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Facies refers to the ability of architecture to enable, by means of its outward appearance, interaction between the space occupied by the building and the setting within which it is found.

Architecture – Gio Ponti argues – is made to be looked at. Because through the facades, architecture is a public landscape. The facades are the street walls and a city is made of streets.

Restoring the facade to the world of meaning means shifting the role of the building from object to subject, elevating it beyond the exclusive need to meet a set of requirements. However, architecture, to be recognized as such, shouldn't represent, signify, or symbolize something other than itself, but provide a process generating form that organizes and builds its own assumptions within disciplinary autonomy. The world of forms thus refers to the wealth of architectural knowledge from which it draws nourishment and thanks to which it generates new forms.

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Starting from the city of Milan

Matteo Sintini

Although extensively studied, the events concerning the reconstruction of the city of Milan in the two decades dating from the mid-fifties to the mid-sixties of the 20th century still offer important insights and have seen renewed interest.

The completion of open or bombed areas took place within the city, largely through the construction of housing blocks to meet the needs of a city emerging from the plight of the immediate post-war period that faced the development of the economic boom, contributing in a decisive manner to the transformation of whole parts.

The impetus of industrial entrepreneurship, the presence of numerous lots close to or inside the city, the the public administration's support for private initiatives, the presence of a widespread design culture within the professional context, the requests of a middle class alert to the modern but without ostentation, and the need for buildings in which to place tertiary functions. These were the consistent factors which, together with the quantity, enable this event to be read beyond mere individual episodes and allow us to define a typological model, let's say, to identify the reconstruction, just as the courtyard block had made the 17th- and early 18th-century city clearly recognisable.

This model, which develops the legacy of those of the Noucentista and rationalist period, can be defined by several common characteristics: the

Ignazio Gardella, Residential building in Via Marchiondi, Milan, 1954
(photo by Matteo Sintini)

extension in height on a clear lot, leaving open space around the building; the unique treatment of this area of mediation with the city and the pre-existing, resolved through varied heights and the placement of private gardens on the ground floor; the multifunctional nature of the program, in which residential and tertiary spaces coexists, which in some cases produced interesting variations and volumetric breakdown; and the unique compositional work on the facades.

We need to dwell more precisely on this aspect, as it is the subject of the studies that follow.

The theme of the facade became central, in fact, as it architecturally solved the issue of a boundary between city and building on the one hand and, on the other, requests to characterize the internal space through the provision of private external surfaces.

Although fragmented episodes occurred in scattered areas of the city (here we can cite, for example, the buildings by Luigi Caccia Dominioni on via Massena, 1959-63 and in piazza Carbonari, 1960-61, and by Angelo Mangiarotti on via Quadronno, 1956-60), in some areas the transformation was made more evident and compact due to the choices of the Reconstruction Plan, which was laboriously approved in 1953.

Among these was via Vittor Pisani, which provided an opportunity to finish the incomplete business center project which, since the 1930s, had sparked the planning of the new arterial road created by moving the railway station back to its current location. Here, already, we find some examples dating back to that period, in particular, the two adjoining blocks by Giovanni Muzio, featuring Casa Bonaiti and Casa Malugani (1935-1936), whose rational rigor, visible in the stacking of floors and emergence of the separation of the facade from the wall surface was modernized, twenty years later, in the apartment building created by Vito and Gustavo Latis in Piazza della Repubblica. Emblems of the Italian International Style would spring up alongside these, including the Breda Tower by Luigi Mattioni (1955), the Galfa Tower by Melchiorre Bega (1959), and the Pirelli Skyscraper by Giò Ponti (1960), additional fragments of a business center that was not fully completed even in this second attempt.

The so-called "Racchetta" area, adjoining the arterial road linking piazza San Babila to largo Missori, outlined in the Albertini Plan (1934) and only built in the 1950s, is another place where this new city just outside the historic center appeared, not without conflict. While, on the one hand, here we can find some of the most successful and discussed examples of Italian post-war architecture, such as the Velasca Tower by BBPR (1958) and the neighbouring

blocks designed by Mario Asnago and Claudio Vender (completed in 1959, but whose creation dates back to 1939), the demolition of the basilica of San Giovanni in Conca and the resonating protests that followed (see the journalistic battles carried out by Antonio Cederna), put the issue of the speculative growth of the city into the limelight more than elsewhere.

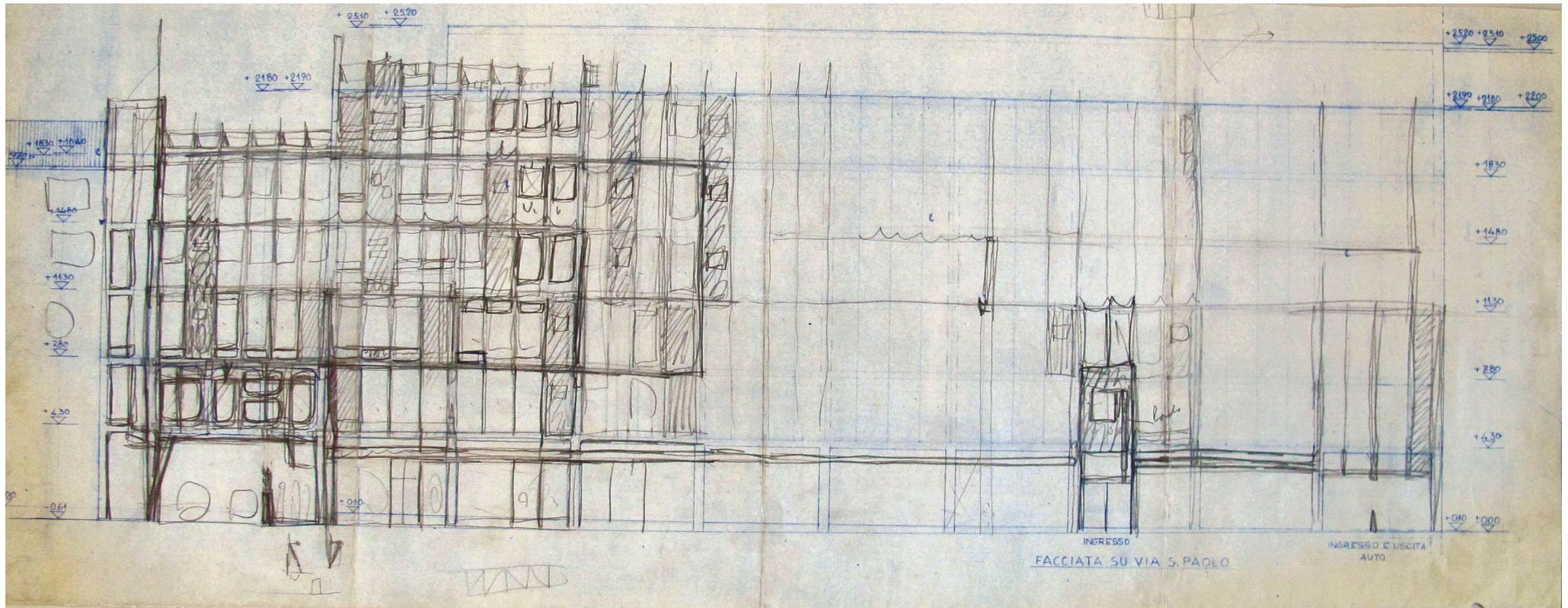
Not far away, the rotated volume overhanging the road of the residential and office building by Luigi Moretti on corso Italia (1949-1955), provides yet another scenario, dramatizing the sculptural possibilities of the planning project.

A veritable cross section of the modern city built and rebuilt on itself can also be found on via Marchiondi, where, alongside fragments of the pre-existing 18th-century Arcadia Gardens, are the Casa della Meridiana by Giuseppe de Finetti (1925) and an apartment building designed by Ignazio Gardella, Roberto Menghi, and Anna Castelli Ferrieri (1955).

The continuity of these themes and their evolution can also be seen in other areas, where new languages are addressed, favoured by curtain wall technologies and metal constructions, such as on viale Europa (office building by Vico Magistretti, 1957) and in piazza Meda (branch of the Chase Manhattan Bank by BBPR, 1969).

A generation of architects addressed these design themes, breaking them down into numerous variations: personal research, professional ability, and sensitivity towards contributions originating from various sources of inspiration.

In the case of Giò Ponti, for example, we can see a desire to pursue research on the elements of a personal language even in these themes, entrusted to the expressive potential of the surface cladding. Also on the subject of facade treatments, others, such as Ignazio Gardella and Caccia Dominioni (see the buildings mentioned above), instead took advantage of domestic materials, such as clinker, and played with the features that best communicated an idea of home: the roofing, balconies, and loggias, selecting views with the movement of the facade planes, "breaking up" the symmetry with window openings. Others were deeply inspired by the world of the arts, including Carlo Perogalli and Attilio Mariani (apartment building on via Beatrice d'Este, 1957), who began explicitly with rules originating from concrete art. A clear reference to abstract art and to the informal is present in the works of Luigi Moretti (we can add to those mentioned previously the Case Albergo on via Bassini, via Lazzaretto and via Corridoni, 1950, the latter appearing in the static scenes of the film *The Night* by Michelangelo Antonioni). Others, such as Asnago and Vender (we can mention the



Giò Ponti, Study for the facade of the INA building on via San Paolo, Milan, 1963-67 (Source: Ponti Archives, CSAC Parma)

apartment building on via Lanzone, 1953, in addition to those above), designed facades according to abstract principles ascribable to the graphic arts, in which saturation through voids and measured irregularity produced an alienating atmosphere.

Within this framework, Maria Vittoria Capitanucci talks about the international relations that exist between some of these works and their protagonists and a wider cultural context of the period following the Second World War.

Orsina Simona Pierini, also avoiding the mere description of particular cases, uses the important Milanese experience to rethink several “universal” suprahistorical aspects of the architectural composition, particularly concerning the work of the facade: the relationship that the “elevation” establishes with the whole project, the volume, and the plan view and then, by extension, with the city. Moreover, she explores the autonomous value of the facade, the subordinate or contemporary relationships within the design process that affect the composition of the plan view, the interior, and its external image and, ultimately, the achievement of the material dimension of the building, removed from the abstraction of the drawing.

Orsina Simona Pierini. Associate Professor of Architectural and Urban Composition at the Politecnico di Milano. On the subject see S. Pierini, *Sulla facciata. Tra architettura e città*, Maggioli Editore, 2008 and B. Melotto, O. S. Pierini, Housing primer. *Le forme della residenza nella città contemporanea*, Maggioli editore, 2012.

Maria Vittoria Capitanucci. Adjunct Professor of The History of Architecture and Design at the Politecnico di Milano. On the subject see M. V. Capitanucci, *Il professionismo colto nel dopoguerra*, Order of Architecture of Milan, Abitare-Segesta ed. 2013 and M. V. Capitanucci, *Vito e Gustavo Latis. Frammenti di città*, Skira December 2007.



Conversation with Maria Vittoria Capitanucci

Milan has a historically international calling: from the construction of the “modern” Fabbrica del Duomo to the building of the utopian visions of Filarete, who was not Milanese; from the work of Leonardo to the classicist spirit of the Bramantesque Renaissance; and, moreover, from the Northern European Neoclassicism that redesigned the most representative buildings to the French style of the great urban transformation around Sforza Castle. Finally, the 20th century began with a “Liberty style” that looked at the irreconcilable languages of French Art Nouveau and the Vienna Secession and would thus proceed to the threshold of the new millennium with increasingly strong contact with the rest of Europe and the world, thanks to large world fairs and new cultural situations.

Speaking of which, the Triennale played a fundamental role and became one of the main places of dissemination, particularly with the presence of some leading figures.

As early as its birth in 1933, the Triennale gathered groups of leading figures in the decorative and visual arts and architecture from all over Europe. The passage of figures such as A.P. Berlage or A. Perret, then of the early rationalism of W. Gropius, Le Corbusier, and Wrightian proposals, would prepare the Milanese architects to form their own personal variant of suggestions from Europe and beyond, even in the midst of the Fascist

regime. Thus, after the war, when opening up to the rest of the world became more evident and necessary, together with the staging of an economic and political recovery, looking elsewhere would become the prerogative of many. In 1933, at the *Réunion Internationale d'Architectes* dedicated to the theme of Architecture Schools, together with the most important voices of the time, a very young E. N. Rogers made his debut here, as the R of BBPR, a group of architects that would express, more than others, a strong aspiration for internationalism. We need to reinterpret his work in this sense, as the product of a perceivable and constant relationship with the international intelligentsia.

His family background, his fundamental role in CIAM events, his cultural curiosity, and his ability to attract the most interesting 'travellers' to their studio on via dei Chiostris would be important factors for exchange and openness. "Casabella-Continuità", the magazine edited by Rogers from 1954-64, was bilingual almost from its beginning. Rogers, moreover, was also a key figure in terms of relations with younger and more critical generations of architects (Team X) and BBPR's relationship with the New York scene would be even more fundamental, revolving around Rizzoli and the MoMA (see the Fifth Avenue site, created with Constantino Nivola, the poetic "*Labirinto dei ragazzi*" at the 10th Triennale in 1954, and the US Pavilion built inside Parco Sempione in the previous edition, for the 9th Triennale in 1951).

How did all this materialize in planning?

Starting from the passion for metal structures already expressed in the sun therapy centre in Legnano, with the 'dual' facade of iron pillars, which certainly expresses a more 'Miesian' splendour compared to the choices of the time, the journey of the Milan-based group, hanging in the balance between philosophical studies and technical-constructive experimentation, added an ideological and political aspect, also aimed at a "democratization" of the building industry and architecture. This was the basis of the efforts of the group, which by no coincidence had chosen an acronym for its name so as to have a certain anonymity, regarding the theme of prefabrication, which became a vehicle and element of connection between seemingly distant design opportunities, and regarding social housing, which was only apparently in contrast with their efforts directed towards the luxury of upper middle class residences, such as the gorgeous complex on via dei Chiostris, where greenery, prefabricated cement panels, metal grilles and traditional copper gabled roofs came together to create timeless elegance.

Who were the other key figures and references?

The "Barons in the Trees", who were protagonists of that time in Milan, and with them a long list of 'learned professionals', were not all hanging in the "balance between modernity and tradition (which one anyway: Lombard? Romanesque? Baroque?)", as they often love to say about their works, or rather, perhaps they were, with each looking for their own point of reference. So it was about looking at models that were very distant among themselves, which didn't necessarily belong to the Milanese tradition. What distinguishes the research of L. Caccia Dominioni (whose proximity to the Italian Grigioni culture is often confused with a passion for the Lombard Romanesque) or I. Gardella (who never forsook the rationalist mark or the detail and materials of Genoese Renaissance buildings) differs from the Northern European elements, particularly Scandinavian ones, that we find in some works by V. Magistretti (the freshly undulating glazed foyers of Torre al Parco or corso Europa) or by V. and G. Latis (the projecting roof of the apartment building in piazza della Repubblica and the wooden panelling of the foyers on via Turati or via Lanzzone).

The Anglo-Saxon post-war experience is more evident in some projects by BBPR, the Velasca Tower first of all, and also by Magistretti himself in the 'brutalist' towers in piazzale Aquileia and the red building in piazza San Marco, where he created a courageous out-of-scale construction worthy of the best "radical" studies of that time in the 1960s.

What should we say then, in the wake of the best international research, about the prefabrication work carried out by a mixed group of designers – from M. Zanuso and E. Gentili Tedeschi to G. Tevarotto and A. Rosselli – in the field of productive but also residential building (the FEAL systems, even tackled by Giò Ponti), to which we can add the dazzling duo A. Mangarotti and B. Morassutti (the latter having passed through the entourage of F. L. Wright) with prefabricated panel systems for the creation of their magnificent residential buildings on via Quadronno and via Gavirate at the beginning of the 1960s?

The abstract language of C. Asnago and M. Vender also leads us to their beginnings with the French experience of A. Perret or R. Mallet-Stevens to then find fertile ground in the coeval research of Swiss and German designers, with their sophisticated production of the whole block on via Albricci or of the XXI aprile apartment building, which is an icon of that 'non-Milanese' style of the 1950s which paradoxically became one of its distinctive features.

Not to mention the rupture represented by the iconic building of the

former Palmolive complex by Luigi Moretti (1954) in corso Italia, where the world of Michelangelo-esque plasticity embraces an expressive study that, passing through his experiments for the E42, would lead the master to the Roman apartment building denominated 'Il Girasole' and from there to the Watergate complex (with P. L. Nervi) in Washington. And we've come full circle.

What were the other dissemination channels?

It is needless to say the journalistic attention that these works received at their time, often also being published in international magazines, especially European ones, such as "L'Architecture d'aujourd'hui", "Architectural Review" or "Architectural Record". Figures the likes of G. E. Kidder Smith would become passionate about the Italian situation, writing about it in terms of internationality of language softened by an intense heritage and taken up with cultured modernity, in his *Italy Builds - Italia Costruisce*, published in 1959 by the Comunità editions of the great Olivetti, a figure whose views went far beyond the boundaries of his Ivrea.

The American Esther McCoy, known primarily for her work on California modernism and its key players, also wrote extensively about Italian architecture, firstly for the "Los Angeles Times Home Magazine" and for other important American newspapers following a number of trips made in the 1950s and 60s, and curated an exhibition and important catalogue entitled *10 Italian Architects* at the *Los Angeles County Museum of Art* (15th February - 2nd April 1967). The exhibition presented the works of C. Scarpa, V. Viganò, G. Valle, A. Mangiarotti, A. Rosselli, G. De Carlo, L. Ricci, L. Fiori, F. Albini, F. Helg and, last but not least, BBPR, whose image of the Velasca Tower in the historic setting of Milan's skyline was chosen for the book cover and exhibition poster. It is an iconic image of the city today. Perhaps the detached view of a foreign critic had precociously read into the international potential of that strange Milanese style.

Milan, 12 September 2016 and 20 February 2017



V.G. Latis, Apartment building on via Lanzone, 1952
(from M.V. Capitanucci, *Vito and Gustavo Latis, Frammenti di città*, Milan, Skira, 2007)



Conversation with Orsina Simona Pierini

The first aspect I would be interested in discussing concerns the relationship that the “facade” or “elevation” establishes with the whole project, identifying, in a simplified manner, two possible relationships: one directly related to the volume, plan view, and typology; the other, autonomous and independent.

When I think about the facade, the first thing I literally see is a section, which identifies and highlights the line containing the body of the building and, at the same time, stands out against the background. Today this line has also become a thickness, a large measurement, containing technical elements or living spaces. There is, in fact, a significant difference between the elevations of public buildings and the facades of collective residential buildings. In the current public building, which is often unique and isolated, the play on volume makes the role of the main facade less evident, if not by the choice of the architect, who may wish to represent the issues that a building evokes through its presence in a certain place.

I'm thinking about the Civil Government of Tarragona by Alejandro de la Sota, where the history of the city, the functional issue, and the relationship with the arts have been summarized in carved-out material, in a volume that is balanced and compact at the same time. It is an “uncomfortable” building in many respects and not just the more evidently political ones; a hybrid function, with the governor's office at the bottom and residences on the upper floors, as well as an alienating setting led the architect to hide the typological

differences and work on the choice of material – slabs of local stone – which allowed him to create lateral elevations “drawn” onto the sides, creating contrast with the depth of the loggias on the facade.

In the Murcia City Hall by Moneo, the facade instead becomes an autonomous body, which seems to be detached from the building as a whole, also because of its depth, which provides a gallery of loggias opening onto the Cathedral Square. In this case, the architect embarks on a refined game of figure drawing, which intersects wall system and trilithon, working with contemporary tools on otherwise classical elements.

I would like to outline just some aspects of what seems to me to be one of the most complex themes emerging from this reasoning, that is to say, the relationship the facade has with the city and its role as an interface between the architecture and a wider built environment.

The city is largely made up of residential fabric and the facade of the urban home plays a fundamental role in defining its image: historically, the sequence of terraced houses or the repetition of blocks were substantially based on the common adornment of regular but varied facades.

The contemporary city retrieves some features of traditional urban home architecture and combines them with several modern achievements: the most recent works, including new complexes in France or the Netherlands, work with an awareness of the possible variations obtained by juxtaposing different scales, by highlighting the internal mix in the facade, or using the theme of compliant height in the recovery of the view overlooking the street.

In studying contemporary residential architecture, we actually identify some compositional themes rooted in a conscious and moderate modernity that is well represented by the case of modern Milan. From Cà Bruta by Muzio until the late 1960s, it is possible to trace the various studies conducted, not so much on a unified image of the modern city, but on the many figures that the composition of the research into the home and its urban facade suggested. The twentieth century, with the abstraction of the facade, which became a plane to be drawn and the first decompositions of volumes by Terragni in the period between the two wars, actually opened the field to a study that was completed in the 1950s and 60s, with the emptying of the facades, the role attributed to transparency, and the compositional freedom of the axes and weight of solids and voids.

Continuing on the line previously traced out, an interesting endeavor could be to identify at what point the composition of the elevation comes into the development of the conceptual/design process and how it relates to its material dimension.

In the context of Milan, typological research found its fulfillment in the facades: there's a strong integration between the study of dwellings and their urban frontage.

In the best cases, research into the themes of living provided the topics that the facade narrates: we need only think of Loos' legacy in the carved out volumes of the Meridiana by De Finetti or, in a very different way, the play on volume that Magistretti used on the balconies of his apartments.

In other cases, the facade is an abstract surface on which to compose solids and voids with artistic sensitivity: the "tableaus" of Asnago Vender are well-known, among which I would dwell on the rear facade of the home on via Lanzone, in which the abstract compositional game becomes tangible in the excavation of loggias, in a sophisticated balance between trilithon and wall. On via Nievo, Luigi Caccia Dominioni also chose the figure of a large compact block horizontally excavated from the different spatiality of unique dwellings: at that time, the search for a customized home became an opportunity for a very interesting formal study of the characteristics of unity and solidarity in complexity.

Closed and synthetic figures created contrast with more fragmented and analytical facades: some compositional tools were tested, including the theme of the loggia, which made the apartments flow and move along the extent of the belt course and which found in the many examples by Gardella, Caccia Dominioni, and even Mangiarotti and Morassuti, variations whose materiality was very diverse.

In these cases, the research into detail and architectural aspects is substantial – we need only think about the richness of the design solutions of the belt course. Gardella used the rain gutter to create the fine moulding that lightens the massive size of the slab with a shadow, while the facade overlooking via Vigoni, designed by Caccia with long cantilevered balconies, articulates this theme in a more complex way, with the projections creating tension between the internal life and facade, and with the movement of the slender cantilevered foundations interlaced with vertical surfaces of various materials, reflectance, and colours.

Finally, I would like to explain why we met for the interview in front of a house whose majestic facade completes the whole of piazza Mirabello in Milan. Long wooden shutters appear to slide along a large belt course, which a careful study of the section reveals to also be a low railing provided to the internal dwelling. The result is an assertive volume, with a facade design that works on the horizontality of the modern, on the apparent variation between floors, on the large shadow of the roof cornice that closes the figure with the exceptionality of its emptied corners. It is a 1968 project by Jan Battistoni, an architect of Norwegian origin, as the use of wood reminds us, which I



Caccia Dominioni, via Vigoni, Milan
(from O. S. Pierini, A. Isastia, *Casa Milanesi 1923-73*, currently being published)

chose to represent a tradition of work on the facade, which in Milan until the 1960s was not only the rarity of known masters but a profession that turned attention to detail and to architectural aspects, such as the shadow of moulding, into a value for the whole urban facing.

Milan, 23 September 2016



Jan Battistoni, piazza Carlo Mirabello, Milan, 1968
(photograph by Orsina Simona Pierini)

The models published in the sections “Milan. A Laboratory” and “Contemporary Atlas” were created by:

- Margherita Memè, Giovanni Morelli, Wladim Morigi, Camilla Pietroni, Ruggiero Scommegna, Giovanna Turchi, Ilaria Franchini, Silvia Toderi, and Alba Pauli (students of the Bachelor’s Degree in Architecture of Cesena coordinated by Davide Giaffreda and Marika Mangano);
- Rosalba Balla, Caterina Gottardi, Wei Liu, Irene Merighi, Federica Nordi, Alessia Rossi, Antonio Salerno, Nichole Steghi, Giulia Taddia, Arianna Travagli, Federica Vallicelli, Sofia Zoni (students of the Dosso Dossi Artistic High School of Ferrara coordinated by Laura Sangiorgi)

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