascism and which received a significant boost after World War Two, even if of a short duration: consistent migrations began in 1947, reached their peak in 1949, weakened and finally dwindled with the progress of the second half of the 1950s.

Architectural historians began to take an interest in the exchanges and migrations between Italy and Argentina in the 1990s. Their studies mainly focused on the nineteenth century and the beginning of the twentieth, decades in which many Italian architects played leading roles in shaping many Argentine cities.² Possibly their interest is due to the fact that, even when fragmented in different regional accents, in those years Italian architecture is at least partially recognizable as an expression of a national culture. That some typologies of buildings, like opera houses, were in most cases designed by Italians suggests an additional character of identity.

Studies on the post-war period are rarer and do not yet make it possible to draw more than a tentative general picture.³ Above all, if one compares the framework of these studies with those concerning migration,⁴ a much-needed reflection on the specificity of this historiographical theme and on the most appropriate sources, tools and methods still seems to be lacking. The history of Italian designers (a term which allows us to group together architects, engineers and other figures involved in the design process) in Argentina after World War Two brings with it other stories and issues. Migrations, circularities, patents and exchanges, like fragments of broken mirrors, can, if combined, give a realistic image of the larger phenomenon and its complexity. The single fragment, if not aligned, will instead produce a distorted and misleading view. This does not mean that individual biographies and personal archives should be disregarded. On the contrary, they represent in many cases the most significant source. Their study, though, should be carried

1 “The biggest Italian city in the world ... more pizzerias than in Naples and Rome considered together” (trans. author).

2 For an overview see Giovanna D’Amia (ed.), *Italia-Argentina andata e ritorno. Migrazioni professionali, relazioni architettoniche, trasformazioni urbane* (Santarcangelo di Romagna: Maggioli, 2015), 7-15.

3 Jorge F. Liernur, “Fuochi di paglia. Architetti italiani del secondo dopoguerra nel dibattito architettonico nella ‘nuova Argentina’ (1947-1951),” *Metamorfosi* 25-26 (1995): 71-80.

4 See, for instance Fernando Devoto, *Le migrazioni italiane in Argentina: un saggio interpretativo* (Naples: L’officina tipografica, 1994); Fernando Devoto, *Storia degli italiani in Argentina* (Rome: Donzelli, 2007).

out in a systemic rather than self-referential perspective. There is no doubt that at present the framework is still very partial, with many gaps and questions still to be answered. This paper focuses on some of the questions raised by the architectural exchange between these two countries that are so distant, but so culturally close.

The main issue is if distance can be used as a lens to evaluate the grade of congruence of Italian design culture in those years. In a moment in which through important exhibitions—such as *Italy at Work: Her Renaissance in Design Today*, staged in various American museums between 1950 and 1953, and *Olivetti, design in industry* held at the Museum of Modern Art in 1952—the concept of “made in Italy” began to take shape and to spread,⁵ was the image Italian designers were projecting on the Argentine screen as coherent as the creation of this new national brand would suggest?

5 Elena Dellapiana, “Italy Creates. Gio Ponti, America and the shaping of the Italian design image,” *Res Mobilis* 7 (August 2018): 25-33.

Between Opportunities and Nostalgia: The Uncertain Reasons for Displacement

Elisabeth Asbrink famously described 1947 as a year in which everything moves in a vibrant way, without stability and without destination, because every possibility is still open.⁶ This can be extended to our case, offering this story an effective starting point for at least two reasons.

6 Elisabeth Asbrink, *1947: When Now Begins* (London: Scribe, 2017).

On the one hand, 1947 was the year of the first post-war CIAM, held in September in Bridgwater, England. Architects Jorge Vivanco and Jorge Ferrari Hardoy, the Argentine delegates, aroused much interest by illustrating projects for the Campus of the University of Tucumán and the study for the Plan for Buenos Aires (EPBA).⁷ These probably were the most promising of a series of public works and projects launched by the government of Juan Domingo Perón that, in official rhetoric, should have led to the construction of the “New Argentina.” CIAM 6 worked as a sort of showcase for the Argentine ferment, to which Eva Perón’s European trip added further visibility that same year. Such foreign magazines as *Architectural Forum*, *Architectural Design* and *Architectural Review* began to take an interest in Argentina. The archive of Ferrari Hardoy, director of the EPBA, preserves correspondence with Monica Pidgeon (who had also been in Bridgwater) and other members of various editorial staffs.⁸ Even more intense were the relations with the leadership of CIAM, and with Sert in particular. The same archive, however, shows how this enthusiasm had a short duration: already in 1949 Ferrari Hardoy announced that

7 EPBA was conceived as a sort of development and updating of the plan proposed by Le Corbusier, Jorge Ferrari Hardoy and Juan Kurchan in 1938. Partly published in several publications, this was exhaustively illustrated in *La Arquitectura de Hoy 4* (1947). See Anahi Ballent, *Las huellas de la política. Vivienda, ciudad, peronismo en Buenos Aires, 1943-1955* (Bernal: Universidad Nacional de Quilmes, 2005), 227-41; Jorge Francisco Liernur, Pablo Pschepiurca, *La red austral. Obras y proyectos de Le Corbusier y sus discípulos en la Argentina (1924-1965)* (Bernal: Universidad Nacional de Quilmes, 2008), 341-74. The CUT project was widely shown in *Nuestra Arquitectura* 254 (September 1950).

8 CIAM Files, The Ferrari Hardoy Archives (FHA), folders A002, A005, A008, A013 (Frances Loeb Library Special Collections, Graduate School of Design, Harvard University).

among the architects active in Argentina only Antoni Bonet would participate in the Congress of Bergamo,⁹ while in 1955 he advised that the Argentine CIAM group no longer existed. The congress also offered the opportunity for direct contact between delegates and foreign colleagues. Specifically, Ferrari Hardoy and Vivanco invited Ernesto Rogers, the only Italian present, to join the teaching staff of the Instituto de Arquitectura y Urbanismo of the University of Tucumán and to collaborate to the EPBA. Presumably, Vivanco, who visited Rome after the conclusion of the congress, contacted the architects of the Association for Organic Architecture (APAO). Three of them, Luigi Piccinato, Enrico Tedeschi and Cino Calcaprina, left for Argentina in 1948, as did Rogers.

On the other hand, 1947 was a crucial year for the redefinition of post-war geopolitical scenarios. The new international map that was taking shape in accordance with the balances of the Cold War had a strong influence, too, on the Italian national scene. Because of its geographical position alongside the Iron Curtain, but also because it was the Western European country with the most important communist party, Italy was to all intents and purposes a frontier nation, central to the international strategies of both superpowers. Therefore, the events of internal politics can be read as a reflection of the interferences of external powers, and of the United States of America in particular. Specifically, the “decisive turning point”¹⁰ made by the Prime Minister, Christian Democrat Alcide De Gasperi, excluding the Socialist and the Communist parties from government at the end of May 1947, would seem to comply with the conditions set by President Truman for the economic aid that the United States would grant to Italy in the following months. This act inaugurated a violent opposition between the Christian Democrats and the Popular Front that culminated in the campaign for the elections of 1948. These proved decisive for the future of the nation, putting an end to the constituent period and binding for decades the destiny of Italy to that of the Christian Democrats and the Atlantic Alliance.

It is clear that the country’s political conditions, especially after a two-decade-long dictatorship, are closely linked to migratory phenomena.¹¹ This aspect, however, has so far remained in the background of studies focused on individual architects, receiving, at most, a mention.¹² The political situation was intertwined with economic difficulties that were particularly critical in 1947. That year Argentina donated two ships of food to Italy, consolidating its image as a prosperous country, “the granary of the planet.”

9 CIAM files, The Ferrari Hardoy Archives (FHA), folder: A051. In the official documents of the congress, however, Ferrari is in the list of participants as the Argentine delegate, Bonet as the Uruguayan. Archivio Piero Bottoni, Politecnico di Milano, folder 71 (VII CIAM, Bergamo, 1949), document 156 (Membres des CIAM participants au VIIème Congrès). The reports on the activities of the 1st Commission refer that the grid of the EPBA was discussed on July 24 and illustrated by Le Corbusier. Archivio Piero Bottoni, folder 71, document 167.

10 Federico Chabod, *L'Italia contemporanea (1918-1948)* (Turin: Einaudi, 1961), 160.

11 Federica Bertagna, *La patria di riserva. L'emigrazione fascista in Argentina* (Rome: Donzelli, 2006).

12 Luca Molinari, “Milano – Tucumán – Buenos Aires – New York – Milano, 1947-1949. Circolarità dei saperi e delle relazioni: il carteggio E.N. Rogers – BBPR,” in *Tra guerra e pace. Società, cultura e architettura nel secondo dopoguerra*, ed. Patrizia Bonifazio, Sergio Pace, Michela Rosso and Paolo Scrivano (Milan: Franco Angeli, 1998), 155-64.

Due to the disappointing situation in their home country and the promise of a wealthy future rich in opportunities, these architects thus decided to leave even though they were in charge of more or less important positions.¹³ Argentina seems to play the role of “America” perfectly. Furthermore, the main assignment for all of them was a teaching contract at the University of Tucumán, which also allowed them to participate in the design of the campus in Cerro San Javier under the direction of Horacio Caminos. However, it is not evident to what extent the Italian contribution influenced the project as a whole.¹⁴ In their general features, therefore, these were the working condition “par excellence” of the migrant architect, who had already allowed many Europeans to move abroad (and especially to the Americas) in the previous decades.

The Presence of the Past or the Ambiguity of the Relationship between Design and Power: The Argentine Experience of Luigi Piccinato

Among the four previously mentioned architects, Luigi Piccinato was the most mature, having been born in 1899 and therefore about a decade before the other three. At the time of his departure, he could already boast a remarkable career and such important works as the Plan for Ivrea commissioned by Adriano Olivetti, and the one for Sabaudia, a new town promoted by Mussolini in the context of the reclamation of the Agro Pontino, a swamp area south of Rome. Despite his direct involvement in the actions of the fascist regime, from the mid-forties he played a key role in the “democratic” rebirth of the Roman environment by participating, alongside Bruno Zevi, in the foundation of the APAO, in the compilation of the *Manuale dell’Architetto*, a primer for technicians involved in the reconstruction promoted by USIS,¹⁵ and in the magazine *Metron*. Moreover, he had just published the volume *Urbanistica*, which would be decisive for obtaining his professorship in Italy in 1949.¹⁶

He remained in Argentina until the end of 1950 and, in addition to collaborating with the EPBA, he received several other public commissions, succeeding in being more professionally involved than other prominent Italian architects, such as Ernesto Rogers, perhaps because of the prestige deriving from his plans of the 1930s.

When observed from the perspective of continuities and breaks, or, in other words, against the elements of novelty introduced after World War Two, the Argentine experience of Piccinato represents one of the most ambiguous and intriguing cases.

13 Belonging to the same generation, Calcaprina, Tedeschi and Rogers were, at the time of their departure, almost forty years old. They were trained and approached the profession in Fascist Italy. The first two were members of the APAO and of the editorial staff of the magazine *Metron* (fig. 1). Calcaprina was among the members of the group that won the competition for the Mausoleum at the Fosse Ardeatine. Rogers was a member of the architectural partnership BBPR. Because of the racial laws he had repaired to Switzerland where he had the opportunity to establish and strengthen a dense network of international relations. Back in Italy, he was one of the protagonists of the Milanese debate. In 1946 he was entrusted with the direction of the magazine *Domus*, which was “returned” to Gio Ponti at the end of 1947. On Piccinato, see the following section.

14 Nicolini and Paolasso asserted that Tedeschi’s organicism clashed with Caminos and Vivanco’s Corbusian monumentality, but the actual development of this supposed struggle between “rationalism and organic architecture” still has to be documented. Alberto Nicolini, Carlos Paolasso, “Racionalismo y arquitectura orgánica en Tucumán,” in *Documentos para una historia de la arquitectura argentina*, ed. Marina Waisman, Ramón Gutierrez (Buenos Aires: Summa, 1978), 209-10.

15 *Manuale dell’Architetto*, ed. Consiglio Nazionale delle Ricerche (Rome: Ufficio Informazioni Stati Uniti in Roma, 1946).

16 Luigi Piccinato, *Urbanistica* (Rome: Sandron, 1947).



Figure 1. Left. *Metron* 31-32 (May-June 1949). The issue contains a reference to Argentine architecture, showing work by Horacio Caminos and Eduardo Sacriste, two architects who were teaching at the Instituto de Arquitectura y Urbanismo of Tucumán — “Un padiglione anti-T.B.C. a Tucumán, nell’Argentina subtropicale. Architetti: Sacriste & Caminos,” 39-45. (Reprinted from *Metron* 31-32 (May-June 1949), cover. (Courtesy of Leonardo Campus Library, Politecnico di Milano, Italy.)

Figure 2. Bottom. Luigi Piccinato (dir.), Ciudad Evita (1948-1950), Province of Buenos Aires, general plan. (Reprinted from Anahí Ballent, *Las huellas de la política. Vivienda, ciudad, peronismo en Buenos Aires, 1943-1955* (Bernal: Universidad Nacional de Quilmes, 2005), 146)



Because of the analogies between Peronism and Italian Fascism those few years returned Piccinato, in a way, to the Italian pre-war context; at least so far as relationships with political power are concerned. In approximately two and a half years he managed to obtain, sometimes by competition, an impressive number of town planning assignments from both the Ministerio de Obras Públicas and the Banco Hipotecario. A corpus where “very different types and formal models are used, if not of an opposite character,”¹⁷ which deserves to be examined in depth, also in relation to the theme of (dis)continuity. Among these works, the most important was certainly that of Ciudad Evita (fig. 2), the largest housing operation (5,000 units) undertaken by Perón and connected with the construction of the new airport and the transformation of the territory between the latter and the capital.¹⁸ The plan was as much different from the use, still widely adopted, of the orthogonal grid, as from the large linear multi-storey blocks proposed by the EPBA; it consists of a low-density settlement reinterpreting the model of the garden city. Organised into five neighbourhoods and a civic centre, it established a hierarchical system of routes and various types of collective and individual residences. In many ways, the plan can be traced back to the *modus operandi* that its author had adopted during the 1930s. Similarities with Italian works of the 1950s likewise become visible. The general organisation reveals an in-depth knowledge of the contemporary English New Towns, while the often-curvilinear course of the roads could respond to a will of organicism—a recurrent feature, too, in the plans of the 1930s, particularly for Sabaudia.

Focusing on the relationship between the plan (or the planner) and politics, it should be observed that the organisation of the town into neighbourhood units, with a hierarchical organization of typologies and roads, in which members of different social classes could find their new house, offered a metaphor for one of the main points in the Peronist program: the construction of the “Organized Community” a harmonious society in which there was no segregation and the organization was assigning a location to everyone. What immediately catches the eye, however, is that the profile of the southernmost neighbourhood unit explicitly recalls that of Eva Perón, making the plan for Ciudad Evita a sort of unicum in the history of planning that raises more than one question about its actual authorship. This rare case of symbolic planning, perceivable only from above or by looking at drawings, represents an “enigma” for historians. It is interesting in this respect that, having published some

17 Guido Zucconi, “Una figura di architetto-urbanista tra continuità e discontinuità,” *Luigi Piccinato (1899-1983). Architetto e urbanista*, ed. Gemma Belli, Andrea Maglio (Ariccia: Aracne), 31.

18 Ballent, *Las huellas de la política*, 140-50.



Fig. 1 - Planimetria del Quartiere «La Florida», Arch. Alberto Prebich, Arch. Prof. Luigi Piccinato. 1) scuola, 2) chiesa, 3) postiglio, 4) negozi, 5) ufficio postale, 6) uffici amministrativi, 7) cinema, 8) attrezzature sportive, 9) tennis, 10) distaccamento polizia, 11) ambulatorio, 12) albergo, 13) oratorio d'acqua, in grigi il lago artificiale in costruzione.

Tre esperienze urbanistiche in Argentina di Luigi Piccinato



Quartiere "La Florida"

Progetto degli architetti Luigi Piccinato e Alberto Prebich.

In occasione della costruzione di una diga per una centrale elettrica, posta in una località panoramicamente interessante, erano richiesti alloggi per 300 operai e le loro famiglie. Si pensò di adottare criteri costruttivi e distributivi tali da permettere, al termine dei lavori previsti in due anni, la trasformazione del complesso in un centro di vacanza gestito dall'Autorità Governativa.

Fig. 2 - Veduta del planico del Quartiere «La Florida».

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Figure 3. "Tre esperienze urbanistiche in Argentina di Luigi Piccinato," *Urbanistica* 9 (1952). The article focused on three works: the "La Florida" neighbourhood, the winning entry to the competition for the "October 17" neighbourhood, and the proposal of a parcelling plan. (Reprinted from *Urbanistica* 9 (1952), 49. Courtesy of Leonardo Campus Library, Politecnico di Milano, Italy.)

Argentine works in the Italian magazine *Urbanistica* (fig. 3) a few months later, Piccinato did not select Ciudad Evita, despite its relevance.¹⁹

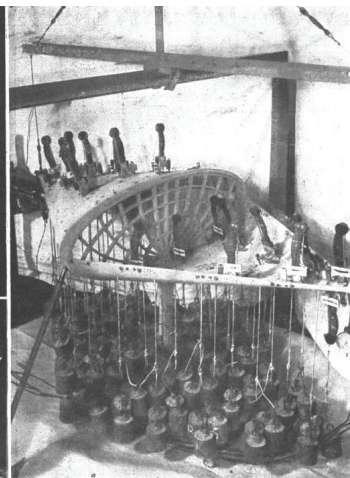
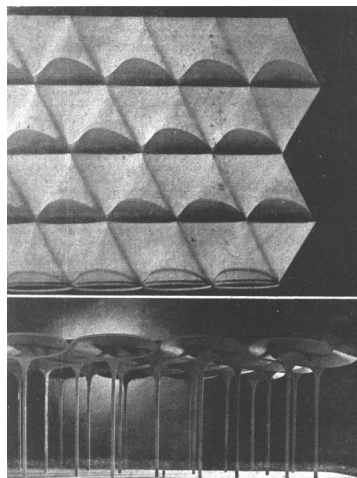
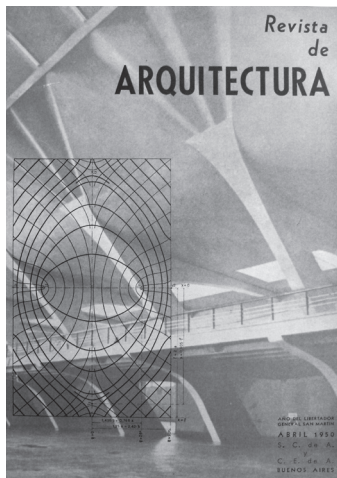
Structures

A peculiar chapter of the Italian presence in Argentina during these years is represented by structures and structural designers. An in-depth study would reveal different levels of knowledge and exchange that even involved some of the fathers of construction science, like Giuseppe Albenga.²⁰ But in a synthetic perspective (like the present paper), the figure of Pier Luigi Nervi clearly stands out for the relevance that his direct and indirect presence had throughout the decade.²¹ There are many reasons for this centrality: already internationally known in the 1930s for the Florence Stadium, from 1947 he was building the Palazzo delle Esposizioni in Turin, which quickly became

19 "Tre esperienze urbanistiche in Argentina di Luigi Piccinato," *Urbanistica* 9 (1952): 49-53.

20 Juan A. Valle, "Un siglo de hormigón armado," *Revista de Arquitectura* 352 (April 1950): 99-102.

21 Federico Deambrosis, "Los temas estructurales en el panorama de las revistas de arquitectura en la Argentina de los años cincuenta," *Block* 9 (July 2012), 9.



an icon of his style (fig. 4). He also contributed, together with Guido Oberti (another Italian engineer) to the project of the Campus in Tucumán, designing the structure of the students' residence and working on the modular elements of the roof of the civic centre, of which a plaster model was subjected to load tests at the Laboratory of Analysis and Models of the Politecnico di Milano (fig. 5).

In 1949 he took part in the competition for new hangars at Ezeiza airport. The project was not considered because it arrived in Argentina after the deadline, but it was nonetheless widely published. Therefore, in September 1950 Nervi was invited to give a series of conferences at the Faculty of Architecture and Planning of Buenos Aires, then collected into the volume *Lenguaje arquitectónico* (Architectural Language).²² The title reveals how one of the main objectives of the Faculty, which had recently departed from that of Engineering, was to underscore the autonomy of architecture as a discipline. Nervi's message as a "very distinguished engineer, but an architect in his soul,"²³ was perfectly congruent since, condemning the analytical method for curbing imagination, he proposed to reconcile the science and art of construction. In this process, intuition was attributed a fundamental role. This message combined, on the one hand, that of other Italian engineers present in the country. This was the case of Giulio Pizzetti, who arrived in Argentina in 1948 as technical director of the Italian company Techint and took part in the debate by proposing new approaches to structural design,²⁴ often based on the examples offered by nature.²⁵ On the other hand, the first monographs dedicated to Nervi, together with his very successful book *Costruire correttamente*,²⁶ further strengthened this interpretation. The

Figure 4. Left. *Revista de Arquitectura* 352 (April 1950). The cover picture portrays the Palazzo delle Esposizioni by Nervi. (Courtesy of Library of the Central Society of Architects, Buenos Aires, Argentina.)

Figure 5. Centre and right. Civic centre of the campus of the University of Tucumán: aerial and frontal photographs of the maquette (centre top and bottom) and load test of a plaster model (scale 1:25) of a modular element performed at Politecnico di Milano in 1949 (right). (Reprinted from *Nuestra Arquitectura* (September 1950), 254. Courtesy of the Library of the Central Society of Architects, Buenos Aires, Argentina.)

22 Pier Luigi Nervi, *Lenguaje Arquitectónico* (Buenos Aires: Facultad de Arquitectura y Urbanismo de Buenos Aires, 1951).

23 Opening discourse by Dean Francisco Montagna, reported in *Revista de Arquitectura* 358 (October 1950), 282.

24 Giulio Pizzetti, "Los nuevos mundos de la arquitectura estructural," *Nº 1* (January 1951): 14.

25 Giulio Pizzetti, "La lección permanente de la naturaleza," *Canon 1* (1951): 65-66.

26 Pier Luigi Nervi, *Costruire correttamente: caratteristiche e possibilità delle strutture cementizie armate* (Milan: Ulrico Hoepli, 1955); Eng. ed: *Structures*, trans. Giuseppina and Mario Salvadori (New York: F. W. Dodge Co, 1956).

most noticeable case is probably the book where the critic and historian Giulio Carlo Argan proposed a substantial coincidence between structural imagination and the creative process of the artist.²⁷ If one considers the centrality that the theme of the synthesis of the arts had previously had in the Argentine debate since the mid 1940s, it is not surprising that the book was almost immediately translated and discussed in local magazines.²⁸

27 Giulio Carlo Argan, *Pier Luigi Nervi* (Milan: Il Balcone, 1955).

28 Giulio Carlo Argan, *Pier Luigi Nervi* (Buenos Aires: Infinito, 1955).

Companies

Companies represent a key actor inside the phenomenon of “made in Italy.” Construction companies were fundamental vectors for the “export”²⁹ and transfer of Italian design culture abroad. Bridges, viaducts, dams and different kinds of buildings erected by Italian companies in different countries were the expression of the Italian way to manage the construction site as well as of Italian design. Moreover, associated with product designers, companies launched to foreign markets hundreds of objects which played a crucial role in the spread and in the definition of “made in Italy.”

29 Jeffrey W. Cody, *Exporting American Architecture 1870-2000* (London-New York: Routledge, 2003).

In Argentina, too, the activity of Italian designers developed organically alongside that of Italian companies. The good relations the two countries maintained during the years of Fascism encouraged technical exchanges and the opening of Argentine branches by some Italian companies. Perón, who was very positively impressed by the public works he saw in Italy at the end of the 1930s, facilitated Italian entries by offering favourable conditions to technicians and companies. He was convinced that local resources were not sufficient to carry out the ambitious project of “New Argentina.” On the other hand, the Austral adventure proved very attractive to entrepreneurs who had to deal with the desperate conditions created by the war and a difficult institutional transition. One can have an idea of the extent of the phenomenon if one considers that in 1948 the Italians obtained 59 concessions of the 71 authorised and that the following year 88 companies were transplanted.³⁰ A phenomenon of such magnitude is not only due to economic factors. The climate of purges certainly contributed to push entrepreneurs, technicians and workers to the other side of the Atlantic.

30 Bertagna, *La patria di riserva*, 145.

Perón’s removal in 1955 was followed by progressive liberalisation that favoured the rooting out of foreign capital. It should be noted, however, that these measures were not

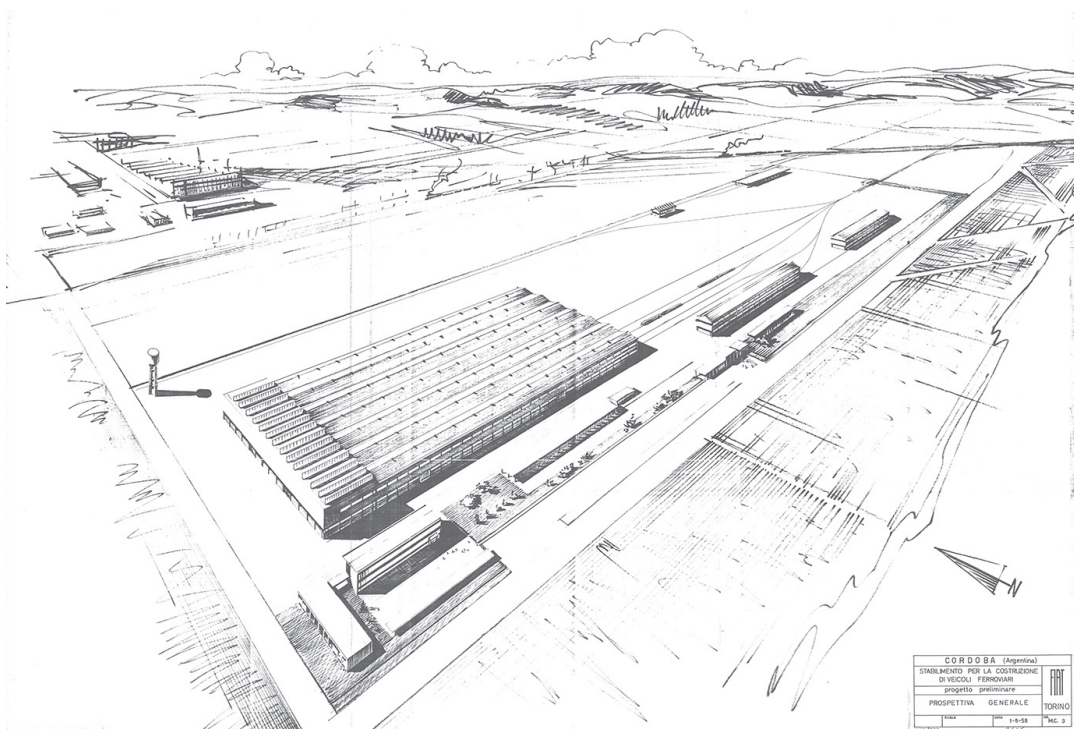
the contradiction, but rather the continuation of the economic policies of the later years of the previous government. In fact, two major operations achieved by Italian companies, the Ferreyra industrial complex erected by FIAT near Cordoba (fig. 6) and the Olivetti plant in Merlo, Province of Buenos Aires (fig. 7) were initiated in 1954, when Perón was still in charge.

These two examples provide an effective demonstration of how diverse the declinations of “made in Italy” can be, both in their approaches and in their outcomes, even when programmes themselves are similar. In Ferreyra, the buildings show no external influence: the grids of metal pillars, the shed roofs, and the alternation of cladding materials reveal a neutral design and construction code that sedimented in the Italian and foreign construction sites managed by the Construction and Installations Office of FIAT.³¹ In Merlo, on the contrary, Marco Zanuso conceived the plant in an authorial way and *a posteriori* around three principles: modularity, flexibility and air conditioning.³² The hollow beams which, in addition to fulfilling their structural function, served as chilled air ducts, were unique pieces. Although prefabricated, they were designed specifically for the Merlo plant and were never used again. In this sense, they were at the antipodes of the incremental logic that was driving the activity of the technical office of the largest national industry.

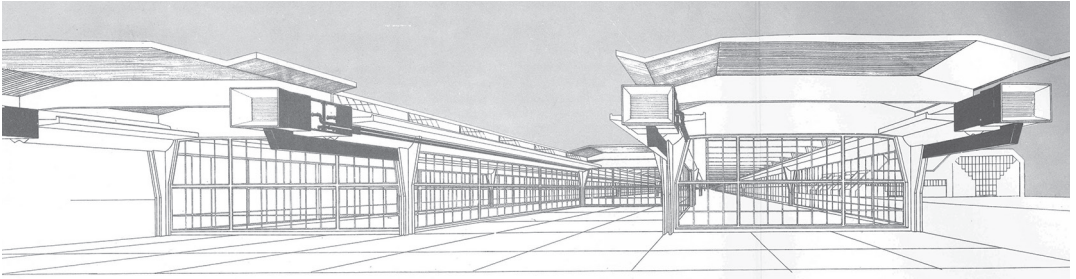
31 Federico Deambrosis, Alessandro De Magistris, “La presenza internazionale, tra continuità e nuove congiunture,” *Maire Tecnimont. I progetti Fiat Engineering 1931-1979*, ed. Michela Comba (Cinisello Balsamo: Silvana Editoriale, 2018), 92-115.

32 Roberto Guiducci, “Un esempio di progettazione ‘a posteriori’: la fabbrica Olivetti di Marco Zanuso a Buenos Aires,” *Casabella-continuità* 229 (July 1959): 20-25.

Figure 6. FIAT, Sezione Costruzione e Impianti [Construction and Installations Section]: Railway material plant in Ferreyra (1954-1960), preliminary project, general perspective (August 1958). Reprinted from *Maire Tecnimont. I progetti Fiat Engineering 1931-1979*, ed. Michela Comba (Cinisello Balsamo: Silvana Editoriale, 2018).



CORDOBA (Argentina)			
STABILIMENTO PER LA COSTRUZIONE DI VEICOLI FERROVIARI			
PROGETTO SPECIFICARE			
PROSPETTIVA GENERALE			TORINO
FOGLIO	1-4-58	N. 9	



This comparison, like the majority of cases referred to above, seems to show how, in the same years in which exhibitions and publications such as *Italy at Work* and *Italy Builds*³³ were providing a narrative of Italian design culture as a coherent and substantially unitary entity, Argentine experiences instead showed a great plurality and heterogeneity of approaches and orientations. After all, it has already been observed that “like every brand . . . , also made in Italy finds its legitimacy not so much in the concrete evidence of a product as in a narrative that refers to expectations that are formed in a long process of negotiation between different instances and subjects.”³⁴

Figure 7. Marco Zanuso, Olivetti plant in Merlo, *Casabella-continuità* 229 (July 1959). (Courtesy of Leonardo Campus Library, Politecnico di Milano, Italy.)

33 George Everard Kidder Smith, *Italy Builds: Its Modern Architecture and Native Inheritance* (New York: Reinhold, 1955).

34 Marco Pogacnik, “Made in Italy,” *Laboratorio Italia. Canoni e contraddizioni del Made in Italy*, ed. Malvina Borgherini, Sara Marini, Angela Mengoni, Annalisa Sacchi, Alessandra Vaccari (Sesto San Giovanni: Mimesis, 2018), 67 (trans. author).