

the “perfect fascist city”
fascism, negativity, and urban planning in colonial space

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Kunsttheorie
bei Univ.-Prof Dr.phil. Helmut Draxler

vorgelegt von
Fedra Benoli BA
11703089

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Abstract (Deutsch)

Wenn die Pläne von Gherardo Bosio aus dem Jahr 1937 für das neue Gondar (Äthiopien) angesehen werden, kann man entdecken, in welchem Ausmaß Architektur und Stadtplanung den kolonialen Raum während der faschistischen Besetzung Äthiopiens bestimmen. Die Zeichnungen, Skizzen und Masterpläne offenbaren den Zustand des Faschismus im Jahr 1937. Sie zeugen von der Phase der totalitären Beschleunigung des Regimes, die 1935 begann, als auch der Diskurs um Architektur und Stadtplanung einen Höhepunkt erreichte. Der koloniale Raum ist somit einer Expression militärischer Macht und architektonische Innovation. Diese definieren letztendlich das städtische Gefüge, das Bosio für Gondar entworfen hat. Die zentrale These untersucht die dem Faschismus innewohnenden Widersprüche anhand der Architektursprache und zielt darauf ab, eine Lesart der Architektur im Faschismus durch eine Beziehung negativer Symbiose zwischen diesen beiden Elementen zu ermöglichen. Schließlich zeigt diese Untersuchung neue Ansätze zur zeitgenössischen Rezeption dieser Architektur auf. In dieser Arbeit werden der beschreibende und der analytische Teil in ständigen Wechsel präsentiert. Dieser Ansatz möchte eine aktive Rezeption von Architektur und Städtebau fördern und signalisieren, dass Materialität und Denken in kontinuierlichen Bezug, Widerspruch und Verschiebung stehen.

Abstract (English)

Walking around the 1937 plans by Gherardo Bosio for the new Gondar (Ethiopia), one discovers the extent to which architecture and urban planning comes to define colonial space during the Italian fascist occupation of East Africa. The drawings, sketches, and master plans reveal the state of fascism in 1937. It is a testament to the phase of totalitarian acceleration of the regime, initiated in 1935, as the discourse around architecture and urban planning reached a boiling point. Colonial space is thus constructed both as expression of military power and architectural innovation, two elements that ultimately define the urban fabric that Bosio sketched for Gondar. Exploring the contradictions inherent in fascism through architectural language, the central thesis aims at providing a reading of architecture under fascism through a relationship of negative symbiosis between these two elements. Finally, this

investigation reveals new approaches to contemporary reception of this architecture. In this work, the descriptive and analytical sections are presented as constantly alternating. This approach wants to foster an active reception of architecture and urban design, as well as signalling how materiality and thought are in continuous relation, contradiction, and displacement.

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Note to the reader

Ethiopian toponyms will be reproduced throughout the text following the most widespread spelling in the scholarship and research material, at every first mention, alternative spellings will be included, if available. Italian terms will be translated at first mention and most relevant can be consulted in the appendix. Unless otherwise stated, all translations from Italian are my own.

Introduction

The two decades of authoritarian fascist regime in Italy are seen as the darkest chapters of Italy's history and coincide with a period of significant change and reassessment, which would eventually inform much of the current dynamics in both politics and culture. The intricacies of a dictatorship of this length are very complex, often contradictory, and ultimately show how Benito Mussolini, as figure-head and dictator, was consistently involved in power struggles throughout his regime. After becoming Italy's leader through the threat of a march on Rome, Mussolini saw how easy it was to grasp onto power, especially in a country with a very weak monarchy and that had just gone through years of discontent during the war first, and in its aftermath later. More importantly, however, he also realised how difficult it was to cling onto that power. Architecture and urban planning soon became tools used by the regime to gain popularity, with public works used as ways to solve the problem of unemployment and at the same time functioning as a physical representation of the grandeur of Mussolini and fascism in general. Having come to power with little political program, Mussolini's rise was an expression of brute force and reactionism with little substance underneath. Architecture thus functioned for many years as a fundamental instrument for portraying the regime as successful and almost became a substitute for ideology. The void present in fascism was filled with reinforced concrete and white marble, thus ushering in a time of astounding production of built environments.

Architecture was especially suited for this use because it was also going through a period of important change and re-evaluation since the 1910s. With the rise of the modernist movement, reconsiderations of the role architecture should play in society developed towards functionalism, creating models that were then easily appropriated by the regime. The relationship between architecture and fascism was not always harmonious: during the 1920s intellectuals long debated on which modernist movement was more suitable for the regime, without ever coming to a concrete conclusion. The problem was, ultimately, that this debate around architectural form was essentially a debate around fascism itself and – failing to come up with a definition – it was impossible to define an architecture that could fit such an elusive signified. Mussolini's reaction to these discussions was not to take a stance for one camp or the other, but rather to stoke the fire with contradicting statements and commissions. By keeping the architects engaged in the question of fascist architecture, some have come to speculate, Mussolini was, in truth, looking for an answer to the question of fascism itself. Intellectual debates notwithstanding, the 1920s and early 1930s saw a great deal of architectural production in Italy and in its colonies, which were perceived in the larger European context as a success and example to follow, especially after the Wall Street Crash of 1929.

The attitude towards the regime was irreparably changed in 1935, however, when Mussolini invaded the Ethiopian Empire – a national state and member of the League of Nations. While on the national level his popularity was at an all-time high, on the international stage Italy's perception

completely changed and it came to be recognized as an enemy force, preceding what would come to be the start of the Second World War. Right after this shift is when the architect and engineer Gherardo Bosio¹ volunteered as a soldier in East Africa and received the assignment to design several urban centres for the new Italian colony of Ethiopia, soon to be merged with the other East African overseas territories under the name of Africa Orientale Italiana [AOI, Italian East Africa]. Bosio's plans for Gondar² and Dessiè³ are specifically used in this thesis as the material anchorage on which to build my main claim. It is my goal to show how the inherent negativity of fascism, as I will go on to illustrate, found its positive expression in the architecture created for the regime and how this architecture itself shows this negativity through its form and content. Stemming from a materialist historical approach, fascism will be defined as an historically precise phenomenon with characteristics that illustrate much larger issues and conflicts that had started to emerge in European discourse since the second half of the 19th century.

Is fascism the logical consequence of the uncertainties that defined the human subject as industrialization spread across the globe? Or is it rather its illogical consequence? What kind of space does negativity occupy? Looking at the contradictions that make up fascism, its constant shift from negativity into positivity and backwards, will allow for an investigation into the elusiveness of not only fascism but more broadly of the theories of the built environment formulated by modernists, which were then easily appropriated for completely opposing goals. After an analysis of the plans produced by Bosio in 1937, I will discuss their impact and reception and come to the crux of the reason for confronting oneself with these urban planners and architects of cities that were never built. It offers on one hand a chance to understand the urban phenomena that succeeded them, while at the same time trying to probe at an understanding of the reason why we as contemporary subjects still feel an unsettling affinity to these spatial forms.

¹ Born 19 March 1903 in Florence, Gherardo Bosio completed a civil engineering degree in Rome in 1926, going on to study architecture in Florence, graduating in 1931. After spending a short period of time in New York working at McKim, Mead & White he establishes his architectural studio in Florence. Before the shift towards urban planning, he focused on interior design, and the construction and renovation of private houses. Remembered for his colonial urban planning in Ethiopia and Albania, he died in 1941. For an extensive biographical account, see Busi 2017 pp. 70–71.

² Gondar, Amharic: ጎንደር.

³ Dessie, Dese, Dessye, ደሴ.

I. The institutional buildings

In this work we will be visiting a town that does not exist, namely the city of Gondar according to the plan drawn by Gherardo Bosio in 1937 (Fig. 1). Gondar was for centuries the capital of the Ethiopian Empire. Founded around 1635 by the emperor Fasilides (reigned 1632 – 18 Oct. 1667), it stayed the empire's capital until 1855, when Tewodros II (11 Feb. 1855 – 13 Apr. 1868) moved the capital to Magdala.⁴ During its time as capital of Ethiopia several Emperors built palaces in Gondar, some of which are still conserved today, most importantly the Fasil Ghebbi, built by Fasilides. Gondar was occupied by the Italian army, led by Achille Starace,⁵ on 1 April 1936 and was under Italian rule for six years. In helping us in this quest of recovering a town from its paper form we will also look at the perspective drawings made by Bosio in that same year, as well as the earlier and later plans for Gondar, all conserved in Archivio Eredi Gherardo Bosio (AEGB), as well as photographic material from the Istituto Luce and recent photos of Gondar.⁶ Whereas the material produced by Bosio in 1936 and 1938 refers to the initial and final decision to develop the Italian town on the same location as the historic city, the 1937 plans are instead designed to be constructed on the site of the village of Azozo,⁷ a few kilometres south of the real Gondar. Bosio's 1937 Gondar is in some ways a utopia. A place that is not, stuck in tracing paper and drawings. However, its origins are not utopistic; Bosio drew his plans with the promise of their realization, which never happened because of different historically contingent obstacles. The wide array of material on the town form that Bosio produced, however, makes a reconstruction of his city possible and not just mere speculation. In this tour through plans of a city that does not exist, we will recover the state of urban colonial planning in 1937 and through this exploration we will see how each element of the city was constructed as representation of the history, the structure, the goals and, most importantly, the contradictions that were informing reflections on the town form in the 1930s, in the eve of the Second World War.

i. Piazza del fascio

We start at piazza del fascio [fasces square] (Fig. 2-3), placed east of the Asasuo hill.⁸ The square is rectangular and presents, according to the general plan, the casa del fascio [house of fasces], a

⁴ Magdala, Magdalena, ሞቅደላ. Today Amba Mariam, ዐምባ ማረያም.

⁵ Achille Starace (1889-1945) was a close collaborator of Mussolini since the end of the First World War, eventually becoming the secretary of the PNF from 1931-1939. See Starace 1936 for his account of the occupation of Gondar. The book was not well received by Mussolini, but nonetheless sold well. He was eventually shunned by the Fascist Party in 1939, in an attempt to regain popular approval. He was executed by partisans and hung in Piazzale Loreto after facing trial in 1945.

⁶ I want to thank Marie Lou Busi, granddaughter of Gherardo Bosio and responsible for the managing of the AEGB near Florence for allowing me to consult the digitalised archive of Bosio in September 2022. In this work, it is not possible to insert all the material of the archive, there will be therefore references to plans and drawings, which I could not reproduce.

⁷ Azezo, አዘዙ.

⁸ Bosio's use of toponyms makes the identification of his map's locations challenging. By relying on transliteration misspellings are extensive. This makes for instance the village Addis Alem as it is called in CTI 1938, p. 356-357 and by Chiari 2015, p. 27 into Adis Salem, or the river Kaà in Bosio's writings actually corresponding to the river

building with a “loggia for merchants,”⁹ the cinema-theatre, and the *circolo ufficiali* [club for military officials] (Fig. 4). The *casa del Fascio* is situated on the south-east end of the square and, in the perspective drawing, can be seen in the background (Fig. 2). The building is placed on a slope, which is compensated by placing a raised platform. It is shaped by two massive wings that inscribe the raised space created by the platform, which is connected to the square through two monumental stairs. This leads to the creation of a pseudo-rostrum that suggests the absence of a statue to be placed on top of it. The rostrum is parallel to the colossal three-partite entrance of the *casa*. From the drawing we see that the principal façade with the entrance is left mostly bare, with only straight vertical lines balancing the horizontal accent of the entrance portals. The left wing instead presents a checkered pattern. An unnamed sketch in AEGB shows the early stages of planning for the *casa* (Fig. 5). Here we see the same basic principle of a raised platform, apart from the stairs, which are placed in the middle. The shift to two sets of stairs in the 1937 drawing, which evokes a sense of absence and uncompletedness within the harmony of the building is interesting, given that one possible explanation for it is that it would function as a rostrum, probably using some ephemeral stage components for the visits of high-ranking officials or, even, Mussolini himself. Its bareness for the rest of the time, which is shown in Bosio’s drawing, remains striking. From the detailed plan of the square (Fig. 3) we see that there is a second part to the *casa* behind the first, C-shaped structure. This second part seems to be detached and is a rectangle with its far end connected to a semicircle. In the early sketch (Fig. 5), a high cupola rises behind the main building. Its height was reduced in the final drawing, but we can assume that this was a *sacrario* [memorial chapel] for fascist martyrs, which was often included in *case del fascio*.¹⁰ Within the square it dominates the other buildings, and its form shows the development of the fascist movement up until 1937.

From covo to casa: the origin of fascism

The first spatial unit of the fascist movement in Italy can be traced back to the so-called *covo* [lair] in via P. da Cannobio 35, Milan. Here is where Mussolini founded the newspaper *Il Popolo d’Italia* on 15 November 1914. A 1941 film by Vittorio Carpignano retells the origins of the newspaper, framing its office in a dark building, with the only source of light being the sun hitting the glass door with the words “Popolo d’Italia” (Fig. 6).¹¹ The origins of the fascist movement are here, in a dark room, going almost unnoticed. Its humble beginnings, here represented as akin to the darkness from which the Big Bang began, are aestheticized and completely oppositional to the grandeur of the *casa del fascio* in

Caa (1938), Qaha (2012) and today as Lesser Angereb. Both CTI 1938 and the plan published in Bosio 1938a, refer to the Rasbièt or Ras Ghemb/Rasbet which is later referenced in Rifkind 2015 as part of the castle complex, Chiari 2015 uses Ras Gimp.

⁹ Bosio 1937a, p. 5.

¹⁰ From 1927 *case del fascio* increasingly included memorial chapels, see Maulsby 2015, p. 666.

¹¹ Carpignano 1941. For a close analysis of the film, see Mariani 2006.

Bosio's 1937 Gondar. However, it is not true that fascism was created out of darkness, its roots rather, go far deeper than the founding of an interventionist newspaper.

In looking for the origins of fascism, different schools of thought have underlined different aspects as being more central for its development than others. Three main currents can be identified: religion, war, and capitalism. The liberal philosopher Benedetto Croce sees the origins of fascism as going back to the second half of the nineteenth century: the Franco-Prussian War showed the power of militarism, nationalism and the weaknesses of liberalism and democratic institutions.¹² This resulted in a change of attitude which steadily developed in the years preceding the First World War and that is characterized by Croce as a crisis of morality and consciousness, one that is best manifested in Futurism – as he argues in 1924 and 1928.¹³ What bound Futurism and fascism together was their unwillingness to be confronted with differing opinions that went as far as quieting dissenting voices and resorting to violence. Croce in 1926, however, also points out that the rise of fascism in Italy showed the weakness of the nation.¹⁴

This weakness, as the steady decline of religious institutions crept on, allowed for the establishment of a laic religion, of a sacralization of politics that fascism took in its stride, as the analyses of George L. Mosse and Emilio Gentile point out.¹⁵ The latter sees in the change of attitudes at the end of the nineteenth century, including the emerging social mobility – made stronger by the escalating modernization – as flowing into the establishment of radical movements that acted outside of traditional matrixes, a manifestation of which being the interventionist movement in Italy before the First World War.¹⁶ Gentile sees a commonality between interventionism, fascism, and Futurism in their “tragic and action-focused conception of life, the vision of modernity as the explosion of human energies and conflict of collective forces [...] waiting for a historic change that would usher in the end of liberal bourgeois and the start of a new era.”¹⁷ The liberal bourgeois – symbolized by the governments of Giovanni Giolitti – was thus threatened by the increasing politicization of the masses. The First World War in this aspect escalated the political engagement of actors, who were previously excluded from active political life. The conflict, which would take on mythological significance in fascist rhetoric, was positively charged in its brutality through its creative character as the event where Italians were authentically forged. The locus of the trenches, which was interpreted by fascism as the prime example of corporativism, saw an alliance of classes for the common goal of nationalism. The First World War ended for Italian soldiers as a mixture of pride (Vittorio Veneto) and shame (Caporetto), and their discontent with liberal democracy – which survived the conflict – was seen by Mussolini as

¹² See Rizi 2003, p. 144.

¹³ See Croce 1928, p. 249 and Croce 1924, p. 3.

¹⁴ See Rizi 2003, p. 106.

¹⁵ See Mosse 1980 and Emilio Gentile 2003.

¹⁶ See Gentile 2010, p. 12-15.

¹⁷ Gentile 2010, p. 11-12.

the starting point for his political endeavours. Mussolini founds the *Fasci Italiani di Combattimento* [Italian Fighting Fasces] in 1919 amongst this climate by speaking to the disillusioned war veterans, which he wanted to unite against bolshevism and socialism. *Fasci di Combattimento* were an anti-party, anti-monarchy, anti-clerical, and militarized.¹⁸ The revolts and riots of workers of the *biennio rosso* [two red years] raged on while the chance for a stable coalition became ever more unrealistic.¹⁹ In the political elections of 1919 *Partito Socialista Italiano*²⁰ and *Partito Popolare Italiano*²¹ – both formed outside of the liberal establishment – signalled the entering of the masses in parliament.²²

After the elections *Fasci di Combattimento* shift their goals by trying to appeal to the masses of the middle class and productive bourgeoisie. The *squadrismo* of the black shirts used their violence in helping safeguard the private property of the productive bourgeoisie, while systematically sabotaging socialist associations and initiatives in Northern Italy. Gentile blames the backing of the *fasci* by the bourgeoisie and middle class on the weakness of parliamentary democracy, as well as the inefficiency of the police in suppressing the riots of the workers that occupied factories and *latifundia* during the *Biennio Rosso*, which represented a possible approaching socialist revolution.²³ The *Partito Nazionale Fascista* [National Fascist Party, PNF] was founded on 9 November 1921 and it entered the elections that same year in the *Blocco Nazionale*, together with the liberals of Giolitti and the nationalist party, *Associazione Nazionalista Italiana*. Giolitti decided to form a coalition with Mussolini's party with the intention of mitigating its militant members, the group, however, was quickly overhauled by the PNF, which by 1921-1922, through its growing capillary presence in the provinces with regional *fasci*, represented a parallel anti-State, a force filling the void left by the weakening government.²⁴ This culminated with the threat of a coup through a march on Rome in October 1922: groups of armed black shirts were directed to enter Rome, exerting a pressure that led to the resignation of the Prime Minister Luigi Facta after the king, Vittorio Emanuele III, refused to either declare a state of siege or the intervention of the police. The king did not offer any resistance and invited Mussolini to come to Rome,

¹⁸ See Gentile 2010, p. 18.

¹⁹ From the end of the First World War up until 1922 there is a succession of seven governments: Vittorio Emanuele Orlando 30.10.1917-23.07.1919 (*Unione Liberale*), Francesco Saverio Nitti I 23.06.1919-21.05.1920 and II 21.05.1920-15.06.1920 (*Partito Radicale Italiano*), Giovanni Giolitti V 15.06.1920-4.07.1921 (*Unione Liberale*), Ivanoe Bonomi 4.07.1921-26.02.1922 (*Partito Socialista Riformista Italiano*), Luigi Facta I 26.02.1922-1.08.1922 and II 1.08.1922-31.10.1922 (*Partito Liberale Italiano*).

²⁰ [Italian Socialist Party] PSI was founded in 1892 and was part of the Second International.

²¹ [Italian People's Party] PPI was founded in 1919 by priest Don Luigi Sturzo and represented the return of Catholics to political life after they abstained from voting for several years following the encouragement of the Catholic Church, which saw the territory of the Vatican shrink because of *Risorgimento*. For an overview of the start of what would later become *Democrazia Cristiana*, see Matulli 2020.

²² The new forces that emerged from the election, however, did not result in any parliamentary stability.

²³ See Gentile 2010, p. 15.

²⁴ Especially the summer of 1922 sees a rise of the *squadrismo* violence, with 369 cases within a month of murders, assaults, property damages, and arsons. See report by the Ministry of Justice cited in Salvatorelli/Mira 1964, p. 229.

where he is asked to form a government.²⁵ As the black shirts enter Rome and parade in front of the king and Mussolini, what was first thought as a coup becomes pure spectacle, a choreographed parade. However, as Simonetta Falasca-Zamponi analyses, the consequent narrative that was constructed around the march on Rome as a revolutionary act became the first building block in the massive spectacle machine that supported the fascist regime for the next twenty years.²⁶ In the fascist retelling of the march on Rome, the first of the succeeding perennial revolutions that made up the fascist regime, there was a conscious need to differentiate it from the revolutions in Russia and France. The low amount of blood that was shed in the supposed revolution made it what Pier Giorgio Zunino calls an “armed plebiscite”, a manifestation of a common will of most of Italy. The march was thus mostly framed as being militarily sound and incredibly effective in changing radically the course of the nation.²⁷ The Risorgimento, which within the fascist ideology was seen as a positive in its outcome but negative in its ideals was completed with the march on Rome, because in 1922 the “dead weight”²⁸ of the liberal ideals born out of the French Revolution were shed and left behind. Without liberal democracy, fascism could finally fill the emptiness of the state apparatus through a government characterized by its force and violence.²⁹

The rise of fascism to the government was a watershed moment both internally and externally. As Gentile explains, there had never been a government in liberal democracy, with a militarized party at its helm – who could also rely on significant parliamentary representation – which had clear antidemocratic values and championed an authoritarian revolution.³⁰ Internally, however, ever since the shift in modalities in 1919, which then led to the institutionalization of the anti-party within a party system, and now as government, meant that the very first supporters of the fasci – the Arditi,³¹ Gabriele D’Annunzio, and Futurists – and especially the militant squadristi made up a very loud faction of the party that disagreed with the compromises that Mussolini had made in order to come to power. Here we must start to differentiate between fascism as a movement and fascism as a government.³² The tensions between the government and the party would be a constant challenge throughout the ventennio and it is reflected also in the policies enacted by the regime, which had to answer not only to its followers but also to the other hegemonic powers, on whose support they relied. This ambivalence and balancing act that we can observe taking place during the twenty years of Mussolini’s rule also is reflected on the question of urban planning and architecture.

²⁵ On 31 October the king approves of the new cabinet which includes figures from the PNF, the Nationalists, Conservatives, Moderate Democrats, as well as the philosopher Giovanni Gentile and military figures.

²⁶ See Falasca-Zamponi 1997, pp. 1-3.

²⁷ See Zunino 1985, p. 146.

²⁸ Rocco 1938, pp. 726-727 and 1127; speeches from 25 February 1923 and 7 March 1926.

²⁹ See Zunino 1985, p. 142-143.

³⁰ See Gentile 2010, p. 29-30.

³¹ The Daring Ones, assault troops in the First World War, demobilised by 1920, who were especially skilled in close combat. They united as political actors together with the futurists and later with the fascists.

³² Separation that, as will be discussed later, was championed by Renzo De Felice.

Herald Bodenschatz develops a periodization that relies especially on the development of urban design and planning.³³ He divides the time from 1922 to 1943 into three phases:

1. October 1922 – October 1929: From the march on Rome to the world economic crisis. Transition from liberal government into fascist government and its consolidation.
2. October 1929 – 1935: The reaction to the economic crisis through increasing state intervention and building of consensus.
3. 1935 – 1943: The time of greatest consensus as the Ethiopian War is carried out up until the fall of the regime by the vote of no confidence of the *gran consiglio del fascismo* [grand council of fascism].

Although fascism is born in Italy, after its establishment it found resonance internationally in the interwar years and beyond. The definition and interpretation of fascism has found a development in its history that moved from extreme specificity to an “increasing dilatation.”³⁴ As mentioned before, in the 1920s, the prevailing lens through which fascism as a phenomenon was interpreted had an essentialist approach, which reduced it to being inherently Italian. Piero Gobetti was a liberal antifascist; from 1922 to 1924 he managed the magazine *La Rivoluzione Liberale* and a publishing house with the aim of criticizing the fascist government before being beaten and forced to exile in France. He comes to the interpretation of fascism as an inherently Italian phenomenon, which rests on weaknesses and lacunes of the Italian spirit. It was the “autobiography of the nation,”³⁵ a symptom of the essentially weak nature of the Italian ruling class and its masses. From this very specific definition, however, as fascism found its resonance internationally in the following decades, the intrinsic Italian nature of fascism was quickly removed from the discussion in a move that several historians criticize as essentially “emptying” the historical situatedness of fascism.³⁶ Comparative studies of fascist movements in Europe, however, allow for a deeper understanding of the phenomenon, and also point out gaps in the strictly national research that has been carried out so far. For instance, the characterization done by Croce of fascism representing a “parenthesis”³⁷ of illness and moral corruption that stood between liberal monarchy and democratic republic,³⁸ while extremely influential for a very long time, has been problematized by many historians because it ignores the continuities between the history that preceded and especially succeeded

³³ See Bodenschatz 2011, p. 27.

³⁴ Gentile 2010, p. 58.

³⁵ Gobetti 1964, p. 179.

³⁶ Emilio Gentile is a particularly loud voice in this camp. See Gentile 2010, p. 7.

³⁷ Croce opened the Congress of the parties united under the National Liberation Committee on 28 January 1944 in Bari, with a speech using this metaphor in championing for a positive reception of Italy from the international community, given that fascism, in comparison with the long history of Italy, should not lead to its end. See Croce 1963, p. 56.

³⁸ Rizzi makes a differentiation between the Croce in front of the international public, who talked of fascism as parenthesis, and the Croce when talking to Italian audiences, who instead was firmly on the illness interpretation since 1925 in a speech to the national council of the Italian Liberal Party, see Rizzi 2003, p. 83 and p. 247.

fascism.³⁹ Furthermore, Marxist interpretations of fascism have seen the movement as inextricably connected to the problems of capitalism. Important within this interpretation is the definition provided by Georgi Dimitroff in 1935: “Der Faschismus an der Macht [...] ist die offene terroristische Diktatur der reaktionärsten, am meisten chauvinistischen, am meisten imperialistischen Elemente des Finanzkapitals”.⁴⁰

As it will be shown in later sections, Dimitroff is correct in implying the importance of finance capital in allowing the regime to be upheld for twenty years, but what cannot be ignored is that the fascist movement found resonance with a large section of the Italian population, and its relationship to single people was extremely important in the construction of its consensus. The importance of *case del fascio* as architectural objects from which the party exerted its influence cannot be understated as a *casa del fascio* was present in most towns, either through the repurposing of an already existing building or one built ad hoc.⁴¹ The most famous was built by Giuseppe Terragni in Como (1932-1936 Fig. 7). The purest example of rationalist architecture for many, it was inspired by a statement from Mussolini in 1929 of fascism as a “glass house”,⁴² which Terragni reads as being connected to “organicity, clarity and honesty in the construction”⁴³. Terragni writes: “La sede del fascio non deve essere più covo o rifugio o fortino: deve diventare Casa, Scuola, Tempio.”⁴⁴ During this time, fascism was entering its last totalitarian push and relied on more than ten years of unmatched power: now it injected every facet of life and became the home of the Italian. Terragni designs the facades of the *casa* as monumental grids, taking inspiration from Mies van der Rohe’s Villa Tugendhat, which presents a strict square module for the whole structure, according to Cesare De Seta, who also points out how the geometrical structure is not exact in Terragni’s house, given that some bays are smaller than others. He defines it as “an ugly renaissance palace built out of cement and glass”.⁴⁵ De Seta’s judgement is that Terragni’s building did not represent fascism because it was unsuitably poetic and self-referential in its formalism for it to be a stand-in for the regime or its architectural goals.⁴⁶ Bruno Zevi even saw it as “antifascist and conspiratorial.”⁴⁷ Daniela Spiegel however points out that Zevi’s interpretation of Terragni’s oeuvre as antifascist stems from the attempt to rehabilitate modernist architecture from its fascist framing after the Second World War, a process that led to a divorcing of his work, his words, and his

³⁹ The question of continuity with the time before fascism is summarised in Woolf 1965, where mostly the relationship between Risorgimento and Fascism is explored, as it was a parallel drawn by Giovanni Gentile and other fascists, as well as from historiographers like Denis Mack Smith. For the continuity of fascism after its end, especially in terms of institutions, see De Nicolò 2019.

⁴⁰ Dimitroff 1982, p. 50. This view is representative of the Intercom stance in the mid-1930s.

⁴¹ Bigger cities had multiple *case del fascio*, each corresponding to a specific neighbourhood.

⁴² “Fascism is a glass house which anyone can see into”, cited in Terragni 1936, p. 6, originally in speech to Milanese gerarchi, 20 June 1929, in: Mussolini 1958a, p. 124.

⁴³ Terragni 1936, p. 15.

⁴⁴ [The fascist headquarters must no longer be a den or refuge or fort: it must become a home, a school, a temple] Terragni 1936, p. 14.

⁴⁵ De Seta 1983, p. 232.

⁴⁶ See De Seta 1983, p. 324.

⁴⁷ Zevi 1980, p. 17.

context into three separate realms through a strict formal analysis.⁴⁸ In comparison with the casa del fascio designed by Bosio, Terragni's relies on the transparency of the glass and its strict solidity is seen by Jeffrey T. Schnapp as being particularly welcoming in the process of fusing the political and community aspect that the casa del fascio takes on in the second half of the fascist regime.⁴⁹ Bosio's winged structure instead comes off as more monumental and less welcoming. Furthermore, the transparency of the glass could not be thematized, given the Ethiopian climate.

In the square of the casa del fascio in these first drawings and plans, the only religious element is present in the casa, the sacrarium. However, another drawing of the same square, also dated 1937, shows the cathedral as being placed opposite the casa del fascio (Fig. 8). From the zoning plan (Fig. 4), a cathedral is placed on top of a hill between the piazza del fascio and the indigenous zone (Chapter III.vi) – this construction, which can also be seen in Figure 1, is most probably the Tekle Haymanot Church.⁵⁰ Catholic Churches are present at the end of the arches of the representative avenues (Chapter I.ii.) and in the extensive residential zones, but they find no direct mention in the 1937 report by Bosio. The interpretation of fascism as a political religion is therefore represented in this specific configuration of the piazza del fascio, given that its spiritual elements are solely present within the party headquarters. This interpretation has been very widespread in totalitarian studies, with some scholars using it to analyse even political systems of antiquity under this umbrella.⁵¹ The use of the “political religion”⁵² paradigm can also be suitable for justifying the limitless violence that, under this lens, united both national socialism and bolshevism.⁵³

Cinema-teatro: the aestheticization of politics and negative architecture

The next building in the piazza del fascio is the theatre-cinema (Fig. 2). From the perspective drawing the building's main façade faces away from the square and instead underlines the start of the Viali della rappresentanza [representative avenues]. Its ground floor is surrounded by a loggia, which expands outside of the building's alignment in the main façade while the side facing the square is integrated within the building's form. The loggia in the main façade has eight rectangular columns and we can see how in the middle archway the entrance to the theatre is located with a slight recess. At the top of the façade several small square windows underline the horizontal roof of the structure. Theatre-cinemas were a feature of most urban planning in the colonies and Italy. The importance of film as a

⁴⁸ See Spiegel 2015, p. 54.

⁴⁹ See Schnapp 2008, pp. 45-56.

⁵⁰ Bosio writes in Fig. 4 “Tacle Aimanot” under the cathedral. Tekle Haymanot, ተክለ ሃይማኖት (1212-1313) is one of the most popular Ethiopian saints, recognised in the Coptic, Orthodox, and Catholic Church. The church in Azozo is still active today. For an analysis of the building and its pictorial programme, see Friedlander 2015.

⁵¹ For instance, see Koulakiotis/Dunn 2019.

⁵² Eric Voegelin introduces the term in 1938. See Voegelin 2000.

⁵³ See Bärtsch 2002, p. 378 and p. 380: In his analysis, the holocaust is engulfed within this interpretation as a religious sacrifice for the sacredness of the Aryan race. For Italy, see Gentile 1990, 2001 and 2003. A comparative study is presented by Maier 2007.

medium of political power was recognized early on by Mussolini, who is credited with the establishment of Istituto Luce and Cinecittà in Rome, and as a means of propaganda, its impact cannot be understated.⁵⁴

Especially since the cultural turn in the 1990s, more attention has been given to the aspect of spectacle in the fascist regime, especially through a new attention given to the writings of Walter Benjamin. In “Das Kunstwerk im Zeitalter seiner technischen Reproduzierbarkeit”, Benjamin explains how fascism operated through an “aestheticizing of politics”⁵⁵ and relied on aesthetic elements of myths, symbols, and spectacles in the form of rallies and mass demonstrations. Benjamin sees the emergence of cinema, concurrent with the proletarianization of the masses and the development of the metropolis as a time of fundamental change for society. Film offers the chance for the emancipation of the masses from the discontents of capitalist society because through its technological reproducibility, it challenges and discards the auratic character of the work of art, which until then had put the spectator in a state of pure passivity. However, Benjamin argues, the emancipatory potentiality of the loss of the aura is stopped by fascism because it can offer expression to the masses without questioning the system of private property at the base of their oppression and of capitalism. The alienation of the masses in fascism renders it possible for them to be confronted with their own self-alienation and find within it an aesthetic character through entertainment. This is what is achieved through the aestheticization of politics that occurs under fascism and that communism should counter through a politicization of art. The epilogue of the artwork essay has brought many questions and interpretations and its significance is still important today, especially concerning the politicization of art. Falasca-Zamponi uses the epilogue to frame Mussolini as dictator-artist, in a conceptualization of politics-as-art coupled with the idea of *art pour l’art*, which Benjamin argues is the modus through which fascism manages to keep the auratic character of art alive.⁵⁶ Starting from the idea of ‘art for art’s sake’, I posit that fascism is a politics for politics’ sake, in a way a politics that is separated from reality and whose permanent – but not sole – goal is its own survival.

In looking at politics through the lens of a separatist conceptualization of art, as something that exists alongside but detached from a given reality plane, we can grasp the capability of ideology. As Antonio Gramsci points out, ideology has no relation to the truth-value of its statements, it rather rests on its own enclosed-in-itself (il)logic, its own justification of itself.⁵⁷ The effectiveness of an ideology is given by its internal harmony and is separate from the possible relation to anything outside of it as true or not. In looking at Mussolini, it would be wrong to compare him to an artist, but it is correct to consider how he adopts the mechanism of the pre-reproductive art object, the passivity inherent in it, to

⁵⁴ For an analysis of the representation of architecture in the cinegiornali [newsreels] of Istituto Luce, see Pettena 2004.

⁵⁵ Benjamin 2008, p. 42.

⁵⁶ See Falasca-Zamponi 1997, pp. 15-20.

⁵⁷ See Gramsci 1975, pp. 436-437 and 1318-1323.

apply it to his own politics.⁵⁸ Although this conceptualization of politics is separated from truth and reality, it is in a relationship of constant referentiality to reality, because it is in reality that its survival is determined. This is what leads to the contradictions, ambivalences, and contrasts that can be traced when confronting fascism and its actions as government. And this is also why fascism is characterized by the most transparent of ideologies, namely non-ideology. Several times Mussolini hinted at the “ideas and doctrines” that motivated fascism, but he never really elaborated on what those were.⁵⁹ Mussolini defended the fact that fascism had risen without a straightforward political program, without an ideology, because it was his opinion that it was this lack that allowed for fascism to take hold and be more successful than other revolutionary movements.⁶⁰ In 1921 he talked of his “programmatic relativism”⁶¹

“Our reluctance to force ourselves to a program [...], our position of agnosticism when it comes to the regime, of having taken from other parties only what we like and serves us while rejecting what we don’t appreciate or goes against us, [...], they constitute as witnesses of our relativistic mentality. For us to act, only one point of reference is enough: the nation. The rest will follow.”⁶²

This programmatic relativism has been read as connected to the strong anti-intellectualist stance that was referenced time and time again by Mussolini, but it also underlines that through this praxis-oriented stance, Mussolini at the same time was motivated by and made a point of showing the spiritual and moral aspect of his leadership. On the other hand, it was criticized by fascists, too. For instance, in 1923 Augusto De Marsanich openly criticizes in *Critica Fascista* the idea that the nation can be enough to support the fascist project; he sees in fascism a lack of ground and unity in comparison to socialism and liberalism. He thinks every fascist has their own definition of fascism and criticizes that “given that in our party there has not been the possibility of discussion, the different currents and single opinions are either dispersed or ignored. We have lost one year looking for enemies everywhere and we did not notice how big of a threat our lack [of fixed principles] is.”⁶³ This aspect makes clear the relationship between fascism and futurism. Defined by its irrationality and subversiveness, futurism was also largely contradictory and its relevance – other than the fact that the Italian cultural elite had not been moved by an artistic current for many years and found itself in stagnancy – was to be credited to their focus on public perception, discourse, overall public image, and public engagement that came hand in hand – and sometimes even overrode – their actual artistic output.⁶⁴ The importance of advertising for Filippo

⁵⁸ Though Mussolini did define himself as an artist when opening the exhibition *Novecento* at the Pesaro gallery in via Manzoni, Milano, see Mussolini 1956a, p. 187.

⁵⁹ Speech at the Scala Theatre, Milan, 28 October 1925, in: Mussolini 1956b, p. 424.

⁶⁰ Mussolini wrote: “The elaboration of the principles of the Fascist State was neither quick nor easy. Fascism did not have a beautiful and prepared program to implement. If it had, by now Fascism would have marked its complete failure. Nothing is more ruinous than parties with a well-organized doctrinal suitcase and that delude themselves that the great and changing reality of life can fit inside it.”, cited in Mariani 1976, p. 54.

⁶¹ Aquarone 1995, p. 4.

⁶² Mussolini 1955, p. 269.

⁶³ De Marsanich 1923, p. 254.

⁶⁴ See De Seta 1983, pp. 2-3.

Tommaso Marinetti revealed to be extremely effective, and it is no secret that Mussolini saw the potential of their artistic strategies for his own political plans. The experience in Fiume of D'Annunzio was also of significance for Mussolini, as the vate often held speeches in front of large crowds with a rhetoric that would be then used by Mussolini too, especially as his mythification grew from 1929 to 1940.⁶⁵ His messages were carefully crafted to lead the crowds in front of him and actively encourage the ideals of belief in the fascist revolution, of obedience and readiness to fight, which were going to define the new Italian man.⁶⁶ The focus on representation rather than substance which characterized futurism and in many important ways fascism, too, was criticized especially succinctly by Gobetti, who after the march on Rome, emphasized that the marketing focus of futurism organized by Marinetti through the establishment of a propaganda office, lobbying for his interests and goals made Marinetti into the prototype of those “bleak figures of post-war heroes, who lack any possibility of confidence, any intimacy, who preach external violence out of fear of loneliness.”⁶⁷

Going back to the significance of film, Benjamin sees similarities in the collective reception of cinema and architecture. In the artwork essay, Benjamin differentiates the process of reception in distraction and concentration. Whereas concentration encompasses the reception of paintings, where the receptive subject is immersed in the artwork, reception by distraction sees instead the artwork entering the subject. “Architecture has always offered the prototype of an artwork that is received in a state of distraction and through the collective. The laws of architecture’s reception are highly instructive.”⁶⁸ According to Benjamin, architecture is received through use, or tactically, and through perception, or optically. Benjamin underlines the importance of habit through use as well as the optical perception in forming architecture. He wanted a departure from the claustrophobic bourgeois interior; he talks about it in terms of his grandmother’s apartment in Berlin, filled with objects which function as memory-devices. The only element he finds positive is the loggia because the glass-clad room offered an escape from the 19th century bourgeois interior and towards modernity.⁶⁹ The element of glass is mentioned other times in his writings: in his essay on surrealism, he writes “To live in a glass house is a revolutionary virtue par excellence. It is also intoxication, a moral exhibitionism, that we badly need.”⁷⁰ This is in reference to André Breton’s *Nadja*, where the narrator sees himself living a

⁶⁵ See Falasca-Zamponi 1997, p. 4.

⁶⁶ See Gentile 2010, p. 42-43. The concept of a new man is central in fascist ideology. This term is to be understood as also implying a specific fascist subjectivity that is exclusively defined as male. This conceptualisation is reflected in the language used throughout this text, where the use of male pronouns is aimed at reflecting the construction of masculinity at the base of fascism – Mussolini said in May 1934 “War is to men what motherhood is to women”, see Mussolini 1958b, p. 259. For the construction of femininity under fascism see Benedusi 2014, Curti 1996, De Grazia 1992, Dittrich-Johansen 1994, Macciocchi 1979, Rubetti 2019, Spadaro 2010, Valeriano 2017.

⁶⁷ Gobetti 1924, p. 38.

⁶⁸ Benjamin 2010, p. 33.

⁶⁹ See Benjamin 2006a, p. 371.

⁷⁰ Benjamin 1978, p. 49.

transparent life of no regrets.⁷¹ In the interior he sees the Bauhaus as being a possible way out of the constraining habits that determined bourgeois dwelling.⁷² Benjamin understands architecture, both in its interior and exterior, as determining through its tactile quality a set of habits that the subject is conditioned to follow through their perception of architecture in distraction. This is what determines the claustrophobia experienced in the bourgeois interior of the grandmother and that is exorcised through modern architecture. He affirms “The modern style of building [...] has now created rooms in which it is hard to leave such traces (this is why glass and metal have become so important) and which make it almost impossible to acquire habits in the first place. This is why the rooms are empty and often adjustable at will.”⁷³ Whereas Benjamin agrees with Adolf Loos’ hatred of ornamentation, he sees his interiors as still trying to conserve the bourgeois individual, wherein the interior still serves the reactionary character of individualized dwelling as being chiefly a space of seclusion, security, and coziness.⁷⁴ Loos and the Jugendstil ultimately keep the same ideology of individualism, their language of the Gesamtkunstwerk stems from a last desperate attempt to save the bourgeois as it is attacked by technology. Benjamin instead sees the exposure championed by surrealists as the new point of departure.⁷⁵ We can say that Benjamin’s approach to modern architecture, especially the Bauhaus movement, is one that is intrinsically determined by his political beliefs, and one that works in function of a communist revolution. The lack of traces in the architecture is thus seen for its revolutionary potential as it would allow for a break from the past and tradition, which comes to mean capitalism. Benjamin here sees the political potential of art and initiates the politization of art for which he champions in his artwork essay. However, the same traceless material, free of habits, can be appropriated by fascism. This does not lead to the same outcome, we suppose, because Benjamin sees fascism as aestheticizing politics. This means that the masses under fascism are given ways to express themselves through the aesthetics of politics, which are imbued with an aura, which distracts the audiences from questioning the modes of production, and, extensively, capitalism.

We have in front of us two ways of going about the artwork as it leaves its auratic character: either this aura simply disappears, making the artwork and the viewer ever-so-close as to be able to understand the artwork in a political sense, or the fascist separation of the work of art and the rest of the world, using the same logic of the art for art’s sake movement in order to keep art separate and far away from its audience, but while still maintaining the perception in distraction, which ultimately works in favour of fascism. At the same time as this process is happening, the aura is transferred into the political realm – the aestheticizing of politics – which uplifts politics into an untouchable realm and thus explains the fascination inherent in fascism. So, if an artwork can direct to the political as it shows the negative

⁷¹ See Breton 1998.

⁷² See Benjamin 2005, pp. 472-473.

⁷³ Benjamin 2005, pp. 472-473.

⁷⁴ See Loos 2019, and Elliott 2011, p. 68.

⁷⁵ See Benjamin 2006b, p. 38.

aspects of a society, a lack or an absence that needs to be addressed for social justice, a politics that is aestheticized works to fill that void – that would be exposed by political art – with the aura. This also implies that the political work of art exists to question the systems in place, while the artwork under an aestheticized politics is in service of that politics and can only be subservient to it. Politics becomes *the* artwork, then, and all the others can only be placed under it. Distraction also seems to work differently in each of the two realms (politicised art and aestheticized politics). Let us consider only the role distraction plays in aestheticized politics.⁷⁶ Adorno explains that distraction-as-entertainment will not be needed in a communist society, implying that it instead does exist in a capitalist society, the individual needs the shocking value of distraction – epitomized in the moving image – to make up for the tiredness and dullness of everyday life.⁷⁷ In fascism however we see a glorification of tiredness and dullness, more precisely a glorification of intense labour, of exhaustion, of sacrifice, compromise, and submission. This is at the very base of the propaganda of the regime as we have seen. So then, what kind of distraction is championed through this focus on sacrifice? It is my claim that it is what I call negative architecture.

Stephen M. Bourque reflects on negative architecture using Immanuel Kant and Theodor W. Adorno. The grounding of his reflection is the sublime in Kantian thought. The feeling of the sublime is experienced through the failure of its perception. That is, it is ultimately a negative feeling because it indicates a lack, an impossibility of our understanding of grasping what is in front of our eyes, which Kant – and everyone after him – saw as the essential approach to (real) art. Bourque then goes on to sketch Adorno and Max Horkheimer’s critique of the culture industry, which sees art as being necessarily bound to the dominating ideology. With these two theoretical standpoints, he tries to understand what a sublime architecture could be. A sublime architecture is one that would confront its viewer with “the lack between the conceptual and non-conceptual in order to show the individual the own face of his subjectivity and therefore to realize in himself a feeling for the potential of spontaneity against the universal structures that confront him in his everyday living.”⁷⁸ Sublime architecture is thus a negative architecture with an incredible positive potential, a potential to break the monotony through its negativity and realize change. As an example of this, Bourque uses Grand Central Station in New York (Fig. 9). The banality of the skyscrapers, which he reads following Adorno as representation of late-capitalist greed, ensuing alienation and deindividualization in its perceivers, makes for a contrast from the “classical architecture mixed with early twentieth century thematic elements” of Grand Central, which results in the feeling of negativity/sublime. Grand Central as the *real* art, looking to break the system that around it reigns sovereign.

⁷⁶ Benjamin does not elaborate in detail his theory of distraction [Zerstreuung], we only have a few lines in the Anmerkungen, see Benjamin 1991, pp. 678-679. Paul North explores distraction in Benjamin at length in North 2012.

⁷⁷ See Letter dated 18 March 1936, See Adorno/Benjamin 1994, pp. 168-172.

⁷⁸ Bourque 2015, para. 15.

Through sublime experiences that induce this negative feeling (a type of play with concepts), a thinking that remains other to society and therefore participate in the Great Refusal, we are subjectively given a small strand of hope for humanity and our future.⁷⁹

Bourque, it is my impression, only replaces the aesthetic experience of the Kantian sublime with negativity, without providing a definition of this negativity that could be helpful in understanding or conceptualizing architecture differently. Ultimately, it seems to champion insular, out-of-place, architecture, and taking especially the example of Grand Central, a conduit built for the very enacting of capitalism as an exception to the rule, as some more authentic aesthetic or truthful experience simply because it sticks out from the surrounding landscape, reduces the potential of both Adorno and Kant. Moreover, I am not comfortable with using the sublime in Kant as any kind of point of departure for an analysis of architecture and built space generally. This is especially hard to apply to the architecture – but in general all the arts – of the first half of the twentieth century because, in Italy and in Europe, there was a general questioning of the art-object, one that was initiated in Italy by futurism. Architecture and urban planning provided to some extent a new stage for the performance that had started with futurists and their obsession with the war as “representation.”⁸⁰ Futurists saw the war as negation, as a way out of the established system and the coming of the future.⁸¹ Bourque in his analysis of what he calls negative architecture, underlines negativity as the feeling of dullness that characterizes late-capitalist society, and sees the out-of-place, or non-homogeneous character of Grand Central Station as being distracting in the way that its very presence makes life more bearable and introduces the aesthetic character to a non-aesthetic life. Negative architecture in fascism, however, and especially in the case of the planned city, surrounds all aspects of life. Each building is imbued with the same aesthetic character.

The white walls of rationalist architecture are like the white screens of the cinemas that were present in every new settlement, be it a town, a city, or a village. They both function in the same way as projection surfaces for what the regime wanted to communicate with propaganda. Like the never-ending cycle of newsreels that were shown during every projection in the cinemas, so in that same movement, the white walls of the city functioned as projection surfaces for the single individuals, who could use them as meaning-makers for their own existence, reality, and experience. This whiteness was in a way atemporal and non-spatial, it represents the infinite possibilities of abstraction, realization, and concretization, it is part of the very process of identity-making that is so fundamental in our approach to the built environment. The homogeneity of the forms and style – or rather, the apparent lack of style – has the potential of opening a host of possibilities, the feeling of being able to do anything we want. At the same time, this is not the case, but rather we find ourselves inexorably stuck within these white

⁷⁹ Bourque 2015, para. 18.

⁸⁰ De Seta 1983, p. 7.

⁸¹ See Isnenghi 1970, p. 174.

forms. If the white screen of the cinema was really a signifier of freedom and choice, we would not have any kind of reflection on its form. Instead, this ostensible freedom is an anchorage of limits. It seems almost inherent in the human mind that when being confronted with a form, one is bound to reflect on the form itself rather than the possibilities that this form grants. We see this in film analysis, where the medium is so inextricably involved in any reasoning on film. One becomes obsessed with the limits of things, the meaning of the very means that ideally would grant freedom but instead become prisons within which we move. This is understandable, what is knowledge, ultimately, if not the testing of its very limits? Within each confine rests the idea that there is something outside of it, something beyond it. But whereas we can look at the empty screen as pure medium, this same equivalency cannot be done for the white walls of a building. It appears as a finished work, as something complete, while the white screen is the mere starting point, it invites, even obliges to project onto it. But in the greater context of what the built space is, the white wall is nonetheless the emptiest of forms. Taking into consideration, for instance, a baroque palace, its multitude of stylistic elements makes it impossible to project anything onto it, each image would become warped by its grooves, its volumetric differences, its statues and ornaments. The baroque palace rather projects onto the viewer signifiers and the viewer is thus left as the receiver of meaning, with very little agency. The flat, geometric, dry, and white walls of rationalist architecture on the other hand invites projection, it is some way mute and is begging for signifiers to be projected onto it. Of course, this muted-ness is apparent, because even in not speaking we know the language it would utter.

Furthermore, architecture itself can be seen as being cinematic and theatrical. Vittoria Capresi points out that fascist architecture in the colonies and the new cities in Italy is one conceived and constructed as a stage, with an inherent theatrical aspect.⁸² As we will see later, the life in these built spaces was characterized through its performative character, and was articulated through the acts of public performance determined by the party and the central government, forming the rituals of fascism.⁸³ It is important to note that this analysis stems from an understanding of fascism as inherently performative, reliant on spectacle and theatricality and its anchorage in negativity is not to be interpreted as a way to take away from the reality of the fascist experience generally. Even if the field of movement of politics and ideology is placed separate from the plane of reality, its manifestation is real, felt, and experienced. The focus on these aspects is not a reduction to theatre, but rather an amplification of the understanding that goes beyond pure historiographical analysis of facts. Facts and ideology are not supposed to be framed in a competition – trying to negate ideology with facts mostly leads to radicalization – but rather as two aspects supporting each other and informing each other. Accounts such as Denis Mack Smith's biography of Mussolini, who offer a peak behind the curtain of the man at

⁸² See Capresi 2009, p. 90.

⁸³ Examples of other literature dealing with the rituality of fascism and Nazism while remaining strictly outside of the religious paradigm include Behrenbeck 2011, Brockhaus 1997, Karow 1997, Reichel 1991.

the head of the fascist movement often rely on pointing out the discrepancies between the outwardness and inwardness of Mussolini, thus often reducing his acts as some sort of overcompensation for personal problems.⁸⁴ Many studies of head figures of mass movements often rely on this strategy of pointing out the absurdity, stupidity, and backwardness, if not the outright perversion of these singular individuals – we can see it for Mussolini and Adolf Hitler but also Donald Trump, or Silvio Berlusconi. There is a security that is given to the idea of reducing such complex processes to vanity projects, overcompensations for internal insecurities and manifestations of the ruin of society through a singular biography. However, this approach cannot be fruitful in gaining a deeper understanding of the phenomenon spurred by these men and often leads to an impossibility of any kind of dialectic. Pointing out the theatricality and performativity of the regime – and it is important to understand fascism as being more than a manifestation of Mussolini – is not done with the goal of reducing the magnitude of its historical significance, but rather show the effectiveness of the theatricality. In considering questions of gender, for instance, its performative aspect has been exposed time and time again. Pointing out the constructedness of a concept, by itself, however, does not take away its power and its goal should not be to point out an ignorance, stupidity, or naiveté of the actors in the play.

In a later perspective drawing from 1938 (Fig. 10) we see another version of the theatre-cinema in Gondar. Here the theatre is placed in the same constellation in relation to the *viali di rappresentanza*, however it is not placed beside the *casa del fascio* but rather the *loggia* of merchants, which in the 1937 drawing was faced opposite the theatre. In this 1938 drawing we can see a development of the architectural forms of the building. The entrance is receding from the alignment and is underlined by a three-arched *loggia* that works as a trace of it on the façade. Beside the *loggia* two statues are positioned on a small plinth. The top floor also has a *loggia* that stretches along the whole façade with arches and balustrades. As with the *casa del fascio*, the theatre also is standing on a *crepidoma*-like raising, with a few stairs leading to the entrance. The side of the theatre begins on its ground floor with another *loggia*, however, there seems to be no connection to the other *loggia* in the front. Stretching three floors above the *loggia*, eight rows of small square windows underline the horizontal character of the building. Through this second *loggia*, which faces the square, we can observe a blurring of the line between the space of the square and of the theatre, even if the *crepidoma* pedestal still makes the separation clear. The square presents a small, raised platform, which would suggest that it delineates the square *per se* and the street surrounding it.

Circolo ufficiali: the Second Ethiopian War and Bosio's arrival in Ethiopia

The *circolo ufficiali* [clubhouse for military officials] is situated in the northwestern end of the square. Its main features are a high bell tower and an airy portico made of arcades (Fig. 11). The clubhouse is L-shaped with one end functioning as arcade, while the other hosting the rooms of the club

⁸⁴ See Mack Smith 1982.

(Fig. 3). Behind the arcade a grass garden opens with four tennis courts and other entertainment facilities for the army officials. The arcade is punctured by small, rectangular, windows (Fig. 10). The placing of the officials' club in such a prominent position can be justified by looking at the terrain levels of the town, where the space behind the building seems the one of the few suited to constructing sport infrastructure. Furthermore, it underlines the importance of the military within the conception of the town. Bosio was probably very aware that during the first period of Gondar's existence high military presence would be necessary and this is also clear by the perspective drawings where we almost exclusively see military personnel. As Bosio was drawing these plans, although the war officially had ended, conflict raged on.

Italian presence in East Africa began after the unification of Italy in the Risorgimento. In 1869, Rubattino, a shipping company, acquired land in Assab,⁸⁵ a port city on the Red Sea coast, following the opening of the Suez Canal. Initially, there was little interest in colonialism, but as Tunisia fell to the French and the British occupied Egypt, the Italian government aimed to establish a colony in the Mediterranean, along the Red Sea and the Horn of Africa coasts.⁸⁶ Assab was occupied by military forces in 1882, and through expansions and diplomacy with Ethiopia, Eritrea⁸⁷ became Italy's first colony in 1890. In 1885, Italy gained commercial agreements for the Benadir⁸⁸ coastal region in southern Somalia, which came under indirect Italian rule. Eritrea was seen as a settler colony for demographic colonization, while Somalia focused on export of agricultural products. The First Italo-Ethiopian War broke out due to local resistance to expropriations in the highlands, resulting in Italy's defeat in the battle of Adwa⁸⁹ in 1896. This defeat caused a national and international embarrassment, leading to a loss of confidence in Italy as a colonial power. Eritrea shifted its focus to agricultural exports, while Somalia adopted a semi-direct administration model, eventually becoming the colony of Italian Somalia in 1908. In 1911, Italy initiated the conquest of Tripolitania and Cyrenaica in North Africa, utilizing air power for the first time.⁹⁰ The Italo-Turkish War led to the establishment of Italian colonies in the region. However, the war was later viewed as a costly mistake and dampened enthusiasm for further colonial conquest.

During World War I, Italian occupation of the Libyan colonies became less active, but Mussolini's rise to power renewed efforts to expand Italian dominion over Libya. In the 1920s, more territories were occupied, and Pietro Badoglio became the Governor of Tripolitania and Cyrenaica. He

⁸⁵ Aseb, Tigrinya: ዓሰብ.

⁸⁶ Mia Fuller explains that the occupation of Tunis by the French was seen as a betrayal by Italians given that there was a minority of Italians residing in the region. They saw it as a lost opportunity. See Fuller 2006, p. 25-28.

⁸⁷ The name Eritrea derives from the ancient Greek name for the Red Sea (Erythra Thalassa), it was imposed by Italy in 1890.

⁸⁸ Benaadir.

⁸⁹ Aduwa, ዐድዋ.

⁹⁰ See Wright 1978.

implemented a reign of terror and genocide, with thousands of people from Cyrenaica placed in concentration camps under inhumane conditions.⁹¹ Suppressing resistance was a prerequisite for the settlement of Italians in the united colony of Italian Libya, established in 1934.⁹²

After years of preparation going back to 1932, the start of the Second Ethiopian War was provoked, unannounced, by the invasion of the Ethiopian Empire by Italian forces on 3 October 1935.⁹³ Alexander De Grand sees the invasion of Ethiopia as motivated by both “domestic pressures and the evolving international situation.”⁹⁴ The failure of corporativism, the increasing competition represented by Nazi Germany, the transformation of the new fascist man looking more hopeless, are all factors that pushed for an increase in militarization and the shift from the intention of enacting a regenerative revolution in Italy to new territories that could seem more suitable for the change.⁹⁵

The international community reacted with economic sanctions on Italy, which however were not upheld for a long time and were quite small to begin with. Italy’s war in Ethiopia, however, turned out to be a very significant moment for many factors. The Ethiopian Empire was a member of the League of Nations and, more importantly, the only African territory that was never colonised. As a member of the League of Nations, the attack by the Fascist army was not only illegal because it was not preceded by a declaration of war, but it also had broader consequences for international politics. Badoglio was a strong presence in the occupied territories and responsible for the coordination of the armed forces. The official war lasted seven months with the occupation of Addis Abeba⁹⁶ on 5 May 1936 but the Italian army never reached a complete control of the territory and guerrilla wars were continuously carried on even after the official end of the conflict. During the first phase 150.000 Ethiopians died, while the guerrilla portion cost an estimated 180.000 to 230.000 lives of the occupied population. On the other hand, 25.000 Italian soldiers died.⁹⁷ The conflict in Ethiopia has been researched more in recent decades, but the extent of its atrocities remains unclear. It also took place as the propaganda efforts escalated exponentially in Italy, ever since a propaganda ministry was founded in June 1935, clearly taking inspiration from Hitler’s Germany. As the fascist empire was declared on 9 May 1936 Italy accounted for the third largest colonial empire worldwide and this was welcomed with incredible euphoria in the motherland, as well as great controversy on the international stage. For many aspects, 1935 was a

⁹¹ See Salerno 2005.

⁹² In a letter to General Rudolfo Graziani in June 1930, Badoglio was clear in his intentions for the war that had started to rage on: “As for overall strategy, it is necessary to create a significant and clear territorial separation between the controlled population and the rebel formations. I do not hide the significance and seriousness of this measure, which might be the ruin of the so-called subdued population... but by now the course has been set and we must carry it out to the end, even if the entire population of Cyrenaica must perish.” (Translation by De Grand 2004) Pieri/Rochart 1974, p. 614.

⁹³ See Asserate/Mattioli 2006.

⁹⁴ De Grand 2004, p. 136.

⁹⁵ See De Grand 2004, p. 136, Del Boca 1976, pp. 287-8 and 344, Panunzio 1936, pp. 66-68.

⁹⁶ Addis Abeba, አዲስ አበባ.

⁹⁷ Woller 2010, pp. 148-150.

watershed year because it was at once the culmination of the fascist regime, both in terms of popular support and territorial expansion, but it can also be pinpointed as the start of the end of Mussolini's time. If earlier, Mussolini had been distant from Hitler and Germany, he was becoming increasingly favourable of the annexation of Austria to Germany, and actively supported General Francisco Franco during the Spanish Civil War in 1936, with 3.800 Italian deaths and great financial support including weapons.

The conquest of Ethiopia is parallel to the totalitarian acceleration that was welcomed by the militant fascists, who had become frustrated by the excessive bureaucratization, that had come to define the regime. Right before the rise of Hitler in Germany, as the ground was laid for the Ethiopian war, fascist ideas spread internationally and found resonance in other political groups, having in common: "the mystical and militarized conception of politics, the anti-democratic, anti-liberal and anti-Marxist revolutionary activism, the cult of the nation and of race as an absolute value, the use of rites and symbols as a fundamental expression of one's identity."⁹⁸ There was at this time a messianic character given to Mussolini and his regime, as the first to usher in a new era, which started with the complete annihilation of parliamentary democracy through the rise of a new generation of young fascist men.⁹⁹

As the military campaign in Africa starts to take shape, the young civil engineer and architect Gherardo Bosio understands the magnitude of the potential conquest of Ethiopia, especially when it came to possible career opportunities.¹⁰⁰ While he had found some success in Italy, with his villa of the Golf Ugolino (Fig. 12) granting him international notoriety, working abroad in the colonies would be easier and could lead to a quicker advancement of his career.¹⁰¹ Bosio attended from 1926 to 1927 the Scuola di Cavalleria [infantry school] in Pinerolo, became a sergeant and eventually being discharged as second lieutenant in 1927. His interest in the military picks up again in 1935, when he starts contacting the Ministry of War to be sent to Africa. In his archive more than fifty documents are conserved about his re-enlistment, which finally happened on 16 March 1936. He arrived in Massaua¹⁰² the following 28 April and stayed until 18 December of that year.¹⁰³ Bosio was right to assume that urban planning was going to have an important role in the colonization efforts. It was as early as May 1936, as Addis Ababa was conquered by the Italian army, that the new chapter of colonial urban planning started. On 4 September 1936 the Governatore [governor] of Amara¹⁰⁴ Alessandro Pirzio

⁹⁸ Gentile 2010, p. 50.

⁹⁹ See Gentile 2010, p. 50.

¹⁰⁰ See Renzi 2016, p. 27

¹⁰¹ The club house was realised between 1933 and 1934. Its design, developing in three parts, was between functionalism and Mediterranean taste. It can be seen as a clear example of Bosio's attachment to rationalism. See Renzi 2016, p. 108-117.

¹⁰² Massawa, Mits'iwa, Batsi, ጥጫዋሳ.

¹⁰³ See Renzi 2016, p. 106-107.

¹⁰⁴ Amhara.

Biroli¹⁰⁵ wrote to the *Ministro delle Colonie* [minister of the colonies] Alessandro Lessona¹⁰⁶ that master plans were to be drawn for every major city, mentioning that Bosio, who was under his service, would be a good candidate for the plans of Gondar and Dessiè.¹⁰⁷ However, as Pirzio Biroli wrote to the metropolis in September, the plan for Gondar had already been approved on 20 August 1936.¹⁰⁸ Bosio could rely on connections, including his brother Jack, who worked in several ministries, who sent numerous letters to recommend his name to the governor.¹⁰⁹ Other than his qualifications as architect and engineer his status as an “old and proved black shirt”¹¹⁰ secured his appointment. Less than twenty days later, Bosio sends to the *Ministro delle Colonie* on 21 September 1936 various materials for Gondar: “photographs of drawings, general report and study of urban infrastructure, sanitation, road network, water and electricity supply, and forecasts.”¹¹¹ He expects to finish the plans for Dessiè in a matter of days and is clear in his hopes of being given further master plans to draw; were it not the case, he’d like to be discharged so as to go back to Italy and continue his architectural practice.¹¹² According to Riccardo Renzi, Bosio had abandoned all other outstanding projects and commissions in Italy to go to Ethiopia, hoping to find work in the newly occupied colony.¹¹³ This suggests that it was not only patriotic belief in the expansionist campaign of the regime that motivated Bosio’s re-enlistment, but it was rather an opportunity for his professional advancement.¹¹⁴ It was a widespread practice in the booming colonialism in Africa since the start of the twentieth century to see the colonized territories as an opportunity for European planners and architects to act with almost complete freedom and without the restrictions that often determined their work in the European continent.¹¹⁵ Within the logic of extraction that characterizes colonial expansion, single individuals, like Bosio, also saw opportunities for individual profit in getting involved in the colonial war. This becomes especially clear in reading his correspondence, where he asks many times to be discharged and thus allowed to return to Italy after having received the commission for the plans – having obtained what he desired. Up to 1936, Bosio had worked on single building architecture and interiors, and it was in AOI that he was able to add a third layer to his practice, namely urban design.¹¹⁶ This allowed him to design space in toto, from

¹⁰⁵ Pirzio Biroli occupied Dessiè during the War, he was the first *Governatore* of Amara from 1 June 1936 to 15 December 1937.

¹⁰⁶ Minister from 11 June 1936 to 8 April 1937, both preceded and succeeded by Mussolini.

¹⁰⁷ See ACS/MAI 106.

¹⁰⁸ According to Renzi 2016, p. 46n113.

¹⁰⁹ See Canali 2012, p. 320.

¹¹⁰ ACS/MAI 106.

¹¹¹ ACS/MAI 106.

¹¹² The *Ministro* added on the letter that the materials were sent to Mussolini for approval; Mussolini had been the *Ministro delle Colonie* before Lessona.

¹¹³ Renzi 2016, p. 27.

¹¹⁴ Bosio was not involved in any active combat while in Ethiopia. This is certified by a letter from 15 November 1937 from the association of war voluntary enlistees that did not recognise his involvement in any active combat. See Renzi 2016, p. 37n149.

¹¹⁵ See Nunes Silva 2015, p. 10.

¹¹⁶ An early experience in urban planning is his submission for the project for the lighthouse dedicated to Christopher Columbus in Santo Domingo in 1928. See Renzi 2016, pp. 58-59.

smaller to biggest, an opportunity which he took to explore the limits of his conceptualization of the built space.

The urban planning development of Ethiopia, which involved dozens of architects, was for the period of occupation mostly focused on urban reassessment of already existing cities. This was because the Italian army never achieved pacification of the Ethiopian resistance and it was only within urban centres that Italians could exert their power. Ciro Poggiali, a journalist sent to Ethiopia to report on the war for the newspaper *Corriere della Sera* kept a personal diary that was only published in the 1970s, where his impressions of the war and the ongoing guerilla were kept. It goes without saying that the testimony in his articles in the *Corriere* and his diaries are largely contradictory. In his diary he recounts of the concerted effort by the Italian army and specifically General Rodolfo Graziani¹¹⁷ of targeting Ethiopian intellectuals to establish a peaceful empire. Poggiali compares the atrocities as “socially and humanly the equivalent of what Bolshevism inflicted in Russia.”¹¹⁸

Loggia dei mercanti

The last building facing the square in its north-eastern side is the “loggia dei mercanti.”¹¹⁹ This building is characterised by a three-story-high loggia that occupies the whole façade and introduced the motif, which will be taken up in the viali della rappresentanza (Fig. 11). From the name given to the building we can assume that its use was as commercial space for merchants, bringing another function to the square from the otherwise strictly institutional configuration. Together with the arcade of the theatre and military official club, the building connotes the square as a pseudo-cloister. The use of arches is clearly determined by the climate conditions of the region. The piazza del fascio, which would be the first urban element encountered by traffic coming from the north, introduces Gondar through its militarized, fascist, and commercial qualities, which are all represented in the square through buildings that show a diversity of forms while forming a harmony through the use of the arcade.

ii. Viali di rappresentanza: the role of capital in the regime and anti-urbanism

The viali di rappresentanza are two streets running parallel forming an arch from the piazza del fascio to what Bosio calls the piazza del commissariato.¹²⁰ As we can see from the general plan (Fig. 13), the two streets find themselves at different altitudes, but they also form a clear unity through the employment of a standardized building form that is repeated throughout the whole urban structure. Only one side of each road is planned to have buildings, while the other is left bare, or rather, is to be decorated with trees, forming an avenue. The western avenue has buildings on its eastern side, while the eastern on its western. Bosio notes in his report that this is done to guarantee a beautiful view of the

¹¹⁷ Graziani was called “the butcher of Libya” given his efforts in suppressing Libyan revolts during his time in Tripolitania from 1921 to 1934. See Fuller 2006, p. 32. On Graziani see Cova 2021.

¹¹⁸ Translation by De Grand 2004, p. 141. Poggiali 1971, p. 195.

¹¹⁹ Bosio 1937a, p. 5.

¹²⁰ [Square of the commissariat] Bosio 1937a, p. 10.

surrounding landscape.¹²¹ As the name suggests, the street is designed for its representative character, meaning that its use was intended to be connected to public parades, rallies, and demonstrations. Furthermore, as we can see from the zoning plan the buildings of the *vie di rappresentanza* are mostly para-statal institutions, banks, and economic players in the colonial enterprise (Fig. 4). Starting from the western avenue and going south, the first building is planned to host the INFAIL – the public institute overseeing the insurance of workplace accidents. Following this an office of the timber trade company Fratelli Feltrinelli is planned.¹²² Next to two banks, the Banco di Roma and the Banca d'Italia, the offices of AGIP – the Italian petrol company – are placed. These are followed by some more private companies. The western avenue ends with the building of the Italian Colonial Society. Going back up towards the piazza del fascio on the eastern avenue we can see the offices of the Gondar Society, some more private companies and at the very end near the square we find the Istituto nazionale fascista della previdenza sociale [National Fascist Welfare Agency].

The basic module of the building in the avenues is drawn by Bosio in a drawing (Fig. 14). They are rectangular buildings made of four floors, each with loggias running through the whole façade. In the ground-floor, arcades with big windows for shops and offices connect each building, thus making the avenues pedestrian friendly as they ensure enough shade to protect from the sun. Along the vertical axis, each building is divided by columns stretching from the ground to the top floor into sixteen bays which are adjoining in groups of four to create four equal units separated by walls. All the loggias from the first until the last floor look the same, with a horizontal balustrade making them into balconies which are accessed from the building through glass doors. On top of each bay awnings are installed. Through the part of the arcade adjoining each building we can see parked cars and trees filling the space between the buildings on each avenue. The avenue complex is divided twice by step streets that make up for the change in altitude while leading to other important parts of the institutional nucleus of the town, namely the square of the government between the Banco di Roma and the Banca d'Italia and further south between different private company offices leading to the square of the courthouse (Fig. 4).

The placing of the para-statal companies and private companies that Bosio assumed were going to establish offices in this new Gondar along these two avenues, which connect the most important institutions of the town, makes us reflect on the relationship between private economic interest and the fascist regime. Within the Marxist tradition of the interpretation of fascism, it is understood as a consequence of capitalism, its most extreme expression. *squadrismo*, which developed after the First World War through groups of militant revolutionary anti-socialists, was employed by the moneyed

¹²¹ See Bosio 1937a, p. 10.

¹²² Fratelli Feltrinelli Società anonima per l'industria e il commercio dei legnami opened nine companies in AOI after receiving approval to cut down timber and together with other companies providing building materials for the first shelters in the colony. See Segreto 2019, chapt. 9.3.

bourgeoise to safeguard their factories and private properties from socialist occupation, is seen within this current of thought as revealing fascism as a maximalization of capitalism.

The Communist International (Comintern) always saw fascism as an international phenomenon and early interpretations also focused solely on the anti-communist aspect of the movement, which led to definitions such as social fascism¹²³ to define social democratic movements. Zunino sees the first Marxist approach to fascism and its ideology as being too reductive and writing off any original characteristic of fascism, given that it was mostly read as a carryover of problems that long preceded it.¹²⁴ Newer Marxist scholarship stepped away from the cause-effect relationship between capitalism and fascism, although the two elements are still conceived as forming an alliance and the aspect of protection of private property still makes the capitalist influence on fascism very clear.¹²⁵ As Zunino wrote his book in 1985 with the aim of showing the extent to which fascism included an ideological structure that could not be ignored, he saw the newer leftist historiography¹²⁶ of his time as being dominated by a discourse on the continuity between the earlier liberal phase and the later republican phase of Italian governments, with the result of fascism itself being interpreted as a “reflex” of liberal Italy and a “premonition” of the coming republican era, dominated by the hegemony of Democrazia Cristiana.¹²⁷ The cultural turn since the 1990s sees what according to Zunino up until 1980 had been ignored by fascism scholarship, namely the role of civil society. With an unprecedented attention given to elements of cultural society such as clothing, language, myth, memory, and gender in different contexts, the appreciation of their role within the fascist ideology came to also be analysed.¹²⁸ Civil society, which previously had been seen as something inherently democratic, once looked at in different contexts, showed that its role in the establishment of fascism could even be one of facilitator rather than opposition, mentioning how northern Italy had a strong network of civil societies and saw a more significant rise in fascism than the less organized southern part of the peninsula.¹²⁹ The role of civil society is seen as being complementary to the “informal negotiation” that led to a “compromesso autoritario”¹³⁰ between the PNF and actors of the church, public administration, and economy. The stretching of the scope of research beyond formal state institutions allows for a greater understanding of the capillary intervention that allowed for fascism to flourish. Giving too much weight to the economic and industrial actors as the most significant in determining the success of fascism presents the danger of reducing the regime to a police state, as the influence on the lower classes, i.e., the masses,

¹²³ Texts produced around this time drawing ideologies between and outside Marxism and liberalism include Drieu la Rochelle 1934, Rosselli 1994, de Man 1929.

¹²⁴ See Zunino 1985, p. 19.

¹²⁵ See, for instance, Santarelli 1967, Carocci 1973, Candeloro 2014.

¹²⁶ See Quazza 1973 and 1976.

¹²⁷ See Zunino 1985, p. 23-27.

¹²⁸ See Paxton 2014, p. 38. According to him this was also motivated by the fall of the satellite states of the Soviet Union.

¹²⁹ See Paxton 2014, p. 40. The role of civil society in the Weimar Republic is explored in Berman 1997, the cases of Spain and Romania are studied in Riley 2010.

¹³⁰ [authoritarian compromise] Legnani 1995, p. 415.

is given too little importance.¹³¹ Nonetheless, the relationship between fascism as government and the financial players in Italy was a central factor in determining the development of fascism, given that the lack of their support could easily lead to the fall of the regime. This is clear from the start of the regime, as Mussolini deliberates that industries were not obliged to give the profits made through military contracting during the First World War to the government, together with the end of state monopoly on insurance.¹³²

The second phase of Mussolini's regime was ushered in by the 1929 financial crisis and extended until 1935. This time is characterized by big architectural projects and is remembered as the time of biggest consensus for the regime, both nationally and internationally. The crash of Black Tuesday in New York rippled its waves in Italy by causing considerable damage to most banks, leading to the overhaul of private banks and industries into the hands of the state. This was not something completely novel in Italy. As Hans Woller explains through his "Italian model", during the First World War, Italy was characterized by a consistent state intervention when it came to resource allocation.¹³³ At this point the parliament is completely fascist as the first plebiscite elections were held in March 1929. Those eligible to vote – only male members of unions and associations – could only answer yes or no to a list of fascist members of parliament. The monarchy showed no opposition while those who had monetary and cultural influence saw the fascist regime as ultimately serving their own interests.¹³⁴ With the trade union reform, the interests of the employers were safeguarded in the first steps toward corporativism. It hinged on the principle of collaboration between classes and its mythical origin went back to the experience of the First World War trenches, where Giovanni Gentile saw the *Geburtsstunde* of the new nation, to be completed with fascism.¹³⁵ Margaret Boveri defined 1936 as the year where state capitalism was one step closer to being reached, especially with the bank reform of that year, which at once enabled the Banca d'Italia to control all credit in the country, as well as facilitating the loaning of money to the state from the central bank without any restrictions.¹³⁶ However, the massive cost of colonial expansions, both in terms of low financial profit and high export necessary for the sustenance of the Italian presence in Africa were too big for the economy to be sustainable.

Through the siding of Mussolini with the financial capital and its economic interests, which clearly points to a necessity for Italy to develop its industries to catch up with other European colonial powers, at the same time political propaganda points to an image of Italy as relying on agriculture. One of the first real points of agreement within fascism and a signpost that was bound to become extremely

¹³¹ See Legnani 1995, p. 414.

¹³² See Pfammatter 1990, p. 15. Further measures introduced to gain the sympathy of big industrial and agrarian owners was the banning of the tax on inheritance, taxation of banks and industrial enterprises.

¹³³ See Woller 2010, p. 21-22.

¹³⁴ See Gentile 2010, p. 37.

¹³⁵ See Gentile 2014, p. 94. Giovanni Gentile was the philosopher that is traditionally credited as sketching most of the fascist ideology for Mussolini to use, Gentile G. 1920, p. 61.

¹³⁶ See Boveri 1936. p. 177.

significant throughout the whole ventennio was its anti-urbanism. This doctrine can be traced back to the work of Oswald Spengler *Der Untergang des Abendlandes*, which had been published in two parts in 1918 and 1922. Spengler was quite clear in his analysis of the metropolis and urbanity generally as the sources for the decline of man, which also implied concepts of infertility and illness. The industrial city was in his analysis the cause for the general degradation at the start of the 20th century and a return to the land and rural life was the solution to the problems that caused societal unrest. Spengler saw civilization as stretching over thousand-year periods of rise and decline, which made his present the time of a coming shift from decline into a renewed rise. Riccardo Mariani sees this consideration of Spengler as supporting fascism's stance against the city and urbanisation generally, which had become symbols of death and illness.¹³⁷ Spengler speaks of the tendency of the city to lead to individual detachment from such cultural constructs like family, land, and nation, which ultimately turn into a stopping of the desire to procreate, taking away meaning from these – according to Spengler – fundamental tenets for the success of civilization generally.¹³⁸ There is therefore a loss of meaning and energy associated with urban life which Mussolini and fascism want to turn around, to make relevant again and actively foster, especially when it comes to the social space created by the regime. Arguing further, however, Mariani sees that Mussolini was not truly inspired by Spengler, but rather used him to somehow make his “intuitions”¹³⁹ stand on more solid grounds rather than just being reactionary stances without much grounding. Intellectuals of the strapaese [ultra-village] movement, with their magazine *Il Selvaggio* were also an outlet for the emerging antimodern sentiments that were attached to a significance of the farmer class for the good of the nation and represented a cultural aspect of ruralism that did not, however, really influence the economic decisions of the regime.¹⁴⁰ Nonetheless their anti-urbanist stance sparked the debate around architecture – which will be explored in chapter II. In their reception of rationalism, relying on an understanding of architecture as inevitably leading to urbanisation, strapaese's founder Mino Maccari describes it as opposing his idea of modernity: “Why do we have to identify our modernity with an anonymous modernism, our universality with an aesthetic internationalism, our history with a mechanical, positivistic, Marxist, flat concept such as the one championed by rationalist architecture?”¹⁴¹

The problem posed by the city and specifically the metropolis is not only present in Italy, but rather it is a Europe-wide concern. Benjamin champions the opening of the private sphere. He sees the nineteenth century dwelling as being like a shell: it is part of the individual and functions to protect through coziness and habits the singular subject from their dissatisfaction with advanced capitalism. In “Die Großstädte und das Geistesleben” Georg Simmel sketches how the focus on the individual in

¹³⁷ See Mariani 1976, p. 81.

¹³⁸ See Spengler 1995, p. 799-800.

¹³⁹ Mariani, 1976, p. 83.

¹⁴⁰ See Corni 2003, p. 101.

¹⁴¹ Maccari 1933, p. 34-35.

Nietzsche and throughout the nineteenth century is a consequence of the de-personalization that occurs in the metropolis.¹⁴² Benjamin sees a potential solution to this in inducing a shift from dwelling to housing – a mode of living where the habits imposed by the environment are kept to a minimum – and through this enact change in wider society. As mentioned before, the opening of the private sphere is advocated by Benjamin through metal and glass in architecture, something that does find resonance in the rationalist architecture under fascism. Riccardo Renzi describes the urban language developed by Bosio in his plans for Ethiopian cities as focused on a search for some kind of overall harmony, of a continuance from the interior and the exterior where similar considerations were expressed through different forms.¹⁴³ The reoccurring theme of the arcade, which was also adopted in Addis Ababa along *viale mussolini*, of course springs to mind.¹⁴⁴ As portals between buildings and the street, they represent a liminal space between the private and public sphere. This, to some extent, could suggest that the blurring of the public and open space wished by Benjamin here finds a possible manifestation.

In bringing the concept of the interior in Benjamin, however, we also need to consider his *Passagenwerk*. Never completed and forever in its scattered state, it investigates how the covered, artificially lit, chaotic, and fragmentary passages in Paris at the end of the 19th century can be read as a representation of the alienation of the individual under capitalism, an individuality driven by the fetishization of the commodity and the illusion of choice while being suffocated by its apparent limitlessness. This environment is in stark contrast with the architecture without traces of the Bauhaus that Benjamin praises. The geometry, material and adaptability of the modernist interior space is read by Benjamin as a prelude to a new configuration of society that genuinely breaks with tradition. At the same time, Benjamin in the section “Convolute E”, subtitled “Haussmannization, Barricade Fighting”, criticized the urban renewal enacted by Napoleon III and Baron Haussmann in Paris, which led to the displacement of hundreds of thousands of Parisians, the destruction of medieval quarters and the establishment of the boulevards, all similar in their ornate aspect, down to the same materiality.¹⁴⁵ Benjamin underlines that this renovation of the urban fabric had as its aim the facilitation of the imperial power, creating obstacles to proletarian demonstration and easing the employment of the army to suppress any uprising. Furthermore, the monotony exerted through the homogeneous buildings further alienated the citizen. Within this framework, we can see how Bosio’s architecture replicates the arcade and the boulevard in the same terms that Benjamin found the most appalling. The materiality and forms of the arcades planned for Gondar, though at first suggesting the tracelessness appreciated by Benjamin, ultimately lacks the element of autonomous arrangement that is present in the Bauhaus houses.

¹⁴² See Simmel 1903.

¹⁴³ See Renzi 2016, p. 27.

¹⁴⁴ See Nuzzaci 2015, p. 131-132.

¹⁴⁵ See Benjamin 1999, pp. 120-149.

Within this context of being confronted with the problems of the industrialized metropolis, urban planning as a discipline starts to take shape. In the history of the Italian peninsula, there is a reoccurring sequence of periods characterized by the establishment of new towns, which is then followed by a period of focusing on urban renewal, restoration, and expansion of existing cities. The fascist regime however presents both trends simultaneously.¹⁴⁶ Before the establishing of an urban planning law in Italy in 1942, decades of debates on political, social, and artistic matters when it came to the built environment unfolded. In Europe, interest in city planning was formalized by legislation earlier, for instance the English Town Planning Act passed in 1909 and France's city planning legislation which was applied in Morocco in 1914 before being approved for France itself.¹⁴⁷ The time before 1942 is thus characterized by a relative freedom and non-formality in matters of shaping the city, and the chance to create planned cities, rather than just focusing on urban renewal, was granted in Italy and in its colonies to a range of architects and engineers. Urban planning was established as an independent discipline in Italy in 1932, leading to the opening of dedicated faculties in major universities and the development of a corpus of courses and discourses around the city and the town. One of these first experiences was the course *Edilizia Cittadina ed Arte dei Giardini* held by Concezio Petrucci at the Scuola Superiore di Architettura in Florence in 1929-1930.¹⁴⁸ Petrucci had graduated in Rome the same year as Bosio and his conceptualization of the city was anchored on the identity-building role that built spaces could foster. Coming from this understanding, space in the city was constructed with a clear identity that needed to be recognized throughout its different elements. Bosio's experience in different fields was reflected in his general plans, which featured a division of the town into different macro-zones, each having a very distinct role and utility (such as residential, representative, commercial), without however losing an overarching harmony or common thread that would characterize the town in general, thus creating a built space that was not merely a conglomerate of different, separated zones. In Renzi's analysis, he sees the street, the square, the communal space, and the building as the tools used by Bosio to achieve an overall effect that was clear from the start.¹⁴⁹

Dessiè: typology and the rehabilitation of fascist urban planning

Together with the commission to draw the plan for Gondar, Bosio was given in 1936 the opportunity to draw a plan for Dessiè. Much smaller in surface, Dessiè was considered useful for the Italian colonial administration given its location along the re-named via della vittoria [victory street] connecting Assab, Addis Abeba, Asmara¹⁵⁰, Harar¹⁵¹ and Gondar. Its strategic position made its development important in the mission to avoid the French port of Djibouti and instead made Italian

¹⁴⁶ See Ghirardi/Forster 1985, p. 633.

¹⁴⁷ See Fuller 2006, p. 73.

¹⁴⁸ See Corsani 2007, p. 93.

¹⁴⁹ See Renzi, p. 37.

¹⁵⁰ Asmera, ኣስመራ.

¹⁵¹ ሐረር.

imports and exports pass through the port of Assab, which was under Italian rule.¹⁵² Its construction was, as Bosio points out in 1937, to be guided by its function as shunting crossroads for the commercial.¹⁵³ The road network in Dessiè, which is expected to be characterised by high usage, travels across the city and touches all the sections of the town, which are placed within a smaller distance than in Gondar (Fig. 15).

In Dessiè, the Italian city was supposed to rise high up and in a dominant position with respect to the indigenous one. The master plan provides for a large urban centre in the Berchennà¹⁵⁴ valley, distributed on the sides of a wide crossing avenue (Fig. 16).¹⁵⁵ The avenue is adorned with rows of trees that divide the dual carriageway. Alongside it, the commercial area develops in a regular succession of large, tree-lined squares with arcades. These squares stretch along the avenue and are connected by a continuous portico. The effects of this development are unknown since they cannot be easily deduced from the models. However, it is clear that the commercial area will exclude banks, silos, warehouses, and other large storage facilities. It was supposed to be closed to the north by the government district, located at a higher altitude. The government district would include a square for state, military, and party buildings. The church will be situated on a hill, with houses being positioned on the slopes of Mount Tossa¹⁵⁶ and on the heights of Debra Sallassiè.¹⁵⁷ The military zone, located on the plateau of the current ghebì, would dominate the approaches to the city from west. Near the indigenous market, on the right side of the road leading to Addis Ababa, the indigenous neighbourhood was to be established. At the opposite end, in the upper Bochennà¹⁵⁸ valley, the industrial district.

The organization of the urban elements in Dessiè present uncanny similarities with Gondar, which has also led to wrong categorisation of the drawings in AEGB and some publications. The buildings of the avenue especially are of the exact matrix as the ones designed for Gondar. We can thus observe how Bosio from the very start of his sojourn in Ethiopia was looking to establish models and matrixes that could be used across cities and territories. In AEGB we see several documents fixing ratios between buildings and their surrounding green space, a strict model of how many floors each type of building could have and in letters to local governments of all the cities where Bosio was actively drawing a general plan the need to stop spontaneous and temporary architecture was underlined many times.¹⁵⁹ Following the formal conquest of Ethiopia and declaration of empire, governori were asked to provide lists of cities under their jurisdictions that would also need master plans, one letter listing

¹⁵² See Rifkind 2015, p. 149.

¹⁵³ See Bosio 1937b, p. 171.

¹⁵⁴ Berk'ana.

¹⁵⁵ See Gorresio 1938.

¹⁵⁶ Tosa.

¹⁵⁷ Bosio writes Dibra Sellassiè. Debre means mountain, Sellassiè means trinity, in Dessiè there is an Ethiopian Orthodox Tewahedo Church called Trinity Church (ስላሴ ቤተክርስቲያን).

¹⁵⁸ A small river, Borkena.

¹⁵⁹ For instance, see Bosio 1937c and 1937d.

twelve towns, some in areas that still were not under Italian control.¹⁶⁰ Master plans had been introduced in the inter-war period as standard planning practice in British, French and Portuguese colonies in Africa. They were often constructed for long-term (10-20 years) development and constituted a tool that ensured a more effective control of the colonized territory. These sometimes adopted the ideas and forms of the garden city.¹⁶¹

One year after coming to Ethiopia for the first time Bosio was also given the job of drawing the plan for Gimma (Fig. 17).¹⁶² The plan for Gimma however would never be enacted because he was replaced by Guglielmo Ulrich. This all erupted in 1939 in a meeting set up to discuss the substitution of the architects. While Bosio had been capable, there was a reoccurring issue of him not bringing his plans to completion and not delivering the expected results.¹⁶³ To complicate the situation the change of guard at the Ministero delle Colonie had brought more chaos, where Bosio ultimately got the worse end of the bargain. Of course, however, there was a signed contract that gave him the commission to complete his plan. Nonetheless, the plan that was to be enacted would be one drawn by the Ufficio Opere Pubbliche [public works office, U.OO.PP.] of the Governatorato of Galla and Sidama, with the revision by Guglielmo Ulrich. A similar faith would also be encountered for Dessiè. Ferruccio Canali recently used the archives of the defunct Ministero dell’Africa Italiana to piece together the process behind Bosio’s plans, their approval, and their misfortunes. His contribution is crucial – given that the archive had been inaccessible for decades – especially in grasping the bureaucratic challenges, which often led to mistakes and back-tracking from very important personalities, that went into the project of urban planning in AOI. For the purposes of this work, however, it is enough to only sketch its borders. Both plans of Gondar and Dessiè were not completed, never fully approved and enacted, and what could withstand the bureaucratic battle leading up to 1939, was promptly stopped by the Second World War. Even not considering the self-imposed obstacles through the state apparatus, all plans developed for AOI had very real, practical issues, the first being the sourcing of building materials.¹⁶⁴ However, the reception of Bosio’s plans through national and international exhibitions, articles in widely read magazines and journals made sure that their legacy would live on. Ultimately, the relationship between the architect and the political apparatus is fundamental in my analysis, whereas the struggle to enact his plans is something which is – in my analysis – a representation and symptom of the questionable state apparatus within which fascism moved, the very same one that made the integral land renewal also fall

¹⁶⁰ See Canali 2012, p. 319.

¹⁶¹ Carlos Nunes Silva mentions A.J. Thompson in Nigeria and South Africa and Etienne de Groer and David Moreira da Silva’s plans for Luanda. See Nunes Silva 2015, p. 14n23.

¹⁶² Jimma. This came to be due to some back-and-forth between the Ministero delle Colonie, the Governatore and Marcello Piacentini, a game of hot potato with Bosio as the winner only for “convenience and economic practicality” as Canali puts it. Canali 2012, p. 320.

¹⁶³ See ACS/MAI 106.

¹⁶⁴ See Lessona 1937. In this letter, the minister underlines the fact that the use of reinforced concrete in Europe is based on its economic advantage, and that therefore if other materials are more economically sound for the Ethiopian towns, they should be used.

flat, and the very same one which needed to be hidden from the general public in order to still receive approval.

The period from the mid-1920s to the mid-1930s sees an increase in the interest in colonial architecture and urban planning, which Mia Fuller sees as the first time when the idea of architecture in the colonies as a representation of Italy was introduced.¹⁶⁵ This led to an increase in articles both in sectorial magazines and journals, as well as in wide-distribution newspapers, dedicated to the urban planning for the cities of the colonies. Striking is the article by Vittorio Gorresio in Rome's *Messaggero*, which shows with sober expression the idea behind the urban design in Dessiè, especially the design of the main avenue.

Since the functions of each of the squares are equal, all the squares will be equal, with all the same buildings, with perfectly equal arcades, shops, back shops, offices, and studios. Having found the elementary module of one of the squares, it is repeated and applied fifteen times in a row, trusting that the repetition gives the whole a rational and at the same time monumental aspect.¹⁶⁶

This article, which went over plans for nine towns, shows that already in 1938 there was a clear enough understanding of the matrix model that Bosio had developed, which according to Gorresio could lead to a rational and monumental urban fabric. This very matrix is possibly one of the most important legacies of urban planning during fascism. It is important to reflect on the terminology that is often used when approaching this subject, namely the preference of defining fascist architecture as equivalent to rationalism. As we will see, such an equation is not only misleading but also factually incorrect; while rationalism was definitely the most appreciated architectural current by the more forward-looking and innovative section of architects and architecture theorists, it was not the only one, and the debate with and against the other currents that were moving within architectural circles in the 1920s and 1930s is fundamental in understanding the dynamics at play in the relationship between the fascist regime and architecture. Herald Bodenschatz thus talks of rationalism rather than fascist architecture in general when he explains the history of the current after the end of the war. This separation is understandable from one point of view because whereas the neoclassical style had started to take hold long before the start of the fascist regime and was embraced internationally, rationalism seems quintessentially of that time. Rationalism's life stretched along the lines of fascism and therefore purely from a temporal perspective it is concurrent with it. According to Bodenschatz, the departure of rationalism from fascism, the schism between the two terms, or – if you will – the denazification of rationalism happens formally in 1973.¹⁶⁷

¹⁶⁵ Fuller 2006, p. 10.

¹⁶⁶ Gorresio 1938.

¹⁶⁷ See Bodenschatz 2011, pp. 12-25. To note is the fact that I have used the term denazification because there is really no term like “defascistization” because there was never a real – that is, concerned, focused, institutionalised – effort to take fascism out of Italy, whereas the process of denazification in Germany and to some extent in

In 1973, part of the XV Triennale di Milano was organised by Aldo Rossi, namely the exhibition titled *Architettura-Città*, which was part of the International Exhibition of Architecture and Industrial Design. Together with the book *Architettura Razionale*, which acted as the ideological backbone of the exhibition, Rossi wanted to sketch the method of rationalization as the emerging approach to architecture, an approach that – according to him - was to be perceived in architectures that, stylistically speaking, seemed quite different from each other.¹⁶⁸ Aldo Rossi was a politically outspoken figure of the Communist Party and was partly involved in the debates that shaped the last Triennale di Milano in 1968 – which had been occupied by architecture students and was by and large a failure, or rather a sign of a deep generational gap between students and professors which rendered a collaboration almost impossible.¹⁶⁹ Rossi in 1973 however sketches his approach to the architectural object in the *Architettura-Città* exhibition, an approach defined by the relationship between architecture and the city and at the same time put “architecture in its rational expression”¹⁷⁰ as the central focus of the debate. It was an approach which vehemently underlined the autonomy of architecture as a discipline and moreover saw the processual as fundamental; rationalism thus was not simply functional – a misunderstanding which had led to the easy appropriation of the discipline by capitalist interests and mass production. Under the ethical banner, architecture could be liberated from these pressures without landing in the alienating space of fine art but rather be an effective tool of political change. Bodenschatz sees Rossi’s approach, based on types and basic forms (typology), as one that ignored the “politisch-gesellschaftlichen Produktionsbedingungen”¹⁷¹ that went into the production of any architectural product. Ulrich Pfammatter calls this a strategy of “Ent-Geschichtlichung” or of the “Liquidation des geschichtliches Denkens,”¹⁷² which made it possible to consider the architectural products of the fascist regime strictly for their methodological and theoretical value rather than their historical and social circumstances. Subsequent exhibitions, for instance the 1982 exhibition *Gli Anni trenta. Arte e Cultura in Italia* held at Palazzo Reale, Arengario and Galleria del Sagrato enforced this attitude.¹⁷³ This growing interest in the architectural production of fascism was tied to an understanding of the regime as quite liberal when it came to the arts, architecture forming a sort of oasis from the otherwise totalitarian environment.¹⁷⁴ The central consideration however was another, namely that architecture during fascism flourished and that it was not true that it had been trapped in “provinciality and mediocrity.”¹⁷⁵ A clear separation of architecture from the fascist ideology was also welcome abroad, with the 1982 exhibition in London *Sabaudia. Città nuova fascista* standing beside the efforts to

Austria – although it was quickly abandoned and had really controversial results – was systematically carried out and to some extent, still is to this day.

¹⁶⁸ Rossi/Bonfanti 1973.

¹⁶⁹ See Guenzi 1968, pp. 82-85.

¹⁷⁰ See De Paola 2011, p. 202.

¹⁷¹ Bodenschatz 2011, p. 14.

¹⁷² Pfammatter 2005, s. 31.

¹⁷³ See Bortolotti 1982.

¹⁷⁴ See Bodenschatz 2011, p. 15.

¹⁷⁵ Widmann 1982.

rehabilitate the image of inter-war architecture in Italy.¹⁷⁶ The 1980s, explains Bodenschatz, saw an increasing favour towards Mussolini-led projects, chiefly the EUR42, which was the subject of a big exhibition and several publications (Fig. 18).¹⁷⁷ The 1990s – characterized by the Berlusconi governments, which had neofascist parties in their coalition – progressed the neutralization of the memory of fascism, changing it into a quite innocent light, especially when it came to its architectural products. Following a logic of uncovering forgotten chapters of architectural history, many exhibitions were made – from 1993 onwards with increasing consideration of Italian colonial architecture – to showcase how forward-looking architecture during fascism had been and – as Bodenschatz suggests – how much was forgotten due to the extreme moralism that had previously soured any and all artefacts that were realized during the ventennio.

This tendency to rehabilitate seems to be motivated by contradicting the idea that architecture during fascism was of poor quality and of little influence. At its core, it is a challenge of the idea that correlates immorality with ugliness. Separating the idea of bad in moral terms and bad in aesthetic terms was at the centre, along with a revindication of Italy's relevance to the larger European discourse. The new narrative was that Italian architecture was to be considered along the same lines of other modernist movements of the inter-war period. We can justify this because Mussolini himself said that art should be free¹⁷⁸ – it is astounding how often this one quote is cited in the resources around architecture in the 20s and 30s – and thus an international dialogue – the very precondition for modernism – was able to take place, even while Italy was under a totalitarian regime. This puts the arts – and in this narrative, architecture is also the highest of the arts – on another level, one that goes beyond dictatorship, beyond the suppression of freedom of speech, the architectural discourse is somehow completely separated from the rest as it floats and hovers over the heads of the regime. Aldo Rossi, stretching his hands to this higher, other plane of existence, picks up where the rationalists of the 1930s left off, and is convinced that these transcendental truths about form, function, and spatial language, could be brought down back to earth and constitute the very ground on which to reform architecture. As Aldo Rossi brought typology further with *L'Architettura della Città* in 1966, the forms developed during the ventennio are decontextualized and reappropriated.¹⁷⁹

This attitude is also contingent with the approach to fascism that was typical of post-war Italy, one that was characterized by unmovable antifascism, which refused the consideration of fascism as ideology. When it comes to ideology and fascism, the liberal-democratic interpretation can be best

¹⁷⁶ See Burdett 1981.

¹⁷⁷ See Bodenschatz 2011, p. 16.

¹⁷⁸ “I declare that it is far from me to encourage anything that may resemble State art. Art falls within the sphere of the individual. The State has only one duty: not to sabotage it, to foster humane conditions for artists, to encourage them artistically and nationally. I would like to declare that the government that I have the honour of presiding over is a sincere friend of art and artists” Mussolini 1956a, p. 188.

¹⁷⁹ See Rossi 2015.

summarized in the figures of Norberto Bobbio and Franco Venturi:¹⁸⁰ “in fascism [...] there is not a trace of idealistic coherence, there is no authentic plan for a transformation of society to speak of.”¹⁸¹ In interpreting this once prevalent current, Zunino works along the binaries of State and civil society on one hand and consensus and violence on the other.¹⁸² The liberal democratic analysis according to Zunino situates fascism as only existing in the state, civil society instead existing in a parallel reality where antifascist sentiments and advantageous but detached adherence coexist, making it impossible for any kind of consensus to be established. The threat of violence from the state thus becomes the instrument through which adherence to fascism starts and is maintained. Reduced to total passivity, Bobbio represents the Italian population as “celebrating ceremonies they don’t believe in”¹⁸³ thus bypassing any confrontation with the idea of consensus amongst the “real” Italy.¹⁸⁴ Given that Bobbio understood fascism just in terms of state-violence, he also underlines that there was not a fascist culture to speak of, which means that there was not a trace of it in post-fascism.¹⁸⁵ Like ceremonies of non-believers, the architects that worked under the regime also did not subscribe to fascism, but rather followed reason rather than passion. This understanding enables the use of products of architects working under the regime as separate from the regime. However, it is not only the conditions of production, as Bodenschatz underlines, that should influence the reception of fascist architecture, but rather it is in their very form that is shaped by fascist ideology, which cannot be reduced, as Zunino points out, as pure violence.¹⁸⁶

iii. Governo: the nature of fascism and the issue of consensus

In contrast to Dessiè, Gondar was the capital of the Amhara Governorate, to which also Dessiè belonged. As such, the complex of the governorate was of major importance within the plan for the city, which was to combine this aspect and its residential character within one “urban organism”.¹⁸⁷ To fulfil this goal, Bosio understands from the start the importance of the government palace as “symbol of conquest and power,”¹⁸⁸ which should be at the very centre of the urban development establishing an urban hierarchy within the rest of the built environment. In AEGB we find two solutions for the government palace before the move of the development from Azozo to the historical Gondar. One of the designs is done by Bosio (Fig. 1, 19, 20), while a plan drawn by the Ufficio Opere Pubbliche [Public Works Office, U.OO.PP.] is present in the rest of the material (Fig. 8, 21). Because all are dated 1937 it is challenging to fix their succession. The change of location to Azozo happens in early 1937 by

¹⁸⁰ See Bobbio 1961, pp. 153-154 and Venturi 1961, pp. 186-189.

¹⁸¹ Zunino 1985, p. 12.

¹⁸² See Zunino 1985, pp. 14-15.

¹⁸³ Bobbio 1990, p. 121.

¹⁸⁴ See Zunino 1985, p. 17.

¹⁸⁵ See Bobbio 1974, pp. 660-661.

¹⁸⁶ See Bodenschatz 2011, p. 14, and see Zunino 1985, p. 17.

¹⁸⁷ Bosio 1936, p. 2.

¹⁸⁸ *Ibid.*

decision of Pirzio Biroli.¹⁸⁹ We could speculate that the planned clearing of the indigenous settlement around the castle had proven too challenging or found too much resistance; it was also in Azozo that the very first tents were set up by the Italian army. Nonetheless, from this decision by Biroli, Bosio develops the plan that we are currently walking through. Looking at Figure 8 we can see the government palace design proposed by U.OO.PP. and the second configuration of the piazza del fascio, with the cathedral and vicariate. From Figure 1 we know, however, that the plan for Gondar in the stage in which we are visiting it, put the cathedral and vicariate at the end of the viali di rappresentanza – whereas the 1937 report does not mention a location for the main church. Thus, we can conclude that the project of the U.OO.PP. was drawn and imposed on Bosio sometime during 1937 but after he developed most of the material on which we rely for our analysis. Ferruccio Canali, in reporting the stages of planning for Gondar points out that around July 1937 the U.OO.PP. was given by Ahmara governatore Ottavio Mezzetti the task of constructing an alternative plan to Bosio's.¹⁹⁰ Eventually, in March 1938 the location of the town is once again fixed around the historical Gondar and not in Azozo by the governatore of AOI.¹⁹¹ We can thus speculate that during that time of parallel engagement with the plan for Gondar of both Bosio and the U.OO.PP., the Ufficio had proposed a design for the palace of the Governorate, which Bosio integrates in his plan (Fig. 21).

The government palace can be reached on foot through a step street departing from the middle point of the viali della rappresentanza (Fig. 12), first crossing the green section between the two avenues before starting again to reach the level of the square of the governo. The perron disrupts the monotonous matrix of the avenues (Fig. 1); the buildings of the eastern avenue at the intersection with the stairs are higher and narrower than the others. In the western avenue the step street instead passes through the building, creating a massive arch. It is also flanked by two other streets running along the outer borders of the buildings just mentioned. This configuration already frames the monumentality of the government palace, which is only incremented by the next set of stairs, which is inserted within a square parted in four sections of what seems to be a French formal garden, flanked on each side by tall cypress-like trees. After the gardens, a first square develops at a slightly higher altitude, which also presents gardens and trees. Coming closer to the main square, a last monumental perron, far larger in height and width, surmounts the remaining rise. The main square is defined by its central building, an L-shaped construction with a detached bell tower, with the longest arm stretching from north to south and the shortest attached at the northern end of the first and stretching towards east. This building (Fig. 19) is characterized by a porch along the ground floor in the northern wing, which is slightly shorter than the main wing, whose colossal entrance in the middle is flanked by a loggia on the last floor and is decorated by a series of statues – or maybe guards – exactly underneath each bay on the ground floor. Both wings

¹⁸⁹ See Rifkind 2011, p. 504.

¹⁹⁰ See Canali 2011, p. 330.

¹⁹¹ See ACS/MAI 106.

are topped by geometric moulding-balustrade. The rest of the buildings facing the square are mostly rearrangements of the L-shape structure, with several presenting a variation of the same high loggia (Fig. 20). The main building divides the space into two separate squares, the eastern facing the city and left unadorned for adunate and military rites, and the western instead planned as a garden, which introduces the residential part of the town which develops on the hill – which we will come to later. The eastern square is connected to the lower square through two stairs at the centre and a soft hairpin turn road on its northern end. Between the two central squares, a podium hovers above the lower square (Fig. 19). We can see a military official standing at the end of the podium, overseeing the military parade that is taking place. This structure re-elaborates the same matrix that characterized the Casa del Fascio and is the second place in Gondar where we can imagine fascist leaders holding speeches to crowds.

The image of the enthusiastic crowd listening and cheering on as Mussolini holds his speeches is probably one of the most memorable of the fascist regime and has been reproduced thousands of times. Mussolini's speeches sometimes were accommodated through the installation of ephemeral podiums, for instance the one installed in Genova in 1938 for his speech days after having welcomed Hitler in Rome (Fig. 22).¹⁹² In the discourse around these mass events, there has been a lot of debate, especially around the idea of mass consensus in fascism, which was brought to the fore in the dominating historiographical discourse by the Mussolini biographer and historian Renzo De Felice. From 1965 to 1997 De Felice produced the biography of the dictator and became the leading historian of fascism in Italy.¹⁹³ Through his presence in the media in the 1970s,¹⁹⁴ and especially after the publication of *Mussolini il duce* in 1974,¹⁹⁵ beyond his scrupulous historiographical work in the archives that had opened after the end of the Second World War, he was at the centre of public controversies due to his understanding of the period from 1929 to 1936 as years of mass consensus for Mussolini. This was something that had been denied or ignored by the general reception of the fascist phenomenon, as I have pointed out in the conceptualization of Bobbio and Venturi, which relied on a perspective on the Italian masses as being for the most part coerced into the assimilation of fascist principles, without however fully believing in its causes.

Looking back at the reception of fascism and even its contextualization in Italian historiography, many scholars point out the weight of the memory politics that emerged after the end of the Second World War, which, especially in leftist circles, was based on the figure of the partisan and antifascist resistance. The partisan was seen as the true liberator of Italy from fascism and their figure was projected onto the general Italian citizen. De Felice's statement, therefore, shocked the general public

¹⁹² For an analysis of ephemeral architecture in service of the regime see Tucci 2020.

¹⁹³ The last volume of his Mussolini biography was published posthumously.

¹⁹⁴ Most influential is De Felice 1975, but also television appearances De Felice/Mack Smith 1976 and Settimo Giorno 1975.

¹⁹⁵ See De Felice 1974.

and some historiographers because it went against both ideas of fascism as being a purely violent regime of terror, or a regime of the ruling financial bourgeoisie. It is also in the 1970s, however, when Palmiro Togliatti's *Lessons on fascism*, which he had held at the Leninist School in Moscow in 1935, were found by Ernesto Ragionieri and published for the first time.¹⁹⁶ Togliatti points out that, especially in reaction to the economic crisis of 1929, fascism had managed to acquire mass consensus from the proletarian class, while at the same time maintaining the support of the bourgeoisie and that this was achieved through the capillary intervention of the party in each institution, inside and beyond the state. De Felice treads the same line, especially when introducing the differentiation between fascism as a movement and fascism as a government.¹⁹⁷ While the movement was characterized by militarism, reactionary violence originating from the dissatisfaction of the emerging middle class towards liberal parliamentarism, the government of fascism was conservative and traditionalistic in its appeasing of the traditional ruling class, given that it needed their support in order to stay in power. This constant compromise, the fact that there are many reports and sources that show the ever-present frictions both within the party and outside of it, also led to the scholarship debating the concept of totalitarianism as a whole and whether the term is suitable for Mussolini's regime.

The consideration of fascism in Italy as a primitive or incomplete realization of totalitarianism per se – of which Nazism is the reference point – was introduced through Hannah Arendt's *The Origins of Totalitarianism*, published in the early 1950s.¹⁹⁸ In her analysis she posits that fascism resembled totalitarianism only from 1938, given that there was not a complete integration of politics into every aspect of life, public and private. Her analysis of totalitarianism was ground-breaking and led to the establishment of the study of totalitarianism, which for a long time took precedence over studies on fascism specifically. Emilio Gentile, who defines totalitarianism as process rather than state of affairs, is quite brutal in his judgement of Arendt's statement, which he argues is untrue.¹⁹⁹ Going back to the origin of the term, totalitarian language was used by antifascists to describe fascism dating back even before the march on Rome and it is in 1925 that fascism takes up the label of totalitarian and spins it positively to define their political approach.²⁰⁰ The compromise between revolution and conservatism can also be seen in the relationship between rationality and irrationality that can cause a lot of misunderstandings. Emilio Gentile unravels this knot by separating the myths, rituals and ideologies of a secular religion that was fascism and the unescapable rationality that characterized the institutions through which the regime needed to operate.²⁰¹

¹⁹⁶ See Togliatti 2019.

¹⁹⁷ See De Felice 1975, p. 27-46.

¹⁹⁸ See Arendt 1975, p. 207.

¹⁹⁹ See Gentile 2010, p. 102.

²⁰⁰ See Gentile 2010, pp. 103-104. Gentile blames the erroneous statement by Arendt because of a lack of sources that were available to the author at the time of writing, which were mostly propaganda journals with few speeches by Mussolini. Amongst the early diagnoses of fascism as a totalitarian regime, important is Basso 1925.

²⁰¹ Gentile 2010, p. 98.

Shortly after the march on Rome in 1922, ministries and significant organs of the public administration were slashed without a second thought, signalling the new government as being capable of reforming the state apparatus that had led to the crisis that spurred its own emergence.²⁰² Alberto Aquarone points out how the reshuffling of the bureaucracy, because it was not done with a clear plan, left several open ends and was criticized already in 1926.²⁰³ Mussolini acted just as quickly in establishing two new institutions, which would characterize and dictate his government until the end: the Gran Consiglio del Fascismo and the Milizia Volontaria per la Sicurezza Nazionale [Voluntary Militia for National Security]. Already in December 1922 there are the first meetings of the party heads in formalizing the militia, of making it directly dependent on the Presidente del Consiglio. In January *Popolo d'Italia* publishes the principles and roles of the Gran Consiglio del Fascismo.²⁰⁴ It was conceived as the space where differences within the party could be discussed as well as the establishing of the political agenda of the party and consequently of the government. On 24 December 1925 Mussolini shifts his formal position from president of the minister cabinet – from a *primus inter pares* – into the role as head of government and prime minister which gave him full executive authority as granted by the king rather than by the parliament. Further changes in the law-making process also made it mandatory for each new law proposal to be first approved by Mussolini, thus completely cutting out the legislative role of the parliament. These new measures were all going against the Albertine Statute, which was a carryover of the former Monarchy of Piemonte and Sardegna and did not represent an obstacle – apart from a symbolic point of view – because it could be modified with the passing of a normal law. Twisting Camillo Cavour's words about the improbability of the law charter, Mussolini managed to completely revision its very principles.²⁰⁵ He summarised these changes as “Tutto nello Stato, niente al di fuori dello Stato, nulla contro lo Stato.”²⁰⁶ Antifascists, ever since 1923, were describing the future of Italy under a fascist government as one of “total dictatorship” and of “Party-State”;²⁰⁷ through a legal revolution Mussolini was able to carry out his mission of integrating fascism and its ideals in every aspect of Italian legislation through the work of figures like Alfredo Rocco, who managed to preserve the façade of constitutional monarchy while irrevocably destroying the parliamentary institutions. The Gran Consiglio was made part of the constitution in 1928, a move that put Mussolini not only as the head of a government but of a regime.²⁰⁸

In dealing with the *squadrisimo*, Mussolini had to at once try to maintain its role as military support of the party, but also implement measures that would make the militia manageable and

²⁰² This was allowed through the law L. 1601/1922. The Ministero del Lavoro e Previdenza Sociale [Ministry of Labour and Welfare] is suppressed, and its role is transferred to several other Ministries, eventually ending up under the Ministry of National Economy [Ministero dell'Economia Nazionale] through the R.D. 1438/1923.

²⁰³ See Aquarone 1995, p. 9.

²⁰⁴ See Mussolini 1956a, p. 98-100. Originally published in *Il Popolo d'Italia*, No. 12, 14 January 1923, p. 10.

²⁰⁵ On the role constructed by fascism in appropriating the figure of Cavour, see Zunino 1985, pp. 92-94.

²⁰⁶ [Everything in the State, nothing outside of the State, nothing against the State] Mussolini 1956b, p. 425.

²⁰⁷ Gentile 2010, p. 34.

²⁰⁸ See Aquarone 1995, p. 17.

acceptable for the conservatives, whose support he still heavily relied on.²⁰⁹ Its complete absorption in the state only occurred after the murder of Giacomo Matteotti in 1924,²¹⁰ and meant that the militia had to swear allegiance to the king, rather than to Mussolini or the party.²¹¹ Aquarone defines the militia as not being particularly effective, given its ambiguous nature between state and party, and acknowledges that the political opposition – which abandoned most hopes of an armed antifascist revolt after its integration in the state – overestimated their power and capacities.²¹² It was however the militants that accused Mussolini of being too soft on his opposition in a tumultuous meeting on New Year's Eve 1924, which resulted in the sequestering of the oppositional newspapers three days later and the official separation of “fascism from the old liberal state.”²¹³ In this time there is a considerable fraction of militant members of the PNF that await a “second wave”²¹⁴ of fascist revolution that would bring about a “pure”²¹⁵ fascism.

The ease with which Mussolini managed to completely overhaul the liberal parliamentary system sparked a strand of fascist interpretation which Gentile defines as “radical democrats.”²¹⁶ They put the blame on the too short experience of democracy in Germany and Italy, who did not have enough time since their unification to internalize the “modern liberal consciousness.”²¹⁷ Around this interpretation we find the emergence of negativity as being a central feature of fascism. According to Gentile, it is the irrationality as championed in fascism that leads to this interpretation; it is an irrationality which cannot be made to fit within the prevailing metahistorical discourse, which sees a general tendency towards rationality and liberty.²¹⁸ Fascism through its irrationality thus becomes a *faux pas* within the course of history and subsequently becomes represented as a “historical negativity.”²¹⁹

Since fascism found resonance in other countries, finding a general definition of fascism that can be applied to its transnational manifestations has occupied historians and theoreticians for decades, given that also within the Italian parameters, there was no agreement as to its origin or its most important features. The history of fascism as a term applied outside of the context of the *ventennio fascista* is not without contradiction and controversy and it has been interpreted by Umberto Eco as being connected

²⁰⁹ Ibid.

²¹⁰ As a reaction to the murder of Matteotti in June 1924, 123 members of parliament (*l'opposizione dell'Aventino*) refused to go back into parliament until the murder and its motives would be resolved and put to justice. On 25 November 1926 their seats were revoked.

²¹¹ See Aquarone 1995, p. 21. See R.D.L. 1292/1924. The leaders of the *Milizia* were to be recruited from high-ranking army veterans, only the *capimanipolo* [the lowest leaders in the hierarchy] could be civilians.

²¹² See Aquarone 1995, p. 23.

²¹³ Aquarone 1995, p. 24.

²¹⁴ Zunino 1985, p. 122.

²¹⁵ Farinacci 1927, pp. 335-338, cited in De Felice 1968, p. 170. De Felice cites Farinacci and his criticism in 1925 of the development of fascism into a party where also non-believers were joining out of convenience.

²¹⁶ Gentile 2019, p. 62. See Viereck 2005, McGovern 1973, Mack Smith 1997.

²¹⁷ Gentile 2010, p. 62.

²¹⁸ This stance is also represented by Francesco Saverio Nitti, he sees fascism as reactionism without ideals, and sees freedom as always eventually prevailing in history. See Nitti 1925, pp. 46-47.

²¹⁹ Gentile 2010, p. 63.

to the difference between Nazism and fascism. He opposes the two by affirming that the former had a “philosophy” while the latter lacked a strong theoretical basis and thus was more likely to spread, take different forms and adapt in different contexts. The result of his analysis are fourteen points that come to define the “Ur-fascism” or “fuzzy totalitarianism”: cult of tradition, rejection of modernism, action for action, disagreement as treason, appeal to frustrated middle-classes, obsession with conspiracy, enemies as simultaneously too strong and too weak, life as permanent warfare, disdain for the weak, heroism (cult of death), machismo, qualitative populism, neo-language.²²⁰ De Felice also was adamant on the difference between Nazism and fascism.²²¹ A narrative developed of opposing fascism with Nazism, along the cliché of ‘italiani brava gente’ [the good-natured Italian], portraying the acts of Italians, especially in the colonies, as ultimately kind. Critics of the generalization of fascism see a potential of taking away responsibility from the Italian fascists and even pursuing a revisionist account of history.²²²

The hesitancy to consider the cultural signifiers that came out of fascism as an ideology is on one hand based on the emphasis with which fascism itself was always against ideology per se and finding its own lack of ideology as the most successful characteristic. On the other hand, this hesitancy can be seen as coming from the understanding that fascist ideology often did not work, or that it was often faulty, executed without success, or even in itself contradictory. Furthermore, the relationship between the masses and ideology in fascism can be decisive in understanding not only fascism as a phenomenon but generally human agency. What do we say about the subject if we say that they believed what fascism told them, which was often based on false facts and relied on outrageous manipulation? One could think that each person’s adherence to the party line, especially as the totalitarian degree of the regime increased, was one of mere survival. On the other hand, if we see the people following the party line as genuinely believing what they heard, this forces us to be confronted with fascism as an efficient ideology. Could the fact that so many historians do not take the ideology of fascism seriously actually show its efficacy? Zunino underlines how it is not so much the truth-value of an ideology that is important, but rather its “integration, homogeneity, its scope and intensity.”²²³ From this perspective, the ideology of fascism is incredibly effective, even today. Zunino analyses the negation of fascism-as-ideology in historiography as being tied to two consequences that this consideration could lead to. He sees ideology as inherently implying consensus, meaning that considering fascism an ideology would implicate the consideration of consensus during fascism, potentially fracturing the impenetrable images that had formed around fascism and antifascism.²²⁴ Furthermore, he sees ideology as implying

²²⁰ See Eco, 2017.

²²¹ See De Felice 1975, p. 24.

²²² Accusation that was often waged against De Felice, see Santomassimo 1998.

²²³ Zunino 1985, p. 39. The definition of ideology per se goes outside the scope of this study, what I want to underline is how much semantics within historiography can lead to the exclusion of relevant material, as well as reflecting in themselves larger trends within the culture from which they stem.

²²⁴ See Zunino 1985, p. 14.

negotiation, which represents the possibility of one of the poles to change its position, of aligning oneself with the other interlocutor. Zunino sees this as a prospect that the Italian historiography of his time was not being able to tackle, as it was too afraid of leading to slippages.²²⁵ Diane Ghirardo and Kurt Forster hint at the drawbacks of the monolithic, antifascist scholarship, which translated in an unwillingness to confront oneself with objects of the regime that could result ambiguous, most importantly, for this analysis, the experiences of the new towns and generally the urban planning legacy of fascism.²²⁶

Roger Griffin brings in the 1990s a new definition of fascism, “a political ideology whose mythic core in its various permutations is a palingenetic form of populist ultra-nationalism”²²⁷ He differentiates fascism from totalitarianism because the former is primarily ideological in nature and the latter – similarly to terrorism – is understood as “political tactic and praxis.”²²⁸ Griffin does not define fascism as reactionary, but rather as utopistic: “It created an influential, future-oriented temporality, even if he conjured up a mythicized past in order to legitimize it.”²²⁹ Hans Woller and Thomas Schlemmer in their overview of the history of the scholarship around the term fascism underline how the impulse to find a general definition has survived many challenges and persists even in the newest scholarship. Without renouncing the specificity of each fascist experience internationally, new studies have shown that what the authors consider the three most important characteristics of national socialism in Germany are to be found in all kinds of fascism. These are its racism and antisemitism, its willingness to resort to violence, and its totalitarian character. New research in the colonial history of fascism, as well as the work done by Emilio Gentile²³⁰ show how these three elements are not only present in Italian fascism, but they are fundamental in its definition.²³¹

iv. Piazza del tribunale and piazza della podesteria: capillary centralisation

Attached to the western Viali di Rappresentanza, the complex of the squares of the podesteria [mayor’s office] and of the tribunale [courthouse] represent the most interesting solution to public space within this Gondar plan. The squares can be reached from the square for the military demonstrations just under the governatore palace through a street travelling south and then by walking down the step street going west, which makes up for the height difference between the government complex and the podesteria square. Tree-lined and separated in three sections vertically by flowerbeds, and in two sections horizontally through the arcades of the viali di rappresentanza, it connects the central and local government morphologically. Other than the building of the podesteria, the square also hosts a hotel,

²²⁵ Generally, studies that focus on the cultural aspect of fascist regimes are criticised as contributing to a positive portrayal of fascism. See Santomassimo 1998.

²²⁶ See Ghirardo/Forster 1985, p. 629.

²²⁷ Griffin 1993, p. 26.

²²⁸ Griffin 2014, p. 18.

²²⁹ Griffin 2014, p. 25.

²³⁰ See Gentile 2002, La Rovere 2003, Gatti 2010.

²³¹ Schlemmer/Woller 2014a, p. 13.

whose features we can only partially observe in the perspective drawing of the square (Fig. 23). One section of the hotel is three-floors high, with the first and second presenting balconies, while the ground floor has horizontal three-paned windows. Going west, the hotel appears smaller and is completely integrated in the arcade that runs along the northern and eastern borders of the public square. These arcades are in their eastern section free-standing and clearly designed as a solution to the high temperatures that could be reached in the Ethiopian plateau. The arcade runs along the square until it meets the building complex of the podesteria. Characterised by a tower with a podium for public speeches and placed on top of a cross vault, the morphology of the building complex is not constant. In some drawings the tower is integrated in the building (Fig. 24), in others free-standing. The complex also is sometimes represented as being C-shaped (Fig. 24) and in others S-shaped (Fig. 25). In Figure 23 the building is made up of at least two cuboid structures connected through a free-standing arcade. In front of this we see an empty plinth – probably planned for the eventual erection of a statue. The figures inhabiting the perspective drawing are all men dressed in the Italian military uniform – which differed from the uniform of the askaris – but for one woman carrying what looks like a water container on her back.

Centralization in the provinces and municipalities was achieved during the 1920s, formalizing the trend of left-wing and communist city halls being raided and suppressed with violence by *squadrismo*. With the law of 3 April 1926, the *prefetti* [prefects] were made to be the highest authority in the provincial level.²³² The administrative role of the prefects became political in January 1927.²³³ Local administrations like municipalities and provinces were also abolished gradually in 1926 and 1927, while Rome had already been turned into a Governorate in 1925.²³⁴ The *podestà* were the new figures that would manage local government and they were centrally appointed by the highest ranks of government. The figure of the *podestà* substituted the role of the mayor and of the municipal council, which was substituted by the *consulta municipale* if the *prefetto* thought it suitable.²³⁵ This *consulta* was made of six members appointed by the *prefetti* for small towns and directly by the Ministero degli Interni for big cities.²³⁶ Two members were directly appointed by the *prefetto*, the others through suggestions of local economic entities, unions and associations.²³⁷ Aquarone sees the centralisation enacted through the *podestà* as a clear measure to limit internal infights within the party, rather than a measure against the opposition, which was completely decimated by this time in the mid-1920s.²³⁸ The capillary projection of the central power could, through these changes, reach each crevice of the country.

²³² See L. 660/1926.

²³³ See R.D.L. 1/1927.

²³⁴ See R.D.L. 1939/1925.

²³⁵ See L. 237/1926, this initially applied only to municipalities with less than five thousands inhabitants.

²³⁶ [Ministry of the Interior] See R.D. 2059/1927 for the norms dictating membership of the *consulta* for municipalities bigger than twenty thousand inhabitants.

²³⁷ See Aquarone 1995, p. 85.

²³⁸ See Aquarone 1995, p. 88.

For these new roles, men were selected by the highest-ranked members of the government and therefore did not have to answer to any form of local electorate; they could function as direct reflection of the central power and thus create a stronger uniformity. This of course was then in practice not often the case, because even if these political figures were willing to completely submit to the wills of Mussolini, he himself did not provide clear messages and intentions to follow, which on one hand led to local problems as well as the overall mistrust that Mussolini felt for all his collaborators.

The internal tensions developed along the two poles of integration within a state system with its corresponding bureaucracy, and the militant, anti-institutional, revolutionary origin of fascism as a movement, which was only worsened by their very few philosophical tenets. While concrete reforms and goals were enacted, there was a haziness around wanting to stick to a theoretical, long-term list of ideals for the regime and its followers. Mariani sees Mussolini as mostly relying on a Mazzinian sentiment of “praxis and thought”.²³⁹ The formulation was used in the definition of fascism published in 1932 in the Italian Encyclopaedia, which was co-written by Mussolini and Giovanni Gentile. Within the first sentence Mussolini explains his doctrine as one that directly translates into action.²⁴⁰ The relationship is so direct that, one could argue, its actions are enough to return to the idea that originated them. This is of course challenging when so much of what the regime did goes ideologically in oppositional directions. In August 1924 Mussolini clearly states that his focus is the present rather than the future, and that the party will concentrate on how to improve the current situation practically and actionably, rather than losing itself in useless philosophical musings.²⁴¹ Within Mariani’s analysis, one that clearly stems from the idea of fascism as empty or inherently negative, the rise to power of fascism is one defined as an “adventure.”²⁴² The power behind the first fascism was not one based on ideals but rather on sheer violence and anger, and what little ideas there were, they were entirely reactionary and simply a negation of whatever had come before them in the liberal era and most especially socialism.²⁴³ On the other hand, Zunino concludes that the lack of a clear ideas was due to an abundance of ideal aspirations: “Fascism was the meeting and crashing point of irrationalism and elitist positivism, idealism and spiritualism.”²⁴⁴ Through the focus on action and praxis, a compatibility, rather than a unification of the contraposing ideals could be achieved, he argues.²⁴⁵ The purportedly ideological

²³⁹ Mariani 1976, p. 52.

²⁴⁰ Giovanni Gentile is presumed to have ghostwritten most of the definition in 1929 already, and definitely wrote the praxis and thought section. See Mussolini 1932.

²⁴¹ “We do not promise something definite for the future, but we work for the present with all our strength, so I believe that the PNF will never be bored, vexed and impoverished by the endless tendentious discussions that once took place in the little Italy of yesterday, the little plaything of the no less petty Italian bourgeoisie” Mussolini 1956b, p. 46.

²⁴² Mariani 1976, p. 55.

²⁴³ See Mariani 1976, p. 55.

²⁴⁴ Zunino 1985, p. 154.

²⁴⁵ See Zunino 1985, pp. 154-155.

openness of fascism made it a safe harbour for politicians of other colours, who saw the alliance with Mussolini as advantageous for the championing of their ideas.

The second square of the courthouse is connected to the first through a perron, while a street directly connects it to the western *Viali di Rappresentanza*. The courthouse (Fig. 26) is designed as a main building with two protruding side wings. The entrance is covered by a simple portico, while the visible side wing has two rows of three windows on the interior side. In another drawing (Fig. 25) the structure of the building is slightly different and unites both the civil and military court. The complex is made of several rectangular buildings placed longitudinally and latitudinally, with a main corpus developing in a rough L-shape. As in many of the buildings in Gondar, archways and porticos are planned, with a small square created between two of the rectangular buildings – probably planned as parking space. Opposite the courthouse the complex of the *Poste e Telegrafi* [post office] rises, made up of three parallelly placed rectangular buildings, with more archways delineating a sort of internal courtyard, which is still largely in communication with the rest of the complex. In the drawing we see some askaris marching and a couple of civilians. Despite the change in level between the square of the *podesteria* and the square of the *tribunale*, the whole complex results connected through the archways and there is an overall perception of “lightness”²⁴⁶ – as Renzi describes it. Comparing it with other designs of public space done during fascism will show the ways in which it can be considered innovative. Before, however, a synthesis of the debate around fascist architecture and urban planning needs to be provided.

²⁴⁶ Renzi 2016, p. 27.

II. The debate for fascist architecture

There are two moments in Italian art that precede the start of the fascist regime when the public square takes central meaning: “La città che sale” by Umberto Boccioni (1910) and “Goie ed enigma di un’ora strana” by Giorgio de Chirico (1913). Whereas the urban imaginary of the Futurists is one full of people, working, experiencing the pleasures of technology and industrialization, the metaphysical painters and especially De Chirico characterize the urban space as empty of people. The mass of undistinguished people in Boccioni, in De Chirico become either puppets or, in the case of “Goie ed enigma”, two figures almost disappearing in the horizon, with the only human simulacrum being a overproportioned reclined statue. De Seta reads metaphysics as rejecting nature and ultimately seeing man as being defined through its artificial environment, but without the “male passion and authentic participation” of the futurists.²⁴⁷ While the urban imaginary of the futurists, especially in the fantasies of Sant’Elia (Fig. 27) were quickly abandoned, Metaphysics provides an alternative imaginary which relies on the familiarity of simple geometry. It is imbued with the history of Renaissance architecture, which in a sense takes up the role of nature – given that it is completely absent – and its very basic forms resemble a return to tradition as a way of reflecting on the human condition at the start of the 20th century. The overcrowding of futurism, but also the heavy ornaments of liberty and art deco need to be forgotten in favour of “the porch, the angle of a street, the [geometrical] masses, height, arches, volumes.”²⁴⁸ De Chirico sees in the relationship to classic geometrical architecture what he calls the “metaphysical aesthetics”²⁴⁹: there is a connection between architecture and poetics, one the manifestation of the other. A metaphysical architecture, connected to human psychology and spirit, must exist in harmony with them.²⁵⁰ De Chirico here makes a similar point as Benjamin. De Chirico observes that the archways and building forms of ancient Greece were connected to the philosophical dialogues that developed under them, thus pointing out that each built form in a culture reflects its spirit. Though he had spent several years depicting the Italian square – especially in Ferrara – it seemed to him still unclear the psychology that could derive from its built forms.²⁵¹ Here Benjamin further confirms this correlation of spirit and architecture. The tactile perception of architecture – which often influences also the secondary, optical perception – is experienced through the habits that each architecture imposes and that are executed within an architecture.²⁵² Through the repetitive nature of habit, perception of architecture both optically and tactilely is executed in a state of distraction.²⁵³ In this state of distraction, architecture shapes us as subjects without our noticing. Thus, similarly to the architecture of the Greek poleis praised by De Chirico, which allowed for philosophical dialogue, so

²⁴⁷ De Seta 1983, pp. 116-117.

²⁴⁸ De Chirico 1919, p. 17.

²⁴⁹ De Chirico 1919, p. 17.

²⁵⁰ See Dottori 2018.

²⁵¹ See De Chirico 1919, p. 17.

²⁵² See Benjamin 2010, p. 33.

²⁵³ See Lahiji 2021, pp. 74-75.

the architecture of the metropolis forces the subject into alienation through the overstimulation of the human apparatus. While De Chirico's answer to this consideration is the creation of a "hyper-reality,"²⁵⁴ the climate of alienation emerging from the city was approached by architects through the establishment of the debate around the new style for Italy.²⁵⁵

The first two decades of the 20th century were architecturally defined by eclecticism. Without a unified national trend, architectural projects fell under many categories between neoclassicism and liberty. As the 1920s wore on, architects grew always more dissatisfied with the academism that had influenced the architectural landscape. The activist impetus developed by the futurists in the 1910s had never meaningfully impacted architecture and as Marinetti aligned himself with Mussolini in 1921, futurism signs its own demise.²⁵⁶ Metaphysical painters founded the magazine for art criticism *Valori Plastici*, published from 1918 to 1921. Though its small run, it was an important source for the developing discourse around avantgarde in Italy and in Europe. *Valori Plastici* did not focus on architecture but in 1919 it covered Neoplasticism and De Stijl, showcasing the interdisciplinary search for a new formal language in the Dutch context, pointing out their commonality in looking for a "super-historical rational order."²⁵⁷

De Seta blames the lack of involvement of architects in *Valori Plastici* on the backwardness of Italian architecture, which could not keep up with the fast development of the painting avantgarde and instead only later absorbed the superficial and aesthetic qualities of metaphysics. So, whereas the metaphysical research was self-described as classicist, Alberto Savinio explains how their classicism was aimed at looking for "the form most suitable for the realization of an artistic thought or will"²⁵⁸ that did not have to serve any tradition or historicity. With Movimento Novecento, who would pick up their formal language, reflection on form was instead completely defined by a re-evaluation of 19th century classicism. The movement emerged in Milan and is best represented by Ca' Brutta, an apartment complex built by Giovanni Muzio, Pier Fausto Borelli and Vittorino Colonnese from 1919-1921 (Fig. 28). A private street separates the building in half, the two sections connected by pseudo-arches of triumph. Horizontally it is made up of three sections in different materials, including travertine, black, and pink marble cladding, and grey plaster. Novecento, which De Seta judges as being of far lower quality in their production in comparison with their metaphysical muses, wants to differentiate itself from the previous century while still using it as a constant point of reference. The architecture of the Ottocento is repurposed by stripping some of its layers to adapt it to the changing historical climate.²⁵⁹

²⁵⁴ Dottori 2018.

²⁵⁵ Emily Braun sees in the figure of Mario Sironi the fusion of the futuristic and metaphysical perception of the city through his urban landscapes. Mario Sironi was considered by the regime the most important Italian contemporary painter and his oeuvre has received similar praise by the consequent scholarship. See Braun 1998.

²⁵⁶ See De Seta 1983, p. 28.

²⁵⁷ De Seta 1983, p. 119.

²⁵⁸ Savinio 1919, p. 21.

²⁵⁹ See Pfammatter 1990, p. 36.

Gaetano Minucci introduced Le Corbusier to Italy in 1926 with an article in the magazine *Architettura e arti decorative*.²⁶⁰ He reads him as a representative of classicism, his relationship with tradition being one of distance from the experience of the 19th century and instead looking back to Greek and Roman and the greatest architecture of European history to synthesize it in forms that are “mathematic, strong, rational, fiercely logical.”²⁶¹ Taking on this understanding of what Le Corbusier wants to achieve, Lionello Venturi underlines how the search of a formal language from the whole history of architecture results in neglecting Le Corbusier’s own historical context. His social goal can thus to be erased in favour of a form of “universalism founded on the prestige of occidental intellectualism.”²⁶²

The Gruppo 7 was founded in 1926. Rejecting academism, it integrated from its very inception being at the service of the regime while supporting modernist ideals spread by Le Corbusier which were making waves throughout Europe.²⁶³ Through a distancing from tradition and the masses, a new language of the built space was conceived to bring Italy to its former glory. They advocate for a change in architecture and the wider culture, with their reference points for the *spirito nuovo*²⁶⁴ being Cocteau, Picasso, Stravinsky, and Le Corbusier. Their relationship with tradition is not one of a rupture but rather a transformation in the consideration of tradition when creating works today; distancing themselves from what they consider the “romantic”²⁶⁵ endeavour of the Futurists to destroy the past, but also the ahistorical approach of Walter Gropius. There is a general rejection of the 19th century architectural discourse, especially a rejection of eclecticism, neoclassicism, and liberty style. Their break with tradition was a reconfiguration of history, with the Renaissance and antiquity as north stars.²⁶⁶ Despite their international inspirations their aspirations are exclusively nationalistic. Rather than looking for a style, they argue that their forms will only follow necessity, logic and rationality, a process that will then lead to a stylistic expression. As their first texts were published in 1926, it had become clear that neither the production of the *scuola romana* – spearheaded by Marcello Piacentini and considered especially antiquarian²⁶⁷ – and Novecento with its minimal classicism would be suitable for a real new architecture in Italy.²⁶⁸ Their willingness to serve the fascist regime is also expressed in their

²⁶⁰ See Minucci 1926.

²⁶¹ Minucci 1926, p. 490.

²⁶² Venturi 1964, pp. 323-324.

²⁶³ It was formed of Luigi Figini, Guido Frette, Sebastiano Larco, Adalberto Libera, Gino Pollini, Carlo Enrico Rava and Giuseppe Terragni.

²⁶⁴ Their interpretation of Le Corbusier’s “*esprit nouveau*”.

²⁶⁵ Gruppo 7 1926, pp. 850-851. Ruth Ben-Ghiat touches on the change in perception of futurism as romantic given their naïve acceptance of technological advancement. Amongst intellectuals there was a growing resentment for technology that threatened individuality and moved increasingly towards standardisation. See Ben-Ghiat 1996, p. 297.

²⁶⁶ See Pfammatter 1990, p. 13.

²⁶⁷ See De Seta 1983, p. 142.

²⁶⁸ See Pfammatter 1990, p. 39.

commonalities, one of which was the end of individualism through the establishment of universal building types and construction elements.²⁶⁹

Though the stylistic debate in the 20s and 30s was diversified, the willingness to appease the government united virtually all architects.²⁷⁰ In 1961 Ernesto N. Rogers (1909-1969) – member of BBPR²⁷¹ – explains the overall adherence to the regime by modernist architects through an erroneous syllogism they followed: “fascism is a revolution, modernist architecture is revolutionary, therefore it must be the architecture of fascism.”²⁷² For Rogers, the mistake lied in the conception of fascism as a revolution. In De Seta’s analysis of their writings, he criticizes how Gruppo 7 are never brave enough to really formulate strong principles to follow, their insecurity in their own beliefs transpiring from their words.²⁷³ Their most interesting point is the view that architecture should be based on a set of limited types.²⁷⁴ The reference to Rome comes as expectedly as the sound of thunder after lightning: Rome was built with its forms really only ever being based on “four or five types: the temple, the basilica, the circus, the rotunda, the dome, the thermal baths.”²⁷⁵ The contradictions inherent in their revolutionary impulse and boundness in their own time, of looking to the future but with the shadow of tradition looming over them, is characterized by De Seta as being the reason for the failure of modernist Italian architecture, given that in comparison with European modernism – cut short, but by material and historical circumstances – their theoretical footing was never solid, always shifting, without “Weltanschauung”.²⁷⁶ The syllogism brought forward by Rogers can be thus revised as follows: fascism is without program, Italian modernist architecture is non-programmatic, therefore it must be the architecture of fascism. The problem of the kind of revolution that wanted to be imparted by Gruppo 7 is explained by Bruno Zevi in similar damning terms: they wanted to carry out a revolution while at the same time avoiding upsetting anyone.²⁷⁷ Ulrich Pfammatter explains that both Gruppo 7 and Mussolini stood on similar grounds: the disgust for the immediate past (if Risorgimento was an incomplete revolution in the rewriting of history championed by fascist ideology, so the confrontation with antiquity that led to neoclassicism was similarly misguided), both looked at a very specific – and constructed – past as a north star to follow, a greatness to come back to, as well as the feeling of finding oneself at the future’s doors, at the moment that preceded the introduction of something entirely new

²⁶⁹ See Pfammatter 1990, p. 40.

²⁷⁰ As an exception Cesare De Seta mentions Novecento member Giuseppe de Finetti (1892-1952), who was antifascist and largely estranged from most public commissions. He is remembered for Casa della Meridiana (1925) in Milan. See De Seta 1983, p. 124.

²⁷¹ Founded in 1932, it also included the architects Gian Luigi Banfi, Ludovico Barbiano di Belgiojoso and Enrico Peressutti. Their service to the regime – which included several master plans – abruptly ended with the antisemitic laws of 1938, which obliged Rogers to flee the country and made their studio a centre for Milanese resistance.

²⁷² Rogers 1962, p. 1.

²⁷³ See De Seta 1983, p. 223.

²⁷⁴ See Gruppo 7 1980, *Sprito di necessità e costruzioni in serie*.

²⁷⁵ Gruppo7 1926, pp. 852-853.

²⁷⁶ De Seta 1983, p. 223.

²⁷⁷ See Zevi 1955, p. 241.

and that was given direction through principles of totality and universality.²⁷⁸ Furthermore, in their critique of the most recent architectural production they underlined that even if it appealed the preferences of the bourgeoisie and the ruling class, they did not manage to really permeate the wider public.²⁷⁹ Gruppo 7 architecture would be able to instead instil the ideals of fascism to every citizen, contradicting their very sentiment of contempt toward the masses, who were seen as being unable to appreciate good architecture – which constitutes yet another parallel to fascism. Their absurdity and questionable theoretical footing become the clearest in March 1927, as they advocate for an education of architecture solely based on traditional classicism.²⁸⁰ The hope was through this foundation, the *spirito nuovo* would emerge.

The different groups that emerged at this time of unprecedented architectural innovation were, however, often short-lived, with internal tensions leading to unravelling alliances and common goals were forgotten in favour of singular success. A crucial episode was the Second Exhibition of Rationalist Architecture, held on 30 March 1931 in Rome. It was an exhibition aimed at putting rationalism at the very top of the stylistic (and ideological) hierarchy by undermining all other currents and competing representations. The exhibition was held by MIAR (Movimento Italiano per l'Architettura Razionale)²⁸¹, which had been formed in 1928 at the first rationalist exhibition. Put together by Adalberto Libera and Gaetano Minnucci, its goal was to be the Italian representation of the international modernist architecture movements. It included around fifty architects, among them the members of the Gruppo 7 from Milan, but also members from the Roman school and Genoa. The culmination of the indignancy towards other exponents was the *tavolo degli orrori* [table of horrors, Fig. 29, 30] designed by Pietro Maria Bardi.²⁸² The photocollage was the sum of different pseudo-baroque, classical and modern by several important architects,²⁸³ arranged next to articles and novel segments from 1860. The work was a sarcastic compendium of the old Italy and was aimed at showing how traditionalist architects were unsuited for the future of Italian architecture. As a result, the MIAR members were threatened by the Union of Fascist Architects of getting their membership revoked, which led to the dissolution of the group by Libera, who recounted his experience in 1959: he says his decision was “badly judged and done with great regret”²⁸⁴ although he knew it was what needed to be done for the continuation of the architectural debate in Italy, which would have become stagnant had he not complied to the request of the union. As a moderate substitute RAMI (Raggruppamento Architetti Moderni Italiani) was founded, with some former MIAR members joining, while others continued their stylistic

²⁷⁸ See Pfammatter 1990, p. 14.

²⁷⁹ See Pfammatter 1990, p. 40.

²⁸⁰ See Gruppo 7 1927, p. 248.

²⁸¹ [Italian Movement for Rationalist Architecture]

²⁸² The idea was first formulated in a letter to Libera from Giuseppe Pagano in 1930 but it would take a year for the project to be realized. See Polin 2001, pp. 59-60.

²⁸³ Such as Armando Brasini, Cesare Bezzani, Gustavo Giovannoni and Marcello Piacentini.

²⁸⁴ Libera 1959, p. 459.

pursuits independently. The short MIAR stint is of importance for two factors: their relationship with modernism, as well as their relationship with tradition. MIAR essentially hollowed out the social and democratic principles of international modernism in favour of bending its formal aspects to suit the fascist regime. At the same time, they kept the novelty of modernism and its suspicion of tradition. To some extent, their criticism of works of pseudo-baroque and pseudo-classicism was not so much a critique of tradition, but rather it advocated for a stepping away from tradition, of moving outside of its shadow, which was still looming large over academic discourse and architectural projects. The possibility of Mussolini preferring rationalism as the language of fascist architecture seemed to concretize in the summer of 1931, which sparked a lot of hope for rationalists, who were hoping to put an end to the stylistic pluralism that characterized the first decade of the fascist regime.²⁸⁵ Such a statement however was never quite expressed by Mussolini. Rationalists believed in a fascist architecture which was a representation of masculine ideals of strength and pride, a symbolisation of the fascist revolution and saw the old architects as being “impotent”²⁸⁶.

Despite the internal conflicts that surrounded the architecture discourse, the fascist regime was from the start dependent on these figures to address the problems that plagued Italy, namely the reconstruction and reassessment of historical old cities, city expansions and the establishment of new planned cities in the areas that underwent land renewal and in the colonies. As MIAR was dissolving, Pietro Badoglio consolidated Italy’s dominance in Libya, preparing the ground for mass relocation of Italian farmers. If before the stylistic question in architecture was mostly geared towards private bourgeois housing and structures, the project of state commissions that was crystallizing in these years significantly changed the stakes. Urban planning, which had become a discipline internationally since the 1910s increased in popularity Italy during this period, with faculties opening in Rome, Venice, Turin, Naples, and Florence. The focus on urban planning, rather than architecture, was ever-growing, as general plans for most cities were being drawn up through state competitions. Founded in 1930 and mostly influenced by Alberto Calza Bini in its goals, the Istituto Nazionale di Urbanistica [National Institute for Urban Planning, INU] promoted the development of the subject through campaigning for more courses dedicated to city planning and advocating for a general plan for cities throughout the peninsula. Accompanied by the magazine *Urbanistica*, urban planners in Italy are a united front when it comes to the necessity of their recently born discipline, and we see its fruition in the first congress of the INU in 1937, which came from a period of incredible flourishing. Important members of INU were Marcello Piacentini²⁸⁷ and Gustavo Giovannoni; they both had been active and successful architects

²⁸⁵ Sigfried Giedion writes to Le Corbusier in the summer of 1931 that Mussolini had finally expressed his official support of rationalism, anticipating a season of close collaboration with the recently founded CIAM. See Bodenschatz 2011, p. 33.

²⁸⁶ Cederna 2006, p. 18.

²⁸⁷ Piacentini in 1925 was still attached to academism and without a clear direction, mostly leaning towards eclecticism. Eventually the monumental aspect of his production came to dominate, especially in the last years of the regime.

before 1922 and only welcomed the change of guard with the rise of Mussolini, with Piacentini being responsible for most of the work done in Rome. He understood that architecture could become a fundamental tool to be used by the regime for its establishment and as the most important representative of the scuola romana and through the work in the magazine *Architettura e Arti Decorative* together with Giovannoni, his influence cannot be understated.²⁸⁸ The Roman school, an example of which is the Foro Mussolini by Enrico del Debbio²⁸⁹ (Fig. 31) added a monumental dimension to their interpretation of an Italian modernity while being quite explicit in their rejection of other architectural movements that were emerging at the time.²⁹⁰ Acting chiefly in Rome, their plans included the destruction of the old medieval town in Rome in order to expose the archaeological sites of the *fori imperiali* and build a ceremonious street connecting the Colosseum to the fascist headquarters in Piazza Venezia. As the *razionalisti* explained their consideration of classical architecture – the so-called *ricorso arcaico* – their focus was on attitude rather than style, it was the spirit of imperial Rome that needed to be revived.²⁹¹

While the plans that pertained to Rome were aimed at establishing the city as the centre of fascist power, the *città di fondazione* [planned towns] aimed at representing the regime as a creative force that resolved Italy's problem of unemployment and emigration. These towns, which were not initially planned as the project of land renewal in marshlands across Italy was established in the late 1920s, were the result of necessity. As we will see in chapter III, they were to function as administrative centres for the surrounding agricultural population. The first town in Agro Pontino was Littoria (today Latina); inaugurated in 1932 with extreme haste, the commission for its master plan was given to inexperienced Oriolo Frezzotti (1888-1965) who was seen as being a suitable candidate because of his lack of involvement in the stylistic debate. Together with Carlo Savoia – an engineer employed by the Opera Nazionali Combattenti (ONC, national veteran charity), the state aid agency responsible for the general land renewal²⁹² – he took the ideal city of the Renaissance and radial-concentric patterns as reference (Fig. 32). Even Piacentini saw Littoria as a step backwards for Italian architecture and urban planning.²⁹³ The competition for the next town, Sabaudia, was won by the rationalist architects Gino Cancellotti, Eugenio Montuori, Luigi Piccinato, and Alfredo Scalzelli (Fig. 33). The group's project soon became the embodiment of fascist urban design. Despite many seeing Sabaudia as the crowning achievement of Italian urban design, others saw it as a very poor result.²⁹⁴ At the same time, the new Florence railway station of Santa Maria Novella was also built following the rationalist design of the Gruppo Toscano,

²⁸⁸ See Pfammatter 1990, pp. 30-33.

²⁸⁹ Gherardo Bosio also submitted in 1929 a project for a steel monolith to work as *stèle* at the centre of the square designed by del Debbio. The *stèle* was crowned by a portrait of Mussolini which was a minimal rendition of a medieval army helmet, the structure was framed by four fountains forming a cross. At night, each fountain projected light onto the steel structure. See Renzi 2016, pp. 62-63.

²⁹⁰ See Pfammatter 1990, p. 32.

²⁹¹ See Pfammatter, p. 40.

²⁹² The ONC oversaw the wellbeing of war veterans and soldiers and had by this time taken over the land melioration project, see Chapter III.

²⁹³ See Bodenschatz 2011, p. 231.

²⁹⁴ For instance, the art critic Edoardo Persico. See Persico 1964, p. 131.

leading to even more debates around the suitability of the movement for the fascist regime (Fig. 34). The Gruppo Toscano, founded in 1931, was spearheaded by Giovanni Michelucci and six younger architects, including Gherardo Bosio. Bosio, however, was not included in the design for S. Maria Novella and left the group, which quickly disintegrated. The concurrence of the projects led to an animated debate on the matter in parliament on 25 May 1934 between traditionalists – especially Francesco Giunta and Roberto Farinacci – and modernists – defended by Calza Bini (President of INU and of the Union of Architects) and Efsio Oppo. The architects of Sabaudia and the Gruppo Toscano were then invited to meet Mussolini on 10 June 1934, who sided with the rationalists, saying “I am for modernist architecture [...] not everything needs to be monumental. In terms of Sabaudia, some said they’ve had enough, I tell you, I don’t. [...] We can’t redo or copy the past.”²⁹⁵ The meeting is reported in subsequent days, but the published accounts adopt a more neutral tone compared to the actual meeting transcript, which was to remain private. Consequently, Giuseppe Pagano writes enthusiastically: „Mussolini saved Italian architecture”²⁹⁶, and Le Corbusier visits Italy to see the success of modernism as it was increasingly integrated in the urban fabric.²⁹⁷ Piacentini writes: “Sabaudia, while remaining rigorously rational, is Italianally alive, warm, plastic” and “Mussolini's architecture is now in full formation.”²⁹⁸ After this, Piacentini and Gruppo 7 join forces, which Bruno Zevi reads as being the result of the lack of a true “social ideology” in either Piacentini or Gruppo 7.²⁹⁹

Sabaudia’s reception has been overwhelmingly positive after the end of the regime. Zevi sees it as one of the few examples of excellent Italian production within modernist architecture, otherwise being harsh in his judgement of architectural production in the interwar period in Italy, judging most of it as broadly unremarkable – especially when it came to urban planning.³⁰⁰ About Sabaudia he says:

“Sabaudia shows in the plan and in the volumes a detachment from rationalism and denounces, in its anti-rhetoric, an awareness of organic instances in the vision of urban spaces; clearly opposed to the empty grandiloquence of Littoria or to the false imitative folklore of the so-called minor styles of Pontinia or Aprilia, it still remains a highly significant centre today.”³⁰¹

Most literature recalls how Pier Paolo Pasolini, who spent a lot of time in Sabaudia with other leftist intellectuals, saw it as incredibly beautiful and expressed in a television segment aired on national television in 1974 how the town was fascinating in its “Italian, provincial, paleo-industrial” nature.³⁰² Mariani interprets both the Florence Station and Sabaudia as antifascist. Possibly informed by the

²⁹⁵ Full transcript in Mariani 1976, p. 99-100, cited in part in Bodenschatz 2011, p. 34, Cederna 2006, p. 22, Nicoloso 2008, p. 158.

²⁹⁶ Pagano 1934, p. 2-3.

²⁹⁷ See Muntoni 2004, pp. 28-45.

²⁹⁸ ACS/SPD.

²⁹⁹ Zevi 1979, p. 119.

³⁰⁰ See Zevi 1955, p. 240

³⁰¹ Zevi 1955, p. 277.

³⁰² Pasolini 1974, min. 4:00.

animated debates in the parliament chambers and beyond, Mariani sees an inherent inconsistency between the rationalist forms and their political sense which is present in Sabaudia. Mariani does not go into any concrete example of how these two elements start to contradict each other, but in his opinion, there is a sterile overtaking of forms from the international architectural production. He interprets the five pontine towns as a confrontation with the problem of the city that is then represented in different “tastes.” Underlying each aesthetic consideration is thus the creation of a town which is conducive to the implementation of the wholesale control over society that fascism represented. Ultimately, they came to represent the “third way” of approaching the problems of advanced capitalism, halfway between liberalism and planification.³⁰³

Looking at the plans for the public squares in the towns of Agro Pontino shows that the design of Bosio presented an innovation. The project for Aprilia of the studio “2 P.S.T.” puts the main square as the intersection of two perpendicular roads signalling the two main lines along which the tight lines of the town develop (Fig. 35). Frezzotti’s design for Littoria sees its main square at the centre of the radial concentric urban fabric, presenting probably the most conventional of solutions to the public square (Fig. 32). Sabaudia’s main square is placed directly at the end of the main access road, which runs across the *piscina della verdesca* – a perfect rectangle of forest land – and with the building of the *podestà* at its center (Fig. 33). Though the rest of the urban fabric presents several interesting variations, the core hierarchy of the town is maintained through the road and the main square. Lastly, Pontinia (Fig. 36), built after Sabaudia, presents a version of the same matrix, with the main road uniting all public space and finishing with the main square. The multiple squares designed by Bosio, and especially the complex of the square of the *podesteria* and courthouse thus present another model of designing public space given its unusual placing and geometries that, given the morphology of the area designated for the production of the city, provide interesting solutions that were not needed in the Agro Pontino, given that all the towns were built on flat ground. Therefore, even though Bosio was “pretextual” in accepting to design the towns in Ethiopia, given that he was promised the chance to design singular buildings, he nonetheless showed interest in developing an entire urban organism.³⁰⁴ Renzi refers to the “internal urban space” as being fundamental for both Bosio and his contemporaries, an urban space that is made up by the facades of the buildings that in turn create a “public built image.”³⁰⁵ In the institutional part of the new Gondar, the face that thus emerges is one that managed to keep its hierarchical character even if fragmented in different spaces. The uneven plane on which Gondar rose was actually used as a way to establish this hierarchy further, with the government complex presiding over the rest of the institutional buildings and the initial separation of the sacral and secular buildings through the *viali di*

³⁰³ See Mariani 1976, pp. 91-92.

³⁰⁴ See Renzi 2016, pp. 38-40.

³⁰⁵ Renzi 2016, pp. 40-41.

rappresentanza constitute an ordering of the different power structures that determined life in the colonies.

III. Residential forms

After having visited the institutional part of new Gondar, we can move onto the residential nuclei. At the south-western end of the courthouse square, a road leads to the area reserved for small businesses and artisans (Fig. 1). This is arranged in two columns of six rows of single, C-shaped buildings that eventually going south grow further apart forming the square for the national market, which was to be used only by Italians. From this small square another road leads to the stadium. On the opposite side of town, in its most northern section, storage halls, silos and other offices are present. This section can be reached from the piazza del fascio and runs parallel to the road going towards Tigrāi. According to the master plan (Fig. 4), it would include the Genio Militare, Segretario Generale and some service stations. The Genio Militare [military engineering office] was responsible for the very first constructions in Ethiopia and their activity was then taken over by the already mentioned U.OO.PP. In terms of the silos and storage halls, those would have been managed by the ONC, as they initiated projects for the agricultural colonization of Ethiopia. In the *Annali dell'Africa Italiana* published in 1940 a large segment is dedicated to the efforts to establish the agricultural economy in Ethiopia by the ONC, following criteria very similar to those applied in Agro Pontino.³⁰⁶

Fascism and ruralism

The city as the environment of moral malaise and corruption was a sentiment shared throughout Europe, and in fascist doctrine it translated into policies of ruralisation. The effort to invest in the primary sector and dampen the movement from country to city was tied economically to the dependency of Italy on imported goods in the 1920s. In 1925, Mussolini starts the battaglia del grano [battle for wheat], a propaganda campaign coupled with higher taxation in imports that was aimed at reaching greater economic independence (Fig. 37). Agrarian landowners were encouraged to expand their territories suitable for agriculture with land melioration, but it was only the threat of dispossession in 1926 that put them in motion. Still unsatisfied with the effort by private actors, Mussolini introduces the legge della bonifica integrale in 1928, establishing a network of consortia to manage the operation.³⁰⁷ Eventually, in 1931, the administration of land renewal is given to the ONC, which carried out their projects with a 75% rate of state funding.³⁰⁸ The bonifica, which mostly focused on the Agro Pontino outside of Rome, was an opportunity to create employment opportunities: the ONC, responsible for providing assistance to war veterans, established plans for the melioration and the consequent farming that would ensue. The promise of giving back the land to the farmer-soldiers, a practice that goes back to antiquity, had been a central issue since the end of the First World War. After serving in

³⁰⁶ See Meregazzi/Piccioli/Papini 1940, pp. 260-271.

³⁰⁷ [Law for integral land renewal] see L. 3134/1928. See Bodenschatz 2011, p. 220 and Schmitt 1934, p. 44. Bodenschatz notes that most were big landowners of aristocratic and bourgeoisie descent; the area of Piscinara was mostly owned by only sixteen families and extended for 42 thousand acres.

³⁰⁸ See Mariani 1976, p. 66.

the trenches, they were promised upon their return to be able to be compensated for their sacrifice. When this did not materialize a series of farmer rebellions occurred before the occupation of the factories in 1918-1920.³⁰⁹ Eventually in 1921, a law, passed with PNF support, allowed war veterans to occupy latifundia and use them for farming. In 1923 the government revoked this measure and made the occupation of latifundia illegal.³¹⁰ Trying to resolve the problem of dispossessed farmers while still accruing sympathy from the latifundia owners was at the crux of the bonifica, which, especially in Agro Pontino, was laden with spiritual and historical meaning given that efforts to renew the marshlands could be traced back to the Roman Empire.

The renewal and agricultural colonization in Agro Pontino were characterized, other than by their poor results that were always kept hidden from the general public, by militarization, moral strength and the myth of sacrifice. This was possible due to the work of ONC, which controlled every aspect of the life of the farmers. During the inauguration of Littoria in 1932, Mussolini explains how it won't be necessary anymore to "cross the alps or sail across the ocean" to find employment, but that enough work will be found in Italy for every unemployed citizen. He then says "it is here that we have conquered a new province. It is here that we have conducted and will conduct real war operations. This is the War we prefer."³¹¹ Mariani reads this speech as partly trying to calm down the rumours that Mussolini was preparing for an armed conflict, but of significance is also the glorification of agrarian labour together with the fact that most new inhabitants of Littoria were former soldiers.³¹² The military connotation of the reclamation of the marshes was also integrated within the larger narrative around the Italian race that was steadily developing in the background. At the same time, the marshes project included the relocation of thousands of families, which would subsequently lose their connection to the soil they grew up around. This meant that a connection had to be fostered artificially in the new territory of the marshes. Given the circumstances the connection between people and the landscape they occupied, possible only through memory, needed to be actively produced. While the historical memory of imperial Rome could be evoked by the historical significance of the reclamation, which had been planned for two millennia, the recent, often deeply personal history of the Great War was achieved through the use of toponyms of the most important battles in the war.³¹³ As projects of agricultural colonization in the African colonies were planned, its connection to war was contemporaneous, with the first searches for territories suitable for agriculture starting as soon as war operations stopped.³¹⁴

³⁰⁹ See Mariani 1976, p. 10.

³¹⁰ See Pfammatter 1990, p. 25.

³¹¹ Mussolini 1958c, pp. 184-185.

³¹² See Mariani 1976, pp. 77-78.

³¹³ See Armiero/Hardenberg 2013, p. 296. Examples include: Sabotino, Piave, Grappa. Miltiadis 2023 analyses the relationship to memory in contemporary Latina, formerly Littoria.

³¹⁴ See Meregazzi/Piccioli/Papini 1940, p. 265.

The figure of the farmer, loaded with what were considered virtues suitable for the fascist man was also given a significant focus in propaganda efforts.³¹⁵ According to Alexander Nützenadel ruralism offered the chance to unite even contradicting standpoints into an ideology that was easily accepted.³¹⁶ In Germany, ruralism was championed by Richard Walther Darré. It was based on the antimodem ideology of “body and soil” and found little resonance, getting sidelined in 1941, since it became clear that Hitler was focused on industrialization with the aim of preparing for war.³¹⁷ A commonality between Nazi Germany and fascist Italy, however, was the absorption of the primary sector under centralized institutions that were focused on the nourishment of the nation. Ruralism in Italy found its central voice in Arrigo Serpieri, who instead advocated for a modernization of agriculture, and saw the importance of support by the farmers in the stability of the regime.³¹⁸ Propaganda efforts for the farmers of Agro Pontino and other land renewal projects included the radio programme Radio Rurale – which informed on the “facts of the farmer” – and some local news bulletin and the ONC magazine *La Conquista della terra* (Fig. 38). With its cover blending the fascio littorio and a spade, there was a continuity established through the militarization of the process of land renewal and farming.³¹⁹ However, many farmers were not able to read or write – as is shown by signatures in documents being just crosses³²⁰ – and the radio programs often coincided with the work times. Along with the land renewal of the marshes, the Agro Pontino was also near the area that would become the Circeo National Park, which today extends up to the town limits of Sabaudia. Whereas the towns and reclaimed marshes were sites of society, modernity, and human intellect, the Circeo was valued for its mythical significance – as the site where the witch Circe had lived – and was therefore to be conserved to remember the connection between the fascist farmers and their imaginary ancient ancestors. In truth, even the establishment of the park included a quite significant amount of human intervention, with the eradication of ecosystems and planting of alien species.³²¹ As shown by research, even if on the surface the regime’s efforts to open several national parks in Italy could have been seen as an appreciation of nature and its conservation, it really was mostly carrying out projects initiated during the liberal governments, while being a construction of a fictive nature that could be purified from illness, danger and calamities, and thus successfully tamed under the virility of fascist power.³²²

Farmers that moved to these new territories (both nationally and abroad) received a small parcel of land with a casa colonica. The ONC operated in a mezzadria model:³²³ The colonial family owed a

³¹⁵ See De Grazia 1981, p. 130.

³¹⁶ See Nützenadel 1997, p. 49.

³¹⁷ See Corni 2003, p. 100. Corni also points out Germany had 30% of the population employed in agriculture, whereas 52% of Italians were employed in the primary sector in 1936.

³¹⁸ See Corni 2003, p. 101.

³¹⁹ See Ghirardo/Forster 1985, p. 634.

³²⁰ See Mariani 1976, p. 71

³²¹ See Armiero/Hardenberg 2013, p. 306.

³²² See Armiero/Hardenberg 2013, p. 292.

³²³ See Bodenschatz 2011, p. 224.

debt to the ONC amounting to the value of the land, the house, and the equipment they received, which needed to be paid back through regular yearly payments from the surplus of the crops. If some families were unable to uphold the deal, they were provided with some compensation, which would be added to their overall debt.³²⁴ ONC predicted that within a few years the crops would become and expected for the majority of the families to expunge their debt within fifteen to thirty years, thus becoming owners of the land.³²⁵ This model ultimately represents the absolutization of the private subject that was championed across fascist ideology. Giovanni Gentile theorised the fascist state as being “in interiore homine”,³²⁶ rather than “inter homines” – the State was to be engulfed within each subject, and this is perpetrated in the matrix of the *casa colonica* as within each family unit the dynamics of the state are interiorised and reflected. The single-family units were represented as independent of each other, each responsible only for their own piece of land, with the chance of making profits to one day reach ownership of the land. It can be said that this was an incredibly individualistic endeavour, which at the same time relied on community – or rather – state intervention.

The increasing dissatisfaction with the urban environment, which Benjamin blames on the interior and sees as potentially being resolved through the abolition of the private sphere through a transparent life, in fascism shifts into ruralisation. Here there is an obstinacy by the Italian fascists to save the bourgeois interior by transporting it to the land. Now each unity of colonial house and its surrounding land becomes the shell-like dwelling of the individual and is sold to them as a reward for the hard work that is inherently inscribed in it. The unity of the place of work and the place of dwelling is explained in Henri Lefebvre as the precondition for capitalist development, the gruesome work done outside of the home finding its counterpart in the coziness of the home environment.³²⁷ Through the ONC model of agricultural colonisation we find a last-ditch attempt to preserve the pre-capitalist ideal of the space of work and of life to coincide. The farmer, who does not own his means of production is given the promise that one day he will. He lives in the illusion that he does. Within those few acres of land, he can be given the false hope of determining his environment by seeing the fruits of his labour, while living under standardisation. All the while, he embarks on a twenty-years-long journey of eventually owning that land. This promise makes the hard work justifiable. What Benjamin considers the “fetish of individualized dwelling”³²⁸ from which he believes modernist architecture tries to be free itself from, is in the Agro Pontino only further preserved. Furthermore, fascism takes on the sensory alienation brought about in modernity, and according to Benjamin, maximalizes its effects also thanks

³²⁴ Some land was not owned by ONC but rather private owners.

³²⁵ Each parcel of land was on average between 12 and 20 acres and included a cowshed, chicken coop, manure pit, a well, a latrine, an oven and some even a pig shed. However, they did not have electricity or plumbing. The colonial houses were designed for eight to ten people and had a surface of 175 square meters, the sheds usually holding up to ten animals.

³²⁶ Gentile G. 1937, p. 129.

³²⁷ See Lefebvre 1991.

³²⁸ Elliot 2011, p. 76.

to its negation of the body, which, within the rhetoric of sacrifice, is subordinated from the spirituality superiority of the fascist “new” man.³²⁹

For the agricultural colonization of Ethiopia three entities are established in 1937 for the managing of the immigration of Italian farmers, namely those of Romagna d’Etiopia (which was present around Dessiè), Veneto d’Etiopia and Puglia d’Etiopia, each hoping to place farmers from the corresponding regions.³³⁰ As Bosio draws his plan for Gondar in 1937, he probably imagined similar entities or ONC interventions to take place in the near future, but the *Annali d’Africa* from 1940 explain that even though the Asmara region is by far the most promising in terms of agricultural and zootechnical development, the political unrest, with raids by the Ethiopian resistance, have made it extremely difficult to establish any sort of settlement outside of the cities.³³¹ Nonetheless, sixty-nine agricultural concessions to private entities are listed, most located around Dessiè, Gondar, and Azozò.³³² The storage facilities planned north of Gondar, therefore, would have hosted the crops of the surrounding fields through periods of scarcity.

v. The zona estensiva and intensiva: individualised dwelling under fascism

As mentioned before, Bosio was given the opportunity to design not only the master plan for Gondar, but also some single buildings, these however were all located in the institutional section of the town, apart from the army barracks, which are located – across all projects – on a higher hill than the rest of the town. Because of this fact, the material pertaining to the residential quarters is very scarce. The zona estensiva [extensive zone, for upper-middle-class housing] is placed on top of the hill west of the government palace (Fig. 4). It can be reached from north through the street going from the storage facility area towards Sudan, and from the government square through two zig-zag roads, one crossing two rivers while hiking up the hill, and another drawing a geometric, winding road passing four times across a step-street. Before developing into the structure of single villas, a big garden with radial walkways covers the entire top of the hill that is visible from the town (Fig. 1). Beside the park, a small square with a church is planned (Fig. 39). The area develops in a soft grid system, without a clear symmetry and presenting a variation of allotments, each planned as having a garden. Though already introduced in the institutional section of the town, here the significance of the use of trees and vegetation becomes central. Private houses of this scope would never be built following principles defined by the master plans, although the thirteen homes of military and government officials and their families, which are reported as being built by 1940 were most probably designed by the U.OO.PP.³³³ Bosio, however, was not involved in designing any private villa for any Ethiopian town. Single family dwelling in the

³²⁹ Benjamin 2006c, p. 319.

³³⁰ According to photographs in Meregazzi/Piccioli/Papini 1940, p. 288. About Romagna d’Etiopia, see Gresleri 2008.

³³¹ See Meregazzi/Piccioli/Papini 1940, p. 288-289

³³² See Meregazzi/Piccioli/Papini 1940, p. 290-291.

³³³ See Meregazzi/Piccioli/Papini 1939, p. 474.

colonies was of interest for other architects, the most important being the Casa Coloniale by Luigi Piccinato (Fig. 40) which was presented at the V Triennale di Milano in 1933 and developed around the concept of a central atrium that would work as an oasis around which the house developed, forming a completely autarch, inwardly focused unit. The variety of the architecture of private upper-middle-class housing in the African colonies is more present in Libya and Eritrea, as the time of colonial rule was much longer and allowed for more private actors to establish themselves in the territory.³³⁴

The other residential area designated for Italians was planned for lower-middle-class and lower-class families and is placed in the 1937 design south of the quarter for national commerce and artisans (Fig. 4). It can be reached from the square of the national market, as well as from the top of the hill hosting single-family houses, and the end of the viali di rappresentanza. This residential area transitions then seamlessly in the industrial zone and is placed on the western side of the Sussuguà hill. Multi-story, multiple family buildings are placed parallel to each other in a pattern following the rhythm of the hill, each building disposing of a big garden. The middle of the structure is separated by a stepway that then leads to single streets crossing the complex longitudinally. For this area there are also no materials conserved in AEGB, however a design of compact residential housing is present for Dessiè (Fig. 41).

Cesare De Seta points out that the origin of modernist architecture movements was inherently bourgeois and that, consequently, if designs and formal principles were ever implemented, it was mostly within the context of private, upper-middle-class housing.³³⁵ Le Corbusier wanted to revolutionize dwelling, introducing the idea of openness and permeability of the spheres of private and public, strong in the conviction that it would make for a better society. Benjamin takes this permeability to mean, however, a complete revolution of the property system, the advent of communism, which was not in any way present in Le Corbusier's musings.³³⁶ Rather, even if the principles were motivated by social change and socialism, most fell flat as it led to designs mostly catered to the milieu of people that could afford to pay the architects. Ultimately, without the change in the means of production, these architectures can be seen as just expression without political impact. When it comes to urban planning, however, rather than just single housing, the political impact of the theories developed in the first three decades of the 20th century have wide ranging consequences, which are still felt today: they were considerations that hinged on the characterization of the capitalistic metropolis as a problem that needed to be solved and that looked at ways of decentralizing the population. This conceptualization, I argue, is inherently bourgeois and finds its justification in a fetishizing of nature and rurality. This trend is one that is not solely observable in fascist Italy, but rather sees very similar manifestations in England, the

³³⁴ See Santoianni 2008 for an overview of the question of individualized dwelling in the colonies.

³³⁵ See De Seta 1983, p. 235.

³³⁶ As CIAM gained relevancy, however, concepts developed were then transported for mass housing, which, however, often led to unsuccessful projects, mostly influenced by the other factors outside of architecture that still determined how space was engaged and perceived.

United States, Germany, France, and their respective colonial territories. The experience of the fetishization of rurality in fascism, however, takes a maximalized meaning, as it coincided with larger economic goals for the regime, namely agricultural autarchy, suppression of urban dissent, and totalitarian control of the population through a capillary model of centralized power.

The città di fondazione in Agro Pontino were a chance for the regime to determine the structure and functionality of a fascist city, which was described by Ridolfo Mazzucconi in 1928 as: “ I imagine the fascist city as completely unphilosophical, flooded with light and sun, with wide streets ... simple and solemn in the lines of an architecture that renounces everything superfluously ornamental and forms a geometric whole of mass and space.”³³⁷ Justifying the existence of new towns amongst the stoking of anti-urbanist sentiments through propaganda was also a process which influenced the configuration of these new towns which initially were seen as being merely administrative centres, and later only paesi [villages]. The paese as a spatial unit was praised and pit against the negatively connotated city by the movement of strapaese. Going back to what they considered the very essence of the Italian race, strapaese exponents saw the small village as the locus that needed to be prioritized, rather than the large urban dwelling. The small, rural, communities were imbued within a logic of better morality, obedience, safeguarding of each other and overall, a better quality of life. Gustavo Corni posits that the influence of strapaese was merely visible on the historical-cultural front,³³⁸ given that the voices of the movement were often quite radical and specific so that it was not a sound strategy for Mussolini to take on their beliefs wholesale. The structure fostered in the ONC-led new towns, nonetheless, replicated the cultural significance of the paese as locus of moral aptitude and strength. Furthermore, decentralizing urban populations into smaller paesi, and then into ever smaller one-family units, allowed for a permeation of power across all hegemonic structures. This system fostered an individualism, as each family was responsible for their own success or failure, which made resistance to hegemonic power more difficult to establish. Piccinato saw in Sabaudia the relationship between the town and its surrounding country as completely opposed to the traditional conception of an urban centre.³³⁹ Whereas a traditional city depends on its surrounding territory economically, the fascist city would work to serve its surroundings: in short, first came the farmers, then their city. This reconceptualization could mean a significant shift in the idea of what urban life could mean. Keeping the planning within these parameters, which also included the idea of a city with clear bounds, whose expansion was not necessary, presented the chance to neutralize the biggest threat that urban centres posed according to fascist ideology: as magnets for agrarian workforces, they actively contributed to the decrease of agricultural production, which only made the economic fate of the country more unsure. Sabaudia on the other hand was a town that from its very inception negated all that was urban and thus threatening to the status quo that was to be

³³⁷ Mazzucconi 1928, p. 23.

³³⁸ See Corni 2003, p. 103.

³³⁹ See Piccinato 1934, pp. 10-11.

established in the marshes, and – more broadly – in Italy. Furthermore, the structure of Sabaudia was also to be praised because it was self-contained in comparison with satellite town that had developed in Germany and England, which were dependent on larger urban centres. As Bodenschatz points out, however, the very fabric of the town was also determined by the ONC and was reinforcing of its hierarchy, which was not to be questioned.³⁴⁰ Piccinato's scheme puts the power in the farmer's hands, ignoring the significance of the institutional hegemony of the ONC. Fascism emerged out of the urban environment, with its early adaptors being urban dwellers, but it was clear to Mussolini that it was crucial to also gain the favour of the agrarian population, which made up 50% of Italy. It was at once the pool from which Mussolini had to draw consensus while also undergoing a process of mythmaking, of increase in cultural significance which made it – at least on the surface – the backbone of the movement. In 1924 Mussolini says how important it was to make fascism rural, given that the temperament of the rural population could withstand and even welcome sacrifice, discipline, and hardship.³⁴¹ What Zunino calls an “ethics of sacrifice” was pervasive in fascism, and is an idea that goes back to the interventionist rhetoric before the First World War – “We've made Italy, now we have to make the Italians.”³⁴² With the promise of a glorious future, the real time of everyday sacrifice was justified and the idea that was repeated by most exponents of fascism was one that saw sacrifice as the most important characteristic of the new Italian man, as something to aspire to for the ideals of the nation. Supported by its anti-materialism and lofty idealism, the Italian man was to find strength of the everyday misery he was put through within the ideals of the fascist regime. Furthermore, following Spengler, the connection fostered by farmwork on land that was at once property of the individual and of the nation, needed to be recovered in the context of the metropolitan city which had destroyed it.

Agriculture, nature, and motherland were within these ideologies completely intertwined. It is also around this time that efforts to conserve nature were championed in the global West, with Italy planning to establish national parks even before the rise of Mussolini. Mussolini took over those plans and perpetuated a logic of imbuing nature through the concept of “Italianness,” meaning that most environments were preserved because of the literary-cultural significance, rather than their environmental value.³⁴³ The conceptualization of nature in fascism was a blend of conservation of landscapes embedded with national identity and the process of making unproductive nature into soil suitable for agriculture. It was also characteristic to see the connection between human activity and nature as fundamental, underlining how this relationship was one that forged the character of the Italian

³⁴⁰ See Bodenschatz 2011, p. 230.

³⁴¹ See Mussolini 1956b, p. 38.

³⁴² Phrase credited to Massimo d'Azeglio, but also Camillo Benso Conte di Cavour, it was widespread after the Risorgimento. In the interventionist lens in 1915, this meant the forging of the Italian people through war. See Gigante 2011.

³⁴³ For instance, the Pineta di Ravenna was considered of cultural significance not for any biological or conservationist reasons, but rather because it was referenced by several writers of the Italian tradition, most importantly Boccaccio and Giovanni Pascoli. See Armiero/Hardenberg 2013, p. 289.

man. Frank Snowden explains the logic that stood behind the benefits of land renewal as something that not only changed nature, but also the individuals carrying it out. He sees a reversal of the process of seeing the soil of the marshes as emanating sickness to a rewriting which sees the soil as emanating instead health, strength, and perseverance.³⁴⁴ The environment was therefore a vehicle to justify the raising racist narratives, with Eduardo Zavattari for instance drawing a direct comparison between the diversity of the Italian environment ranging from the sea to the mountains with the capacity to adapt of the Italian race, who was actively forged by the challenges of the environment that surrounded them and that therefore was superior to other races.³⁴⁵ This is especially clear in the glorification of the figure of the Alpino. The Alpini were historically soldiers born in the alps and therefore trained to carry out military missions in the strenuous environment of the mountains, whose cultural impact was carefully strengthened in the Interwar years, establishing a tradition that carries on to this day.³⁴⁶ Within this military narrative, which we saw being used by Mussolini when talking to the farmers of Agro Pontino, nature is an enemy to be conquered, the wilderness to be tamed. As Armiero and Hardenberg point out, this narrative did not depict people living in the mountains as absorbing the wilderness of their environment but rather be characterized by obedience and submission to authority.³⁴⁷ Nature ultimately was perceived as a further element within the aestheticization of politics, as a mass to mould to fit the party's program.³⁴⁸ As Anna Treves shows in her analysis of the agrarian policies in fascism, the ruralisation efforts were mostly cultural-propagandistic and did not translate into actual change by the regime, who used anti-urbanist ideology as a means to control the unemployed and the Lumpenproletariat.³⁴⁹

Despite the nationalistic overtones that characterized the conceptualization of nature both in fascist and Nazi regimes, the idea of going back to nature had been central in dwelling considerations internationally. The most relevant example of this is the concept of the garden city, which is implemented in the project for Gondar. The garden city, developed by Ebenezer Howard, an English stenographer and shorthand writer, was conceived as a “third way” between urban and rural living.³⁵⁰ He showed his concept through a metaphor of three magnets, each representing urban, rural, and garden city life, with the garden city being the clear winner because it would be the perfect compromise between the two contrasting realities of the urban and rural life (Fig. 42). Divulged in a book published in 1898, the garden city, which was also previously called “Unionville” and “Rurisville,” was a direct

³⁴⁴ See Snowden 2006, pp. 175-176.

³⁴⁵ See Zavattari 1938.

³⁴⁶ Veteran Alpini are organised in local associations and are often actively engaged in ceremonies remembering the First World War.

³⁴⁷ See Armiero/Hardenberg 2013, p. 295. Mussolini defines the approach to the Great War of the rural soldiers as “accepting with submission, patience and discipline”, Mussolini 1956c, p. 205.

³⁴⁸ Renaming was also used, as for instance the highest mountain of the volcanic highlands that stretched from Assab to Addis Ababa, which was named after Mussolini. See Rifkind 2015, p. 149.

³⁴⁹ See Treves 1976, p. 161.

³⁵⁰ See Howard 2010. Ebenezer Howard published the first book on the garden city in 1898, *To-Morrow: A Peaceful Path to Real Reform* and reprinted it in 1902 with the different title *Garden Cities to To-Morrow*.

solution to the urbanization of cities in England: these new towns aimed at decentralizing populations, which were to be arranged in small, 30.000-inhabitant villages, which were connected in a network called the “social city”. The idea was to grant each inhabitant more living space than the amount available in the urban environment, while at the same time fostering a community. Garden cities were to be established through “co-operative action and collective ownership of land.”³⁵¹ This new model did not question capitalism and its private property system while purportedly resolving within this framework the problems of excess urbanization in industrialized countries. The focus, especially for the garden city movement, which developed internationally extremely quickly after the first publication of the book, was its environmental aspect. The garden city, as the name suggests, was to be surrounded by parks and gardens, with tree-lined streets and green belts. Although the promise of social reform was formally present, the name of the model, according to Stephen V. Ward, also contributed to its social goals being quickly forgotten.³⁵² Spreading in England, first examples of garden cities were company towns built by Cadbury (Bournville, Fig. 43) and Leven (Port Sunlight, Fig. 44) with the very first being Letchworth in 1903. With time, the garden city became increasingly diversified in its characteristics, with some examples being strictly residential, others offering instead a higher degree of self-containment. Its administration could also be very diverse, sometimes being private or public, decentralized or managed by centrally appointed state corporations. With time, the two terms of satellite town and garden city came to be often conflated. An innovation was introduced by Ernst May in the satellite towns outside of Frankfurt am Main, which introduced a narrow green belt as physical delineation of the town and separation from the rest of the environment (Fig. 45). May’s work was reported on in Italy by architect Alberto Sartoris in *La Casa Bella* in 1930.³⁵³ Another example of a solution to the dichotomy between rural and urban living is Frank Lloyd Wright’s Broadacre City, which was presented in 1933 in the United States as a solution to centralization (Fig. 46). Like Agro Pontino, in Broadacre City each family owned an acre of land that was conceived as both the space for dwelling and agricultural work. It was extremely influential for its automobile-friendly approach and sprawling effect, which today is present in the suburban space in the U.S., where the possibility of individual expression, which was to be safeguarded in the model by Wright, led to extreme homogeneity.³⁵⁴ These ideas ultimately served upper-middle-class families and in wanting to create an environment both urban and rural, emptied both terms, forming an alternative that mostly just presented more problems than it resolved.

³⁵¹ Ward 1992, p. 2.

³⁵² See *ibid.*

³⁵³ See Sartoris 1930.

³⁵⁴ See Watson 2019.

vi. Quartiere indigeno: producing space in the colony

In a 1938 article, Bosio explains the necessity of developing two models for Ethiopian cities.³⁵⁵ Gondar fell under the first category of towns developed on the Ethiopian plateau. These towns were to be white dominated with Ethiopians being present only through their involvement in the life of the Italians. The other cities in the Ethiopian plains would be demographically non-white, with the presence of Italians as only administrators. Following this model, the indigenous zone of Gondar is placed in the 1937 plan separate from the rest of the urban organism on the western side of the Tacle Aimanot hill.³⁵⁶ It can be reached from the north through the road coming from Sudan, and from the east from the piazza del fascio through a road that first reaches a cathedral and then zig-zags toward the indigenous village. The village develops in a radial pattern drawing a semi-circle around the Coptic orthodox church.³⁵⁷ The radial pattern then bends slightly following the curves of the hill and eventually leads to the square where the indigenous market was situated. In AEGB a perspective drawing of the square is conserved (Fig. 47), which however seems to reflect the later plans for Gondar, when the location was changed. In this later drawing the main square is organized through single C-shaped buildings, with their central façade facing the square, while the two wings create a semi-courtyard behind it. Some wings are planned with arcades which would accommodate single vendors for the market. In the 1937 plan (Fig. 1), the structure for the market is instead a uniform building with arcades running along the western perimeter of the square and then bending to follow the two access roads leading to it. From the same drawing we can see that all the homes for the indigenous population are tuculs/tukuls – the traditional Ethiopian house (Fig. 48) –, organized along streets, making the area “easy to control.”³⁵⁸ While the Coptic church is the only element at the top of the indigenous settlement, placed at the centre of a circular square, the other oblong square will also host the courthouse, the indigenous school and outpatient clinic. The settlement is also served by a road designed for the transit of “functionaries.”³⁵⁹ Whereas the zoning in the white town is function-based, the indigenous settlement encompasses all aspects of daily life and makes therefore any movement outside of it strictly dependent on the necessity of the Italian population.

The Italian discourse around colonial architecture, as Bosio was writing his reports, had been developing for just a decade, and was about to be quickly forgotten. Mia Fuller sees a shift in the concern of Italians and the value that their architecture could provide in the colonial context only in the late 1920s. Before then, a first phase, denoted by “untheorized” building practices, focusing on traffic viability, archaeology and tourism does not, according to Fuller add up to an “architecture”, given their lack of meaning and self-consciousness.³⁶⁰ In the colonies of Libya and Eritrea we disproportionately

³⁵⁵ See Bosio 1938, p. 1089.

³⁵⁶ Colonial subjects never gained the status of citizens in the Italian colonies, this was formalised in the racial legislation introduced in 1937. See De Grand 2004, p. 144.

³⁵⁷ See Bosio 1937a, p. 8.

³⁵⁸ Bosio 1937a, p. 8.

³⁵⁹ Ibid.

³⁶⁰ Fuller 2006, p. 63.

find either the repurposing of local vernacular architecture, the adoption of local building traditions or the implementation of styles, often the result of eclecticism, such as “moresco.”³⁶¹ The meshing of the two influences also led to “Oriental” and “neo-Moorish” architecture developing. She also underlines how racial segregation had not been implemented.³⁶² A “mixed area” is fixed in the 1908’s plan for Asmara, together with separate zones for “colonial subjects” and Europeans – the first example of what would later become strict racial segregation.³⁶³ In this first period in Eritrea, local Italian bureaucrats were free to make decisions about planning and urban development of their city, without input from the central government in Italy.³⁶⁴ The new phase of colonial city planning started after the conquest of Tripoli in 1911-1912, with the Civil Corps of Engineers in Rome drawing a master plan immediately after.³⁶⁵ In Tripoli we also see the Italian government preventing speculation in the area outside the old city by legislating expropriation measures to ensure control over the housing market, manage the housing shortage and pre-emptively quiet unrest.³⁶⁶ Around the development of Tripoli and the setting of the priorities of what needed to be built first, the first direct interventions from the prime minister (Giolitti at the time) occur in 1912.³⁶⁷ This, according to Fuller, opens a new season in colonial architecture and urban planning, where their political significance increasingly comes to the fore.

Colonial architecture is extremely varied and there is little consensus over an overall definition of architecture in colonies, other than the most fundamental relationship between colonizers and colonized, which is always underlined and makes up the first line of action in any intervention in the built space by the colonizers. As Italy established its colonial territories, the history of the built environment under colonial rule had a rich history and it was no question that the architects that worked in the Italian colonies looked at the experiences of other colonial powers in deciding how to shape their newly occupied territories. Focusing on the continent of Africa, an important influence was the French experience in North Africa, which saw the emergence of the “arabise”³⁶⁸ style in Algeria, for instance, which looked to unify the French and Algerian styles into a hybrid that was essentially created out of thin air. Of course, the cultural exchange between colonizers and colonized cannot be reduced to a mere up-down power relationship, with one actor being active while the other entering a phase of absolute passivity. Though this might have been the goal of colonialism, colonizers were always acutely aware of the agency of the colonized, and a collaboration between the two actors was fundamental. French colonialists thus saw their leaning on vernacular forms and styles as important when building colonial architecture. The scramble for Africa initiated by the Berlin Conference in the 1880s came not

³⁶¹ Santoianni 2008, p. 3.

³⁶² See Fuller 2006, p. 63.

³⁶³ See Mia Fuller 2006, p. 70.

³⁶⁴ See Mia Fuller 2006, p. 73.

³⁶⁵ See Talamona 1992 for a detailed account.

³⁶⁶ See Fuller 2006, p. 75.

³⁶⁷ See Fuller 2006, p. 76.

³⁶⁸ Graebner 2007, p. 258.

only with the occupation of the interior of Africa but also with a shift in the architecture and urbanism executed in the occupied territories. If before the 1880s infrastructures built by colonialists were disproportionately military in use and non-planned in execution, the model of the garden city began being employed at the start on the twentieth century and was then succeeded by the discourse on urbanism championed by CIAM.³⁶⁹ Nunes Silva sees the start of concerted efforts to mould the built environment in African colonies as starting in the 1880s in territories occupied by French, Portuguese and British colonizers.

Colonial urban planning has been defined as “disseminator of Imperial values”³⁷⁰ and its function as controlling tool of the European hegemony is fundamental in its development. Whereas Nunes Silva writes of the concern of the planners for the welfare of the colonized population, we find little to no evidence of that in the literature during Italian fascist urban planning in Africa.³⁷¹ Its importance was ideological and further supported by the social Darwinism that motivated the segregation practices that are to be found throughout the African continent, often justified as a measure of health and hygiene as tropical medicine started to emerge during this time.³⁷² Adding to the racial segregation, the declaration of Empire in 1936 represents a shift in the Italian colonial architecture, with the setting up of the *Consulta per l’urbanistica e l’edilizia* November 1936.³⁷³ Anna Nuzzaci writes of an earlier trend in the 1920s of taking into consideration in planning the existing structures and the “genius loci”, something that instead was increasingly ignored in the later phase of Italian colonialism, where racial segregation became the most important factor.³⁷⁴ The shift towards “dual cities” – the term coined by Janet L. Abu-Lughod – had been established in Morocco by the planning of Henri Prost under Marshal Lyautey between 1913-1922 in cities like Rabat, Casablanca and Marrakech, which increasingly established an urban apartheid.³⁷⁵ In a 1938 report on the necessity for a general planning office for the colonies that Gherardo Bosio wrote to Mussolini, he mentions how Lyautey’s work in Morocco should be of inspiration for Italy.³⁷⁶ The case of French urban planning in Morocco is interesting because the occupied cities were used as literal testing grounds for urban planning laws, which were imposed by the French government on the colony before being implemented in France – something that has also been observed in Tripoli.³⁷⁷ Vittorio Santoianni summarizes the ideology behind colonial architecture in the Italian context as being determined by three central issues: *mediterraneità* [Mediterranean-ness], a re-evaluation of the merit of vernacular architecture in Southern Italy, and the search for a modern

³⁶⁹ See Nunes Silva 2015, p. 8-9.

³⁷⁰ Nunes Silva 2015, p. 10.

³⁷¹ See Nunes Silva 2015, p. 11.

³⁷² See Nunes Silva 2015, p. 11. Racial segregation is reported by Carl Husemoller Nightingale as starting at the end of the seventeenth century when the East India Company separated the capital of Madras into a white and black town. See Nightingale 2006, p. 668.

³⁷³ [Urban planning and building board] see Nuzzaci 2015, p. 130.

³⁷⁴ See Nuzzaci, 2015, p. 131.

³⁷⁵ See Abu-Lughod 1980 for an analysis of Rabat.

³⁷⁶ See Bosio 1938b.

³⁷⁷ See Abu-Lughod 1980, p. 146.

Italian architecture.³⁷⁸ These considerations contributed to a general interest by the Italian architects for the pre-existing architecture and environment of the colonies, according to Santoianni, leading to examples of “ante litteram contextual architecture.”³⁷⁹ When architects were confronted with Ethiopian architecture and environment, these principles were ignored or stretched so thin as to lose all of their potential. For instance, the introduction of the arch was interpreted as originating from the Jesuit missionaries – some of which came from Italy – and the castles of Gondar were built maybe by Ethiopians, but their skills were gained from the Portuguese presence in the area, as is erroneously reported in a 1938 tourist guide for AOI.³⁸⁰ However, the idea of mediterraneità, developed in the journal *Quadrante* (1933-1936), with its focus on the open interior space in the form of the courtyard or garden became a staple of colonial residential architecture. The role of the courtyard will only become a theme during CIAM 8 in 1951 by influence of Brazil, Venezuela, and Cuba.³⁸¹ In 2006, an exhibition within the Venice Architecture Biennial *Città di Pietra / Cities of Stone* introduced the term mediterraneità in order to unite the architecture built in Italy and its overseas territories, putting them at the end of a continuity line that started in Hellenic Greece. This was the ultimate chiasm between architecture and its production conditions, only exacerbated by the fact that much of the history of Italy as a colonial power, or even its urban policy during fascism, was not widely known and thus made the aesthetic value of these works more accessible.³⁸²

Renzi regarding the racial segregation offers a positive portraiture of Bosio. An early draft of the article that would be published in *Architettura* in July 1937, when talking about the indigenous quarters mentions the importance of “a return to the Abyssinian lifestyle” for the indigenous population.³⁸³ Whereas Renzi reads this as something akin to a respect for the Ethiopian culture, the language used across his publications and the draft suggests that this “return” was not out of respect but of complete disregard. Some direct quotes from the draft include “In terms of urban design and architecture, there is nothing to be salvaged”³⁸⁴ but also “Abyssinian life offers no modes of construction, of building, or art that we could be able to follow: the spiritual chaos and material poverty of those primitive people did not contribute in any way to the global formal civilization [...] [their artefacts] have the instinctive carelessness of the primitive, devoid of critical conscience and reveal their creative incapacity.”³⁸⁵ In

³⁷⁸ See Santonianni 2008, p. 5. Santoianni points out that the tradition from which modern architects in the colonies were drawing inspiration from was the roman domus, more than monumental architecture.

³⁷⁹ Santoianni 2008, p. 5.

³⁸⁰ See CTI 1938, p. 350, this is also mentioned several times by Bosio in different articles, for instance Bosio 1937f.

³⁸¹ See Sert/Wiener 1953.

³⁸² See Capresi 2009, p. 19.

³⁸³ See Bosio n.d. Renzi writes of a difference in tone between this draft and the published article, see Renzi 2016, p. 28n117. The formulation of “Abyssinian lifestyle” is repeated in several articles published between 1937 and 1939. Bosio generally often repurposed his texts with only minor tweaks for different publications. See Bosio 1937e, p. 431, Bosio 1937f, Bosio 1937g, Bosio 1939a.

³⁸⁴ Bosio n.d., very similar formulation is present in Bosio 1937e, p. 422.

³⁸⁵ Bosio n.d., published without any changes in Bosio 1937f.

the published article, last part changes to “the idle artistic and artisan labours of this miserable and primitive people are too far from our evolution to be useful to us.”³⁸⁶ Renzi, however, sees Bosio’s description of the local vernacular architecture made up of tukuls and edmòs (Fig. 49) as being essentially objective, and together with the presence of the some Black figures in his drawings are enough for the researcher to read Bosio’s intentions for the cities in Ethiopia as “multi-ethnic.”³⁸⁷ Looking at the drawings, all these figures are askaris, Ethiopian soldiers employed by the colonial army.³⁸⁸ Through Renzi’s interpretation, the only thing that prevented for this multi-ethnic city to be built were the hygienic measures that were put in place to prevent spreading of viruses, the only solution to which was racial segregation – Bosio in the draft explains this in terms of “The indigenous quarters will have to be arranged with particular attention to order and collective hygiene, all the more necessary for the unsanitary conditions of the private life of the black populations, and completely separated from the national quarters.”³⁸⁹ Trying to determine whether Bosio was racist is not a particularly productive or illuminative endeavour, but, even if we follow Renzi’s logic, the supposed change in racial tone from draft to publication, which he sees as exonerating, actually shows his willingness, together with most other architects, to assimilate fascist ideology, if not within themselves, within their works. If other aspects of fascist ideology as it translates into the built environment are more open to interpretation, as racism takes on an overt position within fascist ideology, so does its equally overt reflection in architecture and urban design. Emilio Gentile sees racism as being an element of fascist ideology from its very inception, especially given that the “anthropological revolution”³⁹⁰ was one of the first aims of fascism.³⁹¹ Its importance however raised exponentially as the imperialistic aims of Italy started to concretize, and especially the escalation represented by the occupation of Ethiopia, which, together with the nearing of the establishment of the Rome-Berlin axis, quickly made space for all-out antisemitism, as Mussolini started thinking of the international Jewish community as being antifascist.³⁹²

The spatial consequence of racial segregation is executed by Bosio using nature as “diaphragm”³⁹³ between the “white city” and the new indigenous settlement, which takes up the motifs of the garden city. Garden cities in the global North-West have been the subject of studies since its inception, but it is only in the past decade that more scholarly attention has been given to examples of

³⁸⁶ Bosio 1937e, p. 422.

³⁸⁷ Renzi 2016, p. 40. The author uses the term in quotes, as well.

³⁸⁸ See Stefani 2006.

³⁸⁹ See Renzi 2016, p. 40 and Bosio n.d., p. 9.

³⁹⁰ See Gentile 2010, p. 46.

³⁹¹ In 1911 Mussolini wrote on Nietzsche in the newspaper *La Voce*, in following terms “We must envision a new human race of ‘free spirits’, tempered in war, in loneliness and in great danger (...), spirits endowed with a kind of sublime perversity, spirits that free us from love for our neighbour” cited in Pfammatter 1990, p. 27. This point, however, is highly debated across scholarship, see Schlemmer/Woller 2014b.

³⁹² See Gentile 2010 p. 47. It is important to not frame antisemitism as a consequence of Black racism, Italian antisemitism has its own, independent history. For the history of antisemitism in Italy see De Felice 2005, Bartikowski 2013 and Sarfatti 2018.

³⁹³ Bosio 1937a, p. 9.

garden cities as employed under colonial rule.³⁹⁴ The green belt as separator was the feature that was overwhelmingly adopted in the implementation of garden cities in colonial territories. They were used to delineate racial segregation while representing the hygienic goals that supposedly justified them – this is taken up by Bosio. Liora Bigon differentiates how different kinds of colonialism impacted urban planning. Garden cities were mostly developed for white expatriates, especially in North and West Africa (Fig. 50).³⁹⁵ Examples of garden cities in South Africa, which was a white settler colony, saw the development of garden cities as satellites and suburbs of larger cities, such as Pinelands, suburb of Cape Town (Fig. 51).³⁹⁶ Although Ethiopia was not under Italian rule long enough for a precise schematization of the power-dynamics between colonizer state and colonized to emerge, it was clear from the start that Ethiopia was to be directly administrated, and one of the goals was to use the territory for the settlement of Italians. The planning of Gondar was therefore on one hand morphologically determined – the elevation, as well as the valleys created by creeks and small rivers both unsuitable for construction – but it also fit within the satellite-network concept that was at the very centre of the garden city movement. Furthermore, the presence of a large Ethiopian population also led to the application of the methods of the garden city on a wide scale. Instead of single suburbs like we see in South African cities such as Cape Town, but also in Dakar in Senegal, the entire urban organism in Bosio becomes a garden city. At the same time, in the very first and very final stage of planning, the model of the incorporation of the “indigenous city” within the “new town”, which is implemented, for instance, in Algeri is present (Fig. 52).³⁹⁷ In the 1937 plan, however, the indigenous population is completely separate from the rest of the town, and especially given that this new Gondar is not planned to be built around the imperial castles, the colonial subject is completely alienated from the urban form.

The 1936 and 1938 plans: (dis)placement of the colonial subject

The first report from August 1936 corresponds to the master plan published in *Future Città dell’Impero* in 1938 and conserved in the archives of the defunct Ministero dell’Africa Italiana (Fig. 53).³⁹⁸ The first step for the development of Gondar is the absorption of the indigenous village that surrounded the Fasil Ghebbi. Bosio sees the location of the imperial castles as the most favourable for the urban development and underlines that the indigenous population will be moved, and their habitations replaced by buildings for the Italian administration. The location for the new indigenous village is fixed here as being Addis Alem, located less than two kilometres south of the castle complex.³⁹⁹ It is important for Bosio to underline the aesthetic advantages to different locations around

³⁹⁴ See Bigon 2014.

³⁹⁵ See Bigon 2014, p. 16.

³⁹⁶ Bigon 2014, p. 17-18. The colonial government in South Africa applied zoning, green belts, and detailed planning to ensure the establishment of self-contained, racially separated communities.

³⁹⁷ See Fanon 1965, pp. 51-52.

³⁹⁸ See Bosio 1936. The report is cited in Renzi 2016, pp. 142-146.

³⁹⁹ People living in Gondar, and in Ethiopia generally, before Italian occupation were of many creeds and ethnicities, this did not seem to matter for the planners, as all non-Italian people are lumped together, even if they

Gondar, special attention is given to the Lake Tana and its landscape value. In 1936, Bosio is already planning for an urban landscape developed along nuclei, rather than a central organism. At the same time, it was extremely important to establish the governmental headquarters near the imperial castles. Bosio writes of the characteristic of the governmental buildings in terms of the power they are meant to represent and the glory of the Italian army against the Ethiopian forces.⁴⁰⁰ The integration of the historical archaeological sites – the Ras Biet also needing to be renovated and made into a museum – within the governmental complex is done with the specific goal of representing Italy as powerful and dominating. The domineering role of Italy is however not achieved through a disregard for the history of the Ethiopian empire. Rather, the Ethiopian empire through its monumental importance is supposed to underline just how powerful Italy was, to be able to conquer such a colossal force.

The appropriation of the archaeological sites was clear from the start, as space was cleared around the castles and used as a stage for several rallies, including *saggi ginnici della Gioventù Etiope del Littorio*.⁴⁰¹ This youth-organisation was set up exclusively for Ethiopian children, and materials from the Archivio Luce show dozens of children in uniform performing choreographies in front of the imperial castles in 1936-1937 (Fig. 54). The focus on shaping the younger portion of the population saw a shift around 1935 in Italy, as, according to De Grand, an “ideological dead-end” was reached.⁴⁰² Increasing militarization of youth institutions led to the establishment of education programs for 18–21-year-old boys in 1934 as a preparation to military service. Giuseppe Bottai saw it as a solution of the moral inaptitude and laziness of the Italian population, characteristics reflecting bourgeois ideals: through the Ethiopian War, a moral renewal and a complete abandonment of these ideals would ensue.⁴⁰³ With publications such as *Il Cittadino soldato*, the image of the fascist man shaped by the ideas of the party through militarism was championed, an education that was aimed at fostering discipline and a collective mindset.⁴⁰⁴ The school system was a priority for the fascist government, with the reform of the education system penned by Giovanni Gentile being approved in 1923. Education in the colonies of colonial subjects was also very important, given that it was fundamental for maintaining approval and silence discontent. A similar model was adopted throughout all Italian African colonies, with the local intelligentsia targeted and disempowered, together with any existing education system, which was substituted by very minimal education, often only lasting a few years, without the chance of continuing it beyond a certain point.⁴⁰⁵ The *Gioventù Etiope del Littorio* – the Ethiopian equivalent of

historically had lived separately. Addis Alem was the village where the Muslim population resided since the mid-seventeenth century, as they were separated from the Christian population by Emperor Yohannes I (1667-1682). The Bate Israel community instead resided in the village Wolleka, four kilometres north of Gondar. See Chiari 2015, pp. 32-33.

⁴⁰⁰ See Bosio 1937e, p. 425.

⁴⁰¹ [Gymnastic showcases of the Ethiopian Youth of the Lictor].

⁴⁰² See De Grand 2004, p. 136.

⁴⁰³ See Bottai 1935.

⁴⁰⁴ See PNF 1936.

⁴⁰⁵ See Pankhurst 1972, p. 366.

Gioventù Italiana del Littorio⁴⁰⁶ – stemmed out of the efforts to integrate colonial subjects into the fascist system, with a group of Ethiopian children being invited to Rome in May 1937 to parade in front of the duce and sing fascist songs.⁴⁰⁷ Soon after, however, the decision was made by Rodolfo Graziani (Viceroy of AOI), Achille Starace (PNF Secretary), and Mussolini to stop integrating Ethiopians in fascist institutions, as the process yielded poor results.⁴⁰⁸

In the 1938 plan, which emerged after compromise with the U. OO. PP., Bosio used the Ghebbi complex as a screen separating the city racially. Furthermore, roads were also racially segregated, as well as a general “isolation, downwind and downstream, of the indigenous zones from those for Italian residents.”⁴⁰⁹ By this time, Mussolini had complained about the behaviour of Italians in East Africa in terms of interaction with the Ethiopians – which was deemed too friendly.⁴¹⁰ In the 1938 plan, the separation desired in order to preserve the Italian’s racial dignity is reflective of this stance. Ultimately, the plan for Gondar followed the tradition of colonial urban planning of developing around a historical centre.⁴¹¹

⁴⁰⁶ Established in 1937, it united the Opera Nazionale Balilla (6-18-year-olds) and the Fasci giovanili di combattimento (18-21-year-olds), it was focused on managing the education of boys and girls through spiritual, physical and pre-military education, it also offered organised summer camps and similar activities.

⁴⁰⁷ See Pankhurst 1972, p. 376.

⁴⁰⁸ Ibid.

⁴⁰⁹ Bosio, 1938a, p. 5.

⁴¹⁰ Sbacchi 1985, p. 65.

⁴¹¹ See Nunes Silva 2015, p. 9.

IV. Synthesis

Taking in the whole urban organism of Gondar from the drawing done by Bosio (Fig. 1) we can appreciate the overall concept that determined the single sections that have been described so far. Characterized by the use of porticos, arcades and loggias, as well as the construction of a spatiality determined by planning incomplete courtyards and patios, the town presents enough variation to not be completely homogenous while still developing a consistency throughout the different zones.⁴¹² At this stage of planning, the simple geometries are distributed throughout the complex, and the differentiation is just through form, rather than any stylistic variance. As Bosio drew the plan, he found himself at an interesting time in the architecture debate, given that after the events of 1934, Mussolini had started taking an always greater role in the urban planning, personally involving himself, for instance, in the discussion of the height of the podesteria tower in Sabaudia, effectively becoming “the true and only Italian ‘architect.’”⁴¹³ If the debates around the style of fascism amongst architects had been very lively up until 1935, during the acceleration phase the borders between each style blurred; Pfammatter sees this as a consequence of the process of personification of *italianità* [Italian-ness] in the figure of Mussolini; each style was directly linked to its own interpretation of fascism and their common ground was only their nationalistic focus. With time, all the other contributing factors to their aesthetic ideology were phased out, eventually leaning into a homogeneity amongst architects that during the years prior had seemed irreconcilable.⁴¹⁴ On the other hand, the development of a discourse around colonial architecture opened new avenues for experimentation which was determined by its authoritative character, hinging of racial segregation, coupled with a complete disregard for the tradition, culture, and heritage of the people who had lived in those territories before. While in Libya the “archaic recourse” championed by rationalists coincided with a (re)vision of Libyan history and archaeology as intrinsically Roman, given its past as colony of the empire, in Ethiopia the traces of non-Italian presence could not be traced back to some glorious Roman past. In the 1937 plans, which placed the new Gondar away from the imperial castles, with the displacement of the indigenous population behind a hill, the history of the territory is completely wiped out and is of no consideration. Eventually, the plan will divert back to the initial 1936 intention of developing around the imperial castles introducing the colonial subject within a framing of submission by way of appropriating their own cultural heritage – some structures of the imperial compound are used as government offices – within a narrative of great military conquest by the Italian army of a century-long empire.

The plan dated 1 October 1938 in AEGB (Fig. 55) shows the final stage of planning by Bosio for Gondar, which he formulates around the plans of the Ufficio Topografico del Regio Governo

⁴¹² See Renzi 2016, p. 27.

⁴¹³ Mariani 1976, pp. 116-118. 1935 also sees a crisis of the ONC-led marshland project in Agro Pontino, which led to a reassignment of most leadership positions within ONC.

⁴¹⁴ See Pfammatter 1990, p. 33.

dell'Amara [topographical office of the Amara governorate], who had already fixed the area around the cathedral and fascist party headquarters. At the very bottom of the map, we see how the Kaà flows into the Angareb River while, as it crosses the area longitudinally, smaller rivers are distributed around it. The rainy seasons of the Ethiopian plateau formed these rivers, which laid dry for the rest of the year. The Angareb river before connecting with the Kaà runs adjacent to the east of Gondar, circumscribing the heart of the old and new Gondar. The castle complex of Gondar is clearly marked but left untouched by the general plan. The plan can be roughly divided into three macro zones, which are then, in a separate map, given their specific subcategories and functionalities (Fig. 56). Starting with the macro zone around the castles, it is articulated northward and southwards into two very distinct areas. North of the castles is one of the principal squares with the government palace, which is completely integrated with the PNF headquarters. It is a succession of three concatenating C-shaped buildings, forming three identical courtyards facing away from the square (Fig. 57). Behind this, towards east, we can see an area which would come to accommodate the residence of the viceroy and of the governor of Amara. The upper-class residences develop west of the square.

Proceeding south the “respect zone”, with the Abajale Takla Haymanot Church at its centre,⁴¹⁵ was to be left empty, conceived as a buffer zone between the Italian and indigenous zones. An area dedicated to indigenous artisanship is located at the start of the indigenous zone, starting from the southern end of the imperial compound. It is worth noting that often planning was not enacted in indigenous zones, but here Bosio is quite precise.⁴¹⁶ Starting from this point, the indigenous zone develops along a road flanked with a series of oblong buildings, which curve along the side streets and eventually lead to the circular square of the Saturday market. The side streets along the principal road led to the indigenous residential zone. This is ordered in strict grid systems which then develop into a radial pattern around the market square. Side roads delimit the pattern of single allotments with a tukul and a small garden, which are disposed in two rows facing each other for each street block. Within the indigenous zone we find the Abba Avesat, the indigenous ambulatory, the indigenous school, and just outside of it the Bahata, around which a small square is planned with an L-shaped building.⁴¹⁷ As Bosio drew up the plan, Ethiopians were living around and north of the imperial compound and they would be forced to abandon their homes to move to the new indigenous zone, where they would be employed to build new tukuls to reside in.⁴¹⁸ The indigenous zone is by far the most densely populated and its strictly geometric arrangement is simply put on the ground without too much consideration of the

⁴¹⁵ In the plan spelled as “Taclà Hamainot”, an historical church which was rebuilt several times after its first foundation and consecration in December 1682 by Iyasu I, Emperor of Ethiopia. Its vicinity to the imperial compound meant that the church was often used by emperors, which could reach it through a passageway connecting the two buildings. Chari 2015, p. 62.

⁴¹⁶ See Nunes Silva 2015, p. 9.

⁴¹⁷ Abbà Avesat in the plan seems to correspond to today’s mosque, whereas Bahata seems to refer to the Bata Lamariam Church, ባኢታ ለማርያም ቤተክርስቲያን.

⁴¹⁸ See Bosio 1939b, p. 373.

difference in altitude in the area. The indigenous zone is the southernmost end of the first macrozone which starts with the plan of the topographical office and then develops into the official residences, the imperial compound, *zona signorile* [upper-class zone], respect zone and finally the indigenous zone. Renzi sees some correspondence in the street network present in Gondar today to the pattern developed by Bosio.⁴¹⁹

Moving onto the second macrozone, it develops west of the zone planned by the topographical office beginning with a road leading to the hospital and then wraps around a hill.⁴²⁰ Single family homes are placed along the road, which then forks into smaller streets that organically follow the altitude difference. This zone represents the bulk of upper-middle-class residences. The rectangular lower-middle class zone is adjacent, with residential buildings for multiple families developed along a strict grid system. At its southern end, the Italian market is placed, whereas in the north the area dedicated to sports and a park is placed, adjacent to Fasilides' Baths (Fig. 58). The imperial Baths are the second archaeological site set to be conserved through the new planning of Gondar and north of them is another *zona signorile*. It is comprised of one street drawing the shape of an eight around two churches: the Qeha Eyesus orthodox church⁴²¹ and the Gondar Apostolic Church (pictured, but not named in the plan). Two roads at the north and south end of Fasilides' Baths cross the Kaà River westward and connect to the last macrozone of Bosio's plan. This last zone is by far the most elongated, reaching the Cusquam archaeological complex which is surrounded by further luxury residences (Fig. 59).⁴²² Proceeding southwards a small respect zone is also to be seen, which ushers in the working-class zone. It develops along two lines going south and is intersected by the industrial zone. The most western line is a combination of two parallel streets which are united several times by crossing streets with large residential buildings.

This plan was also never completely enacted, with the buildings built by Italian colonists in Gondar being based on plans without authors, mostly stemming from state offices. These buildings were the cinema (Fig. 60), the postal office (Fig. 61), the military command (Fig. 62), and some INCIS housing.⁴²³ What did remain consistent after the 1938 plan, however, was the establishment of the main government square adjacent to the imperial complex, with the fist castle being used as *casa del fascio*.⁴²⁴ The rallies and ceremonies that took place in this space "re-enacted the seizure of Ethiopia."⁴²⁵ The architectures built by Italian colonists proceeded along the Viale Re Imperatore, staging a parallel to

⁴¹⁹ See Renzi 2016, p. 172.

⁴²⁰ The Tigrè Macennà mountain at 2342 meter above sea-level, where also the military barracks were to be built.

⁴²¹ Caa Jesus in Bosio's plan, ቀሃ ቅዱስ ጳጳሱስ ቤተክርስቲያን.

⁴²² Qusquam, Kusquam.

⁴²³ Istituto nazionale per le case degli impiegati statali [national institute for housing of state employees]. For a short overview of public works in AOI, see Podestà 2013.

⁴²⁴ CTI 1938, p. 352.

⁴²⁵ Rifkind 2011, p. 498.

the Via dell'Impero in Rome.⁴²⁶ David Rifkind sees in the approach to architecture in Dessiè and Gondar a process of substitution and appropriation of important spatial elements (chiefly the castles and the intersection of existing regional roads) that are then re-framed within the language of fascist colonialism.⁴²⁷ Rifkind therefore reads a continuity of pre-colonial Ethiopia into the brief colonial period and then developing along those same lines once the Italian army left the colony in 1941. His interpretation, based on the consequent history of cities like Gondar and Dessiè, exposes the role of architectural press in perpetuating the construct of colonial architecture rising from a tabula rasa, by staging and editing of photographs.⁴²⁸ A re-appropriation also took place, as the intersection around which most Italian architecture still stands today – and still keeps the name of “piassa” – is now decorated with a statue of the Emperor Tewodros II (1818-1868, Emperor from 1855, Fig. 63). Rifkind's observation offers an alternative reading of the practices that were carried out in Gondar and other colonial cities, which are otherwise often read as a consequence of the lack of funds, capabilities, and materials that made first improbable, and then ultimately impossible for the Italian government to enact their urban development plans, and therefore reverted to an appropriative approach.

The town of Gondar according to the 1937 plan, though never approved or enacted, remains the most influential in the architectural discourse, given that it was reproduced in perspective drawings, general plans and even models. The plan was reported on by Bosio and in several magazines, with some of its material being shown at the 1937 exhibition *Italianische Städtebaukunst im faschistischen Regime* in Vienna's Secession in November and December 1937.⁴²⁹ The exhibition catalogue describes the climate of fibrillation amongst urban planners: “Italian urban planners are all mobilized to give concrete substance to the urban planning of East Africa, to create, in the empire that has returned to Rome, the perfect fascist cities.”⁴³⁰ The Gondar of the 1937 plans is the perfect fascist city. Developed on strict zoning based on function, class, and ethnicity, each zone represents a compartment that needs to be separated from the other, all the while being part of the same whole. In comparison with Sabaudia's urban structure and street network, which is very compact while still holding principles of radial towns, rationalism here defines the larger urban fabric, rather than just singular buildings, and is enacted through a rational division in nuclei. In its totality, the master plan sets out to define each aspect of life within this produced space, and, as we have seen, the fascist ideology, with its contradicting measures, goals, and means, trickles down onto every corner of this paper town. Spurring from the disgust for ornaments formalized by Adolf Loos, Italian colonial architecture arrives in 1937 at a point of complete transparency. The lack of any stylistic characteristic, of any signifiers that go beyond size and pure geometry, a mixture of separation and amalgamation that is praised by Loos as being suitable for the

⁴²⁶ See Rifkind 2015, p. 151.

⁴²⁷ See Rifkind 2015, p. 161.

⁴²⁸ Ibid.

⁴²⁹ Materials exhibited included: a model of the institutional zone, general master plan, zoning plan, street networks and perspective drawings.

⁴³⁰ Secession 1937, p. 60.

modern man results in urban designs like this. The lack of architectural language, its homogeneity, is praised and glorified because subordinated to the greater goal of functionality. Functionality – in contrast to international functionalism – in fascist colonialism comes to mean submission, obedience, austerity. The totalizing fascism spreads in architecture and is presented positively while being inherently negative. The negativity inherent in the process of rationalization of architecture takes on this functionality, able to be manipulated and filled with meanings and signifiers of dominance, masculinity, and dictatorship. The naked walls give the semblance of expression, and as perceived in distraction, become conducive to delineating the habits of the fascist new man.

In reconstructing the programme of the Gruppo 7, we have come to a revised syllogism from what Rogers formulated in explaining the participation of modernist architects in the fascist regime. From the connection being the revolutionary character of both fascism and modernist architecture, we have shifted into their correlation being their lack or a program. Fascism flaunted their non-programmatic nature repeatedly and made it its selling point, and rationalists were also unwilling to put stylistic parameters to their architecture, while still providing some programmatic points, such as their conviction in what later would become typology, their goal of following rationality and functionality through a focus on geometry and simple forms. At its crux, here is the fundamental movement that happens in the relationship between modernist architecture and fascism. It is a symbiotic relationship where each respective lack gets filled in with what the other instead can provide. In a non-programmatic fascism, architecture comes in to fill its program, while in a non-programmatic architecture, fascism comes in to fill its program. Each looks for the other in fulfilling the void that is inherently present in their form. So, fascism uses architecture to signal their productivity, strength, and commitment, while architecture does the same thing in using fascism as the vessel for the justification of its existence. As many studies have shown, the non-programmatic nature of the fascist government in Italy was also due to the balance of power that needed to be always maintained for Mussolini to stay in power. We see this also in the architecture, for every project based on anti-urbanism and rurality, others were also planned for urban renewal in the historical city centres and methods and goals often were in a relationship of “dyscrasia”, as Corni calls it.⁴³¹ This bad mixture, this coming-together of contraposing stances and interests shows that the regime could not act autonomously, but rather was in a constant bargaining process with other power structures that laid outside of it, such as the threat of a proletarian uprising and the influence of the financial capital.

Corni points out that in the German counterpart of the ruralisation movement in the figure of Darré, we see a nostalgia.⁴³² Rather than a nostalgia, in Italy we find a process of constant confrontation with tradition, in architecture, as well as in literature, philosophy, and politics. Every time, tradition takes a new shape through its inextricable connection to the present context of remembering. During

⁴³¹ Corni 2003, p. 118.

⁴³² See *ibid.*

fascism there is a process of “re-memorization”⁴³³ where the past needs to be constructed to fit within the framework of fascist ideology. Fascism’s relationship to history is ambivalent because at once it represents itself as a break from it and at the same time as the very destination of history itself: as Giovanni Gentile puts it “fascism is a revolution, but it is also a recovery of all essential traditions.”⁴³⁴ The only nostalgia is one reflected within fascism, namely the nostalgia for the times of squadristo, of fascism as described in the negative, as anti-party, anti-state, anti-libertarian, and anti-institutional. Whereas the connection to the past is, according to Zunino, a necessity for survival, rather than a desire; the desire within fascism is instead one of returning to a time before the institutionalization of fascism.⁴³⁵

De Felice writes about the idea of a “third time” approaching around the start of the 1930s.⁴³⁶ As the regime seemed to be in complete stability and it was impossible to conceive of its demise, the more radical of the fascists wanted a “third time” to come, when the real fascist revolution could be enacted. This eschatological impulse showed the desire to be once and for all free from the constraints of institutions and economic hegemonies in determining the course of the regime, of totalizing totalitarianism. In 1937’s *Gondar* this eschatological impulse, which according to Griffin is what unites all fascisms, or rather its palingenetic nationalism, which through the conceptualization of a state religion presents eschatological and messianic features, comes to the fore, as this town was constructed for a third time (the imperial phase of fascism), in a third space (the colonial space between urban and rural of the garden city) and in a third way (corporativism, between capitalism and communism). Especially in terms of time and space – as corporativism championed by Bottai had been steadily declining in credibility – the forms of *Gondar* reflect this deep detachment from what can be understood as real space and time. As Fernando Esposito points out, the “narrative of eternity and dynamism”⁴³⁷ makes for a present defined by an eternal past and a constantly moving future, a present that is in a state of constant unresolvedness, that looks back in disappointment and forward in hope, but that fundamentally, is emptied out by the magnitude of both concepts. Diane Ghirardo and Kurt Forster also point out that in fascist space, the present is emptied.⁴³⁸ The tensions spurred by the mythological past represented through style and the promise of a future through the implementation of modern forms imbued with the irrational longing for an almost messianic future where the sacrifice will be repaid, the present is a constant state of transition, an empty signifier, a long-lasting crisis and void, which is reflected in the space as well. This third space is characterized by its non-spatiality as time is characterized by its non-temporality, it is a space of waiting, a liminal space between the past and the

⁴³³ Zunino 1985, p. 66.

⁴³⁴ G. Gentile 1936, p. 360. See also Griffin 2008, p. 21-22. He relies on Benjamin 2006d, p. 395.

⁴³⁵ See Zunino 1985, p. 69.

⁴³⁶ See Zunino 1985, p. 123 and De Felice 1974, p. 9.

⁴³⁷ Esposito 2014, p. 56.

⁴³⁸ See Ghirardo/Forster 1985, p. 632.

future, while at the same time being the space of the “permanent revolution” that Bottai advocated for.⁴³⁹

All of this emptiness is inscribed within the architecture in its manifestation as blank walls and elemental geometry, its de-contextualization is so appealing and easy because it actively rejects context, given that it moves above time, rather than through it. The network of garden cities that make up Gondar, each nucleus being provided with schools and parishes, represents the compromise between urbanity and rurality that according to von Henneberg was emerging as a challenge for urban planners, who in the 1920s were distinctly defined by their urbanity.⁴⁴⁰ Bosio’s plans, observed within a larger transnational context of colonial planning, show that indeed the garden city found resonance in Italy, but only in its use as enactor of social division. Von Henneberg posits that differentiating between rural and urban space was not important for fascist urban planning, given that their goal was to “control both.”⁴⁴¹ In the planning of Gondar this comes to the fore, as its structure is the result of a compromise between urban and rural, which, just as the compromise between past and future and between capitalism and communism, ultimately is just a “specchietto per le allodole” – a trick mirror – that is then easily manipulated because of its lack of grounding. Fascist ideology is a trick-mirror, that, nonetheless, “always works.”⁴⁴²

vii. Reception and legacy

With his work in Ethiopia, Bosio was able to champion for the creation of a central office for urban planning that would oversee on a national scale the urban development following fixed principles and ideas. Bosio met Mussolini on 15 April 1938 as the experience in Albania had just started and was able to convince the dictator to establish a central institution with the goal of determining a unified urban planning strategy for the whole nation and its colonies.⁴⁴³ As pointed out before, the plans for the cities in Ethiopia never came to fruition, but upon his return to Italy, Bosio could use his experience in AOI to receive the commission of designing Tirana (Fig. 64). In AEGB documents are conserved dating after the end of Italian occupation of Ethiopia asking for copies of the Gondar master plan in order to enact it. After the experience in Tirana, which was also completed after Bosio’s and Italian presence in Albania, Bosio was diagnosed with cancer and died in 1941, aged thirty-eight. He was survived by his daughters and his wife, who would contact the Ministry of the Colonies several times to receive compensation for her husband’s work – which never happened. She is said to have continued his activity as interior designer.⁴⁴⁴

⁴³⁹ Bottai 1926.

⁴⁴⁰ See von Henneberg 1996, p. 335.

⁴⁴¹ Von Henneberg 1996, p. 340.

⁴⁴² Bandinelli 1962, p. 69.

⁴⁴³ See Renzi 2016, p. 46. Bosio 1938b is a copy of the report Bosio gave Mussolini; very similar texts also appear in several newspapers.

⁴⁴⁴ Personal conversation with Marie Lou Busi.

On the colonial front, in 1938 and 1939 there were still projects of further expansion. Bottai writes of a Grand Council meeting at end of November 1938, where plans were laid out for the conquest of Albania, balancing German penetration from Durazzo to Istanbul, Tunisia and Corsica, Djibouti, and even Switzerland.⁴⁴⁵ In February 1939 Mussolini talks of breaking into the Indian and Atlantic Ocean through Tunisi, Djibouti and the Suez Canal.⁴⁴⁶ In a diary entry of General Galeazzo Ciano from July 1938, he writes of a “third wave” starting in October 1938, when Mussolini wanted to establish concentration camps and the burning of books, saying that “the revolution must start to affect the comportment of Italians. They must learn to be less tender-hearted, to become hard, implacable, hateful. That is to say, masters.”⁴⁴⁷ The colonial occupation of Ethiopia stoked anti-imperialist sentiments worldwide, with members of the Italian resistance and communist party establishing transnational alliances with anticolonial activists,⁴⁴⁸ while on the other hand, Nazi’s fantasies of reconquering the colonial territories in central Africa and Asia were awakened by Mussolini’s aggressions and his apartheid policy.⁴⁴⁹

In “Fascinating Fascism”, Susan Sontag analyses two types of fascist cultural object. She considers on one hand the works of Leni Riefenstahl – the director most famous for her film *Olympia*, documenting the 1934 Olympic Games held in Berlin –, more specifically how the public received her works after the war, and a book of Nazi Regalia, which she reads as sexually-laden as she describes the garments photographed with an overtly erotic language.⁴⁵⁰ In her analysis, she is pointing out something that still preoccupies the contemporary subject when confronted with cultural objects of the Nazi and fascist era. The difference between Nazism and fascism is to be felt in Sontag's essay, as well. From a pure aesthetic perspective, there just is not as much morbid appreciation for fascist military garments, no magazine being sold at airports or obscure subculture (re)appropriating the fascist man as an object of desire. The aesthetics of the fascist regime was not so much to be seen on the men, but rather, in the built landscape. Fascist architecture is the equivalent of the Nazi Regalia, and the fascination with the latter that Sontag describes, is like the one felt towards the buildings of the Italian fascist regime. Nonetheless, there is a difference between the two categories. The fascination with the military uniform is linked directly to the fear that these uniforms awake in the observer: war, destruction and hurt are written all over them; a constant reminder of death, their subversive erotic use touches directly on the relationship of Eros and Thanatos. On the other hand, built complexes such as EUR42 in Rome (Fig. 18), monumental as they are, do not present such a direct confrontation with the destruction that was inherent in their construction. A building doesn't shoot bullets, doesn't deport victims, doesn't threaten your life. At least, not directly. Whereas the enchantment of the uniform is kept hidden, in the underbelly

⁴⁴⁵ See Bottai 2001, entry for 30 November 1938.

⁴⁴⁶ See *Il Popolo d'Italia* 1939.

⁴⁴⁷ Ciano 1996, entry for 10 July 1938, translated by Alexander De Grand, cited in De Grand 2004, p. 137-138.

⁴⁴⁸ See Srivastava 2018.

⁴⁴⁹ See Bernhard 2013.

⁴⁵⁰ See Sontag 1975.

of society and only visible through kitsch objects such as the magazine analysed by Sontag, the fascination with fascist architecture is overt, often expressed with little hesitation, regardless of political stance. Why are aesthetic statements easier to articulate beyond the moral in architecture than in other media? The words on a page jump out at the reader as racist, fascist, immoral. Is the linguistic turn to be blamed or credited for this? Within the triangular structure of significance, the written word has a meaning defined by social convention and consequently the social conventions imbue the words with the fascist connotation that the reader cannot help but notice. How does this change in architecture? What is at stake in looking at architectural elements as signifiers? Looking at Benjamin's praise of modern architecture of glass and metal as being traceless and thus not imposing of habits, this can be applied to fascist architecture, too. How can meaning be fostered without traces? Is not meaning nothing but a trace being retraced again and again? Every meaning is inherently historical because it relies on repetition for its meaning to emerge. When a child learns to speak, that is, aligning sounds to meaning, it is by repetition that this skill is acquired. When first learning a new word, one uses reference points within the sentence to gain a relative understanding, and eventually through different relations, the use of the same word/sound in different sentences, the meaning of the single word emerges. What happens if our mind is made of glass and metal – like modern architecture, without the chance to shape our environment – and there is no way for us to retain the past reference points to come to an understanding of the meaning of the single word? The rehabilitation of rationalism initiated by Aldo Rossi and the different exhibitions of the 1970s around rationalist architecture strip history and ideology away from the architecture done under the regime, an act that Rossi justifies because the problems of architecture and urban planning have not changed since rationalism's inception, is justified by a formal and materialistic purity within rationalism that could allow for a "de-historicization"⁴⁵¹ of the buildings of the 1920s and 1930s. What is forgotten in the process is how inextricably bound to the present Gruppo 7 was, as Pfammatter points out. This is because the negative space and temporality created by these architectures make them easily appropriable and manipulated, because they are traceless. In re-evaluating them, one returns to the perception of one's own annihilation as entertainment.⁴⁵²

The rehabilitation of rationalism also hinges on the demonization of monumentalism. Monumentalism is described by Cesare De Seta as emerging out of fascism, whereas rationalism is born outside of the regime but "lives and grows" within it.⁴⁵³ Whereas monumentalism should not survive fascism, post-fascist rationalism can exist and is the result of a process of returning to its very beginning and re-enacting its growth outside of the framework of fascism.⁴⁵⁴ At its crux, this is the process which allowed for a consideration of the ideas of rationalism in a post-fascist society. Rationalism without fascism is progressive in its bourgeoisie ideas and forms. Ultimately, the lack of determination on the

⁴⁵¹ Pfammatter 2005, p. 31.

⁴⁵² See Benjamin 2008, p. 42.

⁴⁵³ De Seta 1976, p. 8.

⁴⁵⁴ See De Seta 1976, p. 10

part of the regime to restrict the lines of its dominion on the built form, allowed for rationalists to move in a space that was European, rather than Italo-fascist.⁴⁵⁵ The rehabilitation of rationalism was on one hand based on the idea that rationalism was in the latter part of the regime abandoned in favour of monumentalism and this was seen by many architectural historians as proof that as a modernist movement, it could not really represent fascism. Therefore, by its failure to truly establish itself, its antifascist potential was underlined, and in the same breath, its quality. Only bad architecture could serve a dictatorship, and monumentalism was just that. Within this understanding, low-quality architecture was fascist, and high-quality was antifascist.⁴⁵⁶ This rehabilitation was also reflected in the continuity of many architects with prestigious teaching positions after the end of the Second World War.⁴⁵⁷ Many buildings planned during the regime were built by the succeeding Democrazia Cristiana administration, for instance in Rome the completion of EUR42 for the 1960 summer Olympics and Palazzo Littorio, completed by Del Debbio – who also designed Foro Mussolini (today Foro Italico) and Stazione Termini.⁴⁵⁸ But maybe most importantly of all, rationalist architecture was on the very same quest that motivated architectural discourse in the global north. The questions, doubts and contradictions that characterized the conceptualization of space in the first decades of the 20th century present themselves regardless of nationality and are mostly resolved by the same form.

viii. Outlook

The analysis of the 1937 plans for Gondar as material anchorage is useful in understanding the relationship between space and fascism, which in the colonial context take on even more totalitarian meanings. The symbiotic relationship between architecture and the fascist regime reveals that both were characterized by a negativity which the other compensated for, and in this process created the conditions of the representation of each other within a new conceptualization of time, space, and politics. Fascist space is totalizing in its homogeneity, order and purported transparency, whose emancipatory potential, observed by Benjamin, is however annihilated, given that the transparent life in fascism is one which crystallizes the individual into an image. The overwhelming of the sensory apparatus described by Benjamin as being the result of modern capitalism, in fascism is resolved through a negation of the senses and of the body, which loses all materiality in its becoming-image.

Ultimately, in showing the integration of the ideology of fascism within the images of the perfect city of Gondar, the potential of urban design and architecture becomes clear. At the same time, we understand that the need for interdisciplinary practices is crucial for the production of a space that cannot be so easily manipulated, or even be used for the perpetuation of discrimination. Urban elements

⁴⁵⁵ See De Seta 1976, p. 11.

⁴⁵⁶ See Spiegel 2015, p. 54. Architectural historians representing these views were Leonardo Benevolo, Bruno Zevi, Giulio Carlo Argan.

⁴⁵⁷ Ulrich Pfammatter mentions Libera in Florence (1952-1955) and Rome (1962-1963), Nervi at the University of Rome from 1948, and Saverio Muratori from 1953-1973 in Rome. See Pfammatter 2005, p. 31.

⁴⁵⁸ Ibid.

such as the green belts of the colonial garden city can become highways gutting entire neighbourhoods, function-based zoning can lead to food deserts, the crystallization of the individual and private property could be blamed for the eroding of communities, the lack of ornament leads to the pervasive anonymity of most new builds in our cities.

Appendix

List of abbreviations

- AEGB: Archivio Eredi Gherardo Bosio, Archive of Gherardo Bosio, Pelago (FI), Italy.
- AOI: Africa Orientale Italiana, Italian East Africa. Established on 9 May 1936 with the declaration of Empire, it was de facto defunct in 1941, but its end was formalised with the Paris Peace Treaties in 1947.
- ONC: Opera Nazionale Combattenti, organisation established after the demise in Caporetto in 1917 to assist First World War veterans in adapting to civilian life, it was dissolved in 1977.
- PNF: Partito Nazionale Fascista, National Fascist Party.
- U.OO.PP.: Ufficio Opere Pubbliche, public works offices were regionally present and responsible for the managing of public works.

Overview of Italian terms with translation

- Adunata/adunate: mandatory meeting of members of a political, military or paramilitary organisation for a specific reason.
- Battaglia del grano: battle for wheat. Propaganda campaign started by Mussolini in 1925 with the goal of producing more wheat nationally in order to stop Italy's heavy reliance on foreign imports.
- Bienno Rosso: Period of two years from 1918-1920 that saw numerous occupations of factories and latifundia by socialists and communists throughout Italy, inspired by the Bolshevik Revolution.
- Bonifica/legge della bonifica integrale: land melioration of marshlands throughout Italy with goals of relocation of unemployed populations, dispossessed farmers, but also the eradication of malaria. The project was initially privately organised in consortia but was then taken over by ONC.
- Casa del Fascio: house of fasces, they represented the local headquarters of PNF.
- Cinegiornali: newsreels shown in cinemas before every projection.
- Circolo Ufficiali: clubhouse of military personnel, mostly higher rank, it offered infrastructure for leisure, a canteen, and fundraising events like balls.
- Città di Fondazione: planned cities, during fascist twelve were built in Italy. They are: Mussolinia (Arborea), 1928; Littoria (Latina), 1932; Sabaudia, 1934; Pontinia, 1935; Guidonia, 1935; Fertilia, 1936; Aprilia 1936, Arsia (Croatia), 1937; Carbonia, 1938; Torviscosa (technically a company town, built by SNIA Viscosa), 1938; Pomezia, 1938; Pozzo Littorio (Croatia, Pidalbona/Podlabin) 1940.
- Covo: lair, term used to designate the first office of the *Popolo d'Italia* in Milan.
- Fasci Italiani di Combattimento: Italian Fascist Fasces, the first organised movement founded by Mussolini in 1919, the first members are referred to as diciannovisti and sansepolcristi (from the year and the place of the founding meeting, in Piazza San Sepolcro in Milan on 23 March 1919). It was an anti-party that was organised in local fasci following a militarised conception of life and involved in suppressing socialist sentiments. The Fasci di Combattimento were then followed by the Partito Nazionale Fascista in 1921.
- Genio Militare: military engineering office responsible for the first infrastructures in the colonies.
- Governatore/Governatorato: AOI was administrated by the Viceroy/Governatore Generale and was divided in the governorati of Somalia, Eritrea, Scioa, Harar, Galla and Sidama and Amara. Other governorati were Rome, Dalmazia, Dodecaneso Italiano. Libya, on the other hand, was organised in commisariati provinciali.
- Gran Consiglio del Fascismo: the Grand Council of Fascism met for the first time on 15 December 1922, its headquarters were Palazzo Venezia in Rome. Starting as central body of the PNF, it eventually became the single most powerful institution of the Italian government and was responsible for the eventual vote of no confidence against Mussolini, which led to his arrest in 1943.

Milizia Volontaria per la Sicurezza Nazionale: institutionalised version of squadristo. Militant fascists that were eventually integrated into the state, they were organised following Roman models, in squads and legions.

Ministero delle colonie/Ministero dell’Africa Italiana: Ministry responsible for the administration of the colonies, specifically in Africa.

Paese: village.

Piazza del fascio: fasces square, toponym most often used for the square where the Casa del Fascio was placed.

Podesteria/podestà: terms introduced to refer to the new head of local administration during fascism and the headquarters of their offices. Podestà were not elected and substituted the function of mayors in most Italian cities and in the colonies.

Prefetto: prefect. Figure introduced as provinces were suppressed to manage local bureaucracy and enact centralisation of the executive.

Sacrario: memorial used for fallen military, remembering their sacrifice for the nation. One of the most iconic sacrari is in Redipuglia, where more than 100.000 fallen soldiers of the First World War are buried in a monumental stairway covering the side of a hill; it was inaugurated by Mussolini in September 1938 and designed by Giannino Castiglioni and Giovanni Greppi.

Squadristo: phenomenon developed after the First World War of armed men with the goal of suppressing political dissent. Some members were from the Arditi and were characterised by their brutality and illegality. State police never provided enough resistance, thus allowing them to foster an environment of turmoil.

Strapaese: ultra-village. Fascist literary and cultural movement that saw its origins in the mid-1920s and found its counterpart in the stracittà (ultra-city). Most important voices were Mino Maccari, Leo Longanesi, Curzio Malaparte. They advocated to a return to the land as a way of reinstating moral fortitude, the importance of traditions and nationalism. Their magazines were *Il Selvaggio* and *L’Italiano*.

Tribunale: courthouse.

Ventennio: two decades of fascist government and regime in Italy.

Viali di rappresentanza: representative avenues. Term used by Bosio to refer to the two avenues at the centre of Gondar’s institutional district. They are representative because they were planned to host local offices of most para-statal offices as well as private companies, furthermore, they were planned to be used for parades, motorcades, and other representative occasions.

Zona estensiva: upper-middle class residential zone.

Zona intensiva: lower-middle-class residential zone. Eventually in the 1938 plan, Bosio will introduce a further class separation with a labourers-zone.

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- Fig. 38: Emeroteca Biblioteca nazionale centrale di Roma, url: http://digitale.bnc.roma.sbn.it/tecadigitale/giornale/TO00182016/1930/unico?paginateDetail_pageNum=4 (accessed 13 August 2023).
- Fig. 39: Renzi 2016, p. 173.
- Fig. 40: Archivio Luigi Piccinato, url: <https://www.archivioluigipiccinato.it/?p=2059> (accessed 14 August 2023).
- Fig. 41: Renzi 2016, p. 180.
- Fig. 42: Howard 2010, public domain, via Wikipedia Commons, url: <https://upload.wikimedia.org/wikipedia/commons/5/55/Howard-three-magnets.png> (accessed 14 August 2023).
- Fig. 43: Wellcome Collection, London, via ARTstor, url: <https://library.artstor.org/asset/24796733> (accessed 14 August 2023).
- Fig. 44: Amanda Rees, “Nineteenth-century planned industrial communities and the role of aesthetics in spatial practices: the visual ideologies of Pullman and Port Sunlight”, in: *Journal of Cultural Geography*, Vol. 29 No. 2, 2012, 185-214, DOI: 10.1080/08873631.2012.680816 (accessed 14 August 2023), p. 205.
- Fig. 45: Ernst-May-Gesellschaft e.v., url: <https://ernst-may-gesellschaft.de/wohnsiedlungen/roemerstadt> (accessed 14 August 2023).
- Fig. 46: Skot Weidemann. Frank Lloyd Wright Foundation, url: <https://franklloydwright.org/reading-broadacre/> (accessed 14 August 2023).
- Fig. 47: Renzi 2016, p. 172.
- Fig. 48: Archivio Luce, url: <https://patrimonio.archivioluce.com/luce-web/detail/IL0600010017/8/tucul-due-bambini-nella-campagna-etiopica.html?indexPhoto=0> (accessed 14 August 2023).
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- Fig. 50: Alain Sinou, “The ‘plateau’ in West African, French-speaking colonial towns: between garden and city”, in: Liora Bigon/Yossi Katz (eds.), *Garden Cities and Colonial Planning. Transnationality and Urban Ideas in Africa and Palestine*, Manchester: Manchester University Press, 2014, url: <https://search-ebshost-com.uaccess.univie.ac.at/login.aspx?direct=true&db=nlebk&AN=1272983&site=ehost-live> (accessed August 14, 2023), p. 76.
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- Fig. 53: Renzi 2016, p. 151.
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- Fig. 55: Rifkind 2011, p. 503.
- Fig. 56: Renzi 2016, p. 153.
- Fig. 57: Renzi 2016, p. 158.
- Fig. 58: Bernhard Gagnon via Wikipedia Commons, url: https://commons.wikimedia.org/wiki/File:Fasilides_Bath_03.jpg#/media/File:Fasilides_Bath_03.jpg (accessed 14 August 2023).

Fig. 59: Chiari 2015, p. 93.

Fig. 60: Rifkind 2011, p. 502.

Fig. 61: Rifkind 2011, p. 496.

Fig. 62: Rifkind 2011, p. 499.

Fig. 63: Neil McAllister / Alamy Stock Photo url: <https://www.alamy.com/ethiopia-amhara-region-gondar-piazza-statue-of-emperor-atse-tewodros-ii-image335747537.html> (accessed 14 August 2023). Also published in: Mulatu Wubneh, Planning for Cities in Crisis. Lessons from Gondar, Ethiopia, Cham: Springer, 2023, p. 173.

Fig. 64: Bodenschatz 2011, p. 389.

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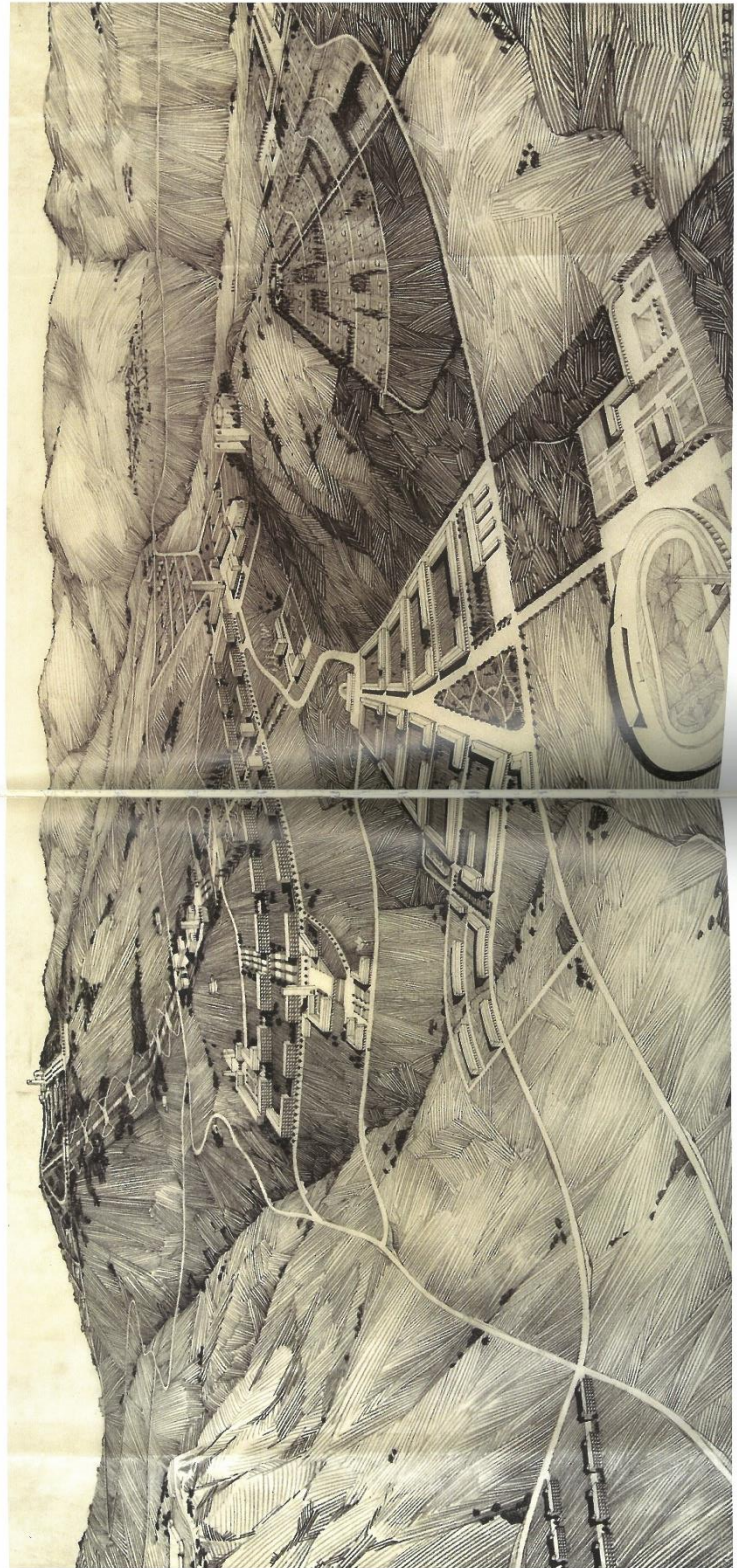


Figure 1: Gherardo Bosio, Master plan for Gondar, bird's eye view toward North-West, 1937, pencil on tracing paper, AEGB. Published for the first time in *Popolo d'Italia*, 12 May 1937.

⁴⁵⁹ For reasons of conservation, materials from AEGB could only be consulted as digital scans. Techniques of some material stem from Ulisse Tramonti (ed.), *Architettura e urbanistica nelle terre d'oltremare. Dodecaneso, Etiopia, Albania (1924-1943)*, (exhib. cat. Associazione ATRIUM/Comune di Forlì, Forlì 2017), Bologna: Bononia University Press, 2017. Sizes are not mentioned in secondary literature and, as they could not be verified, are left out.

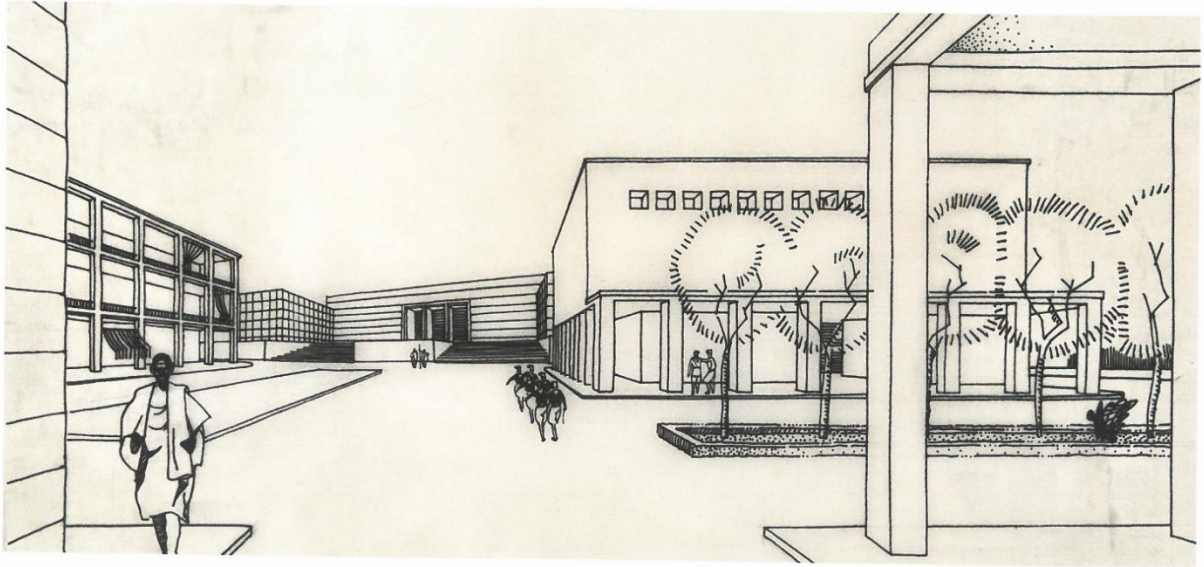


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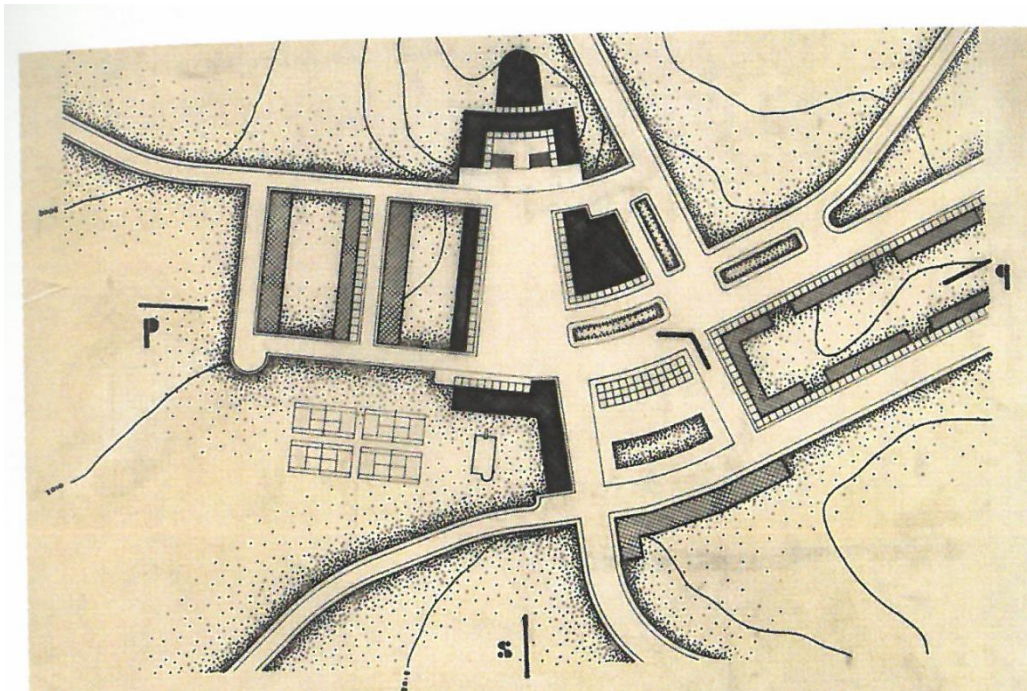


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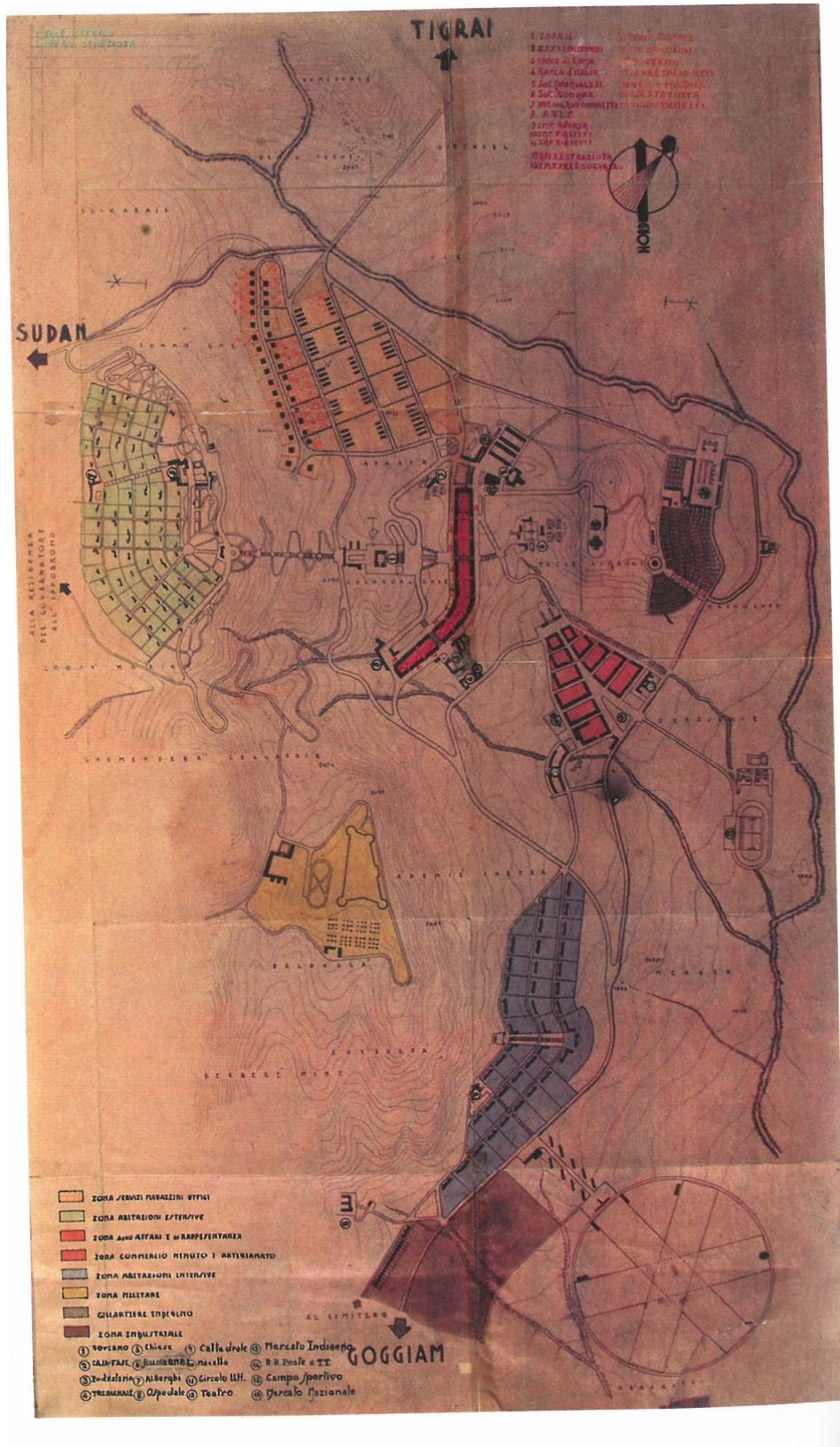


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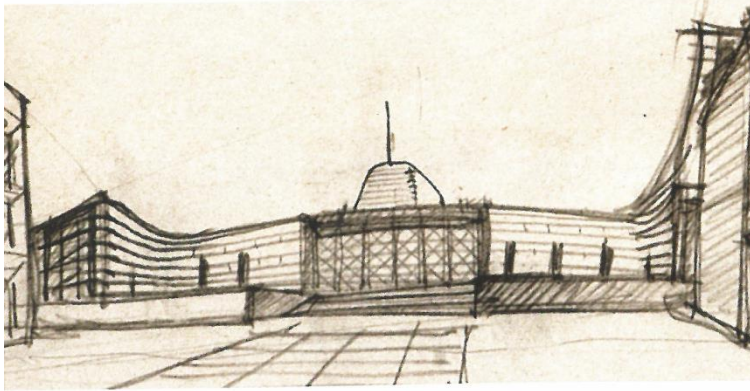


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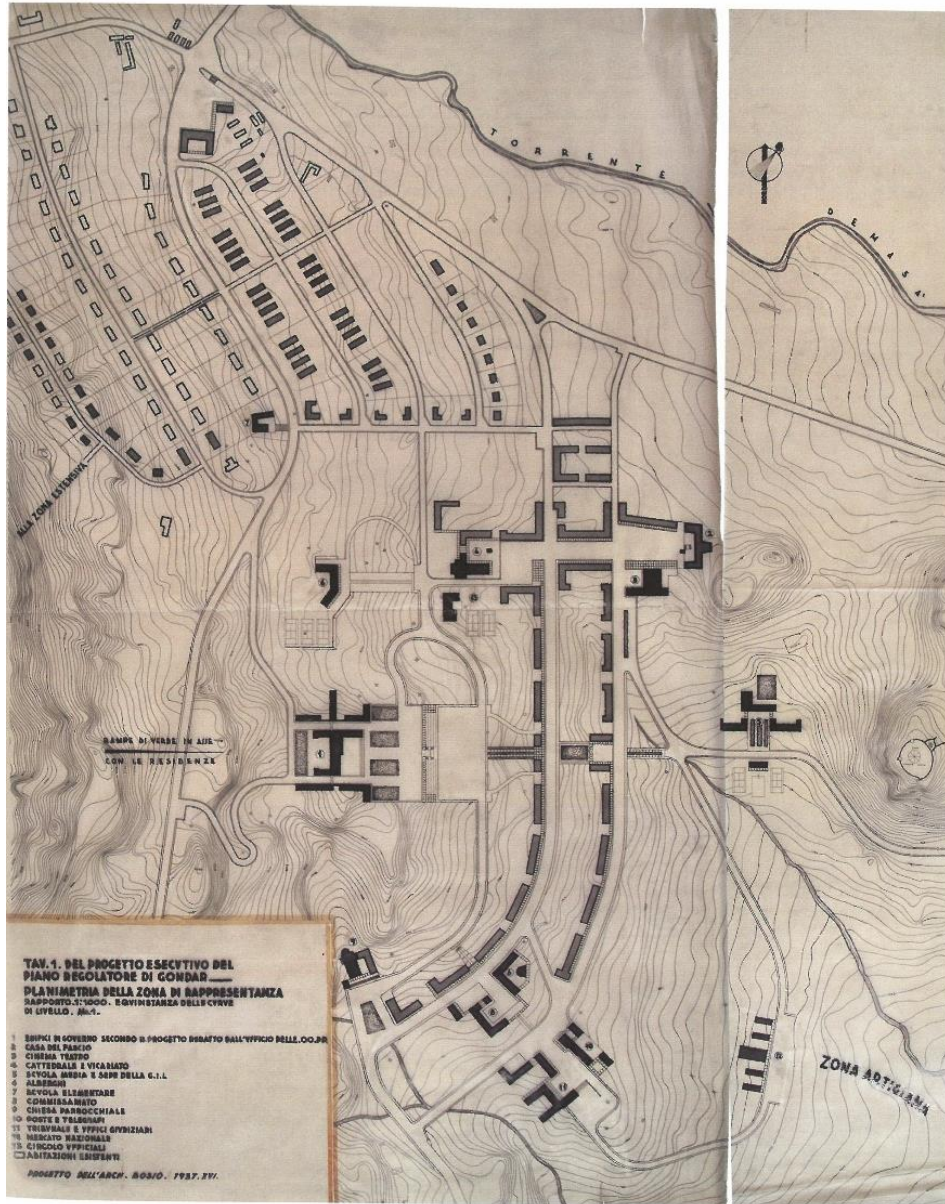


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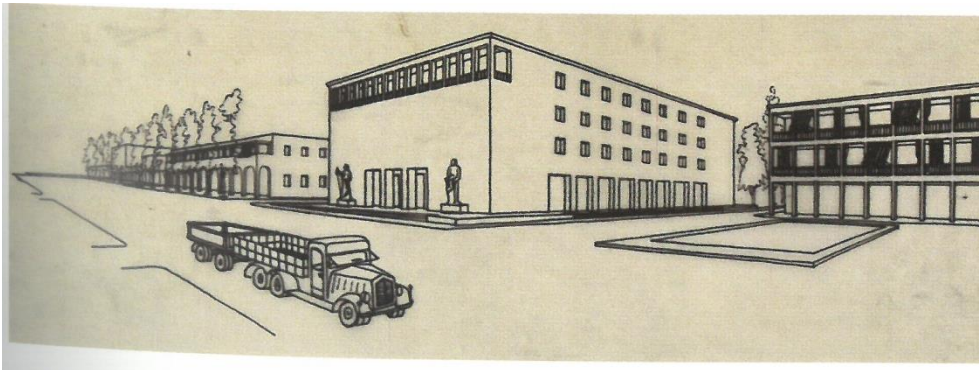


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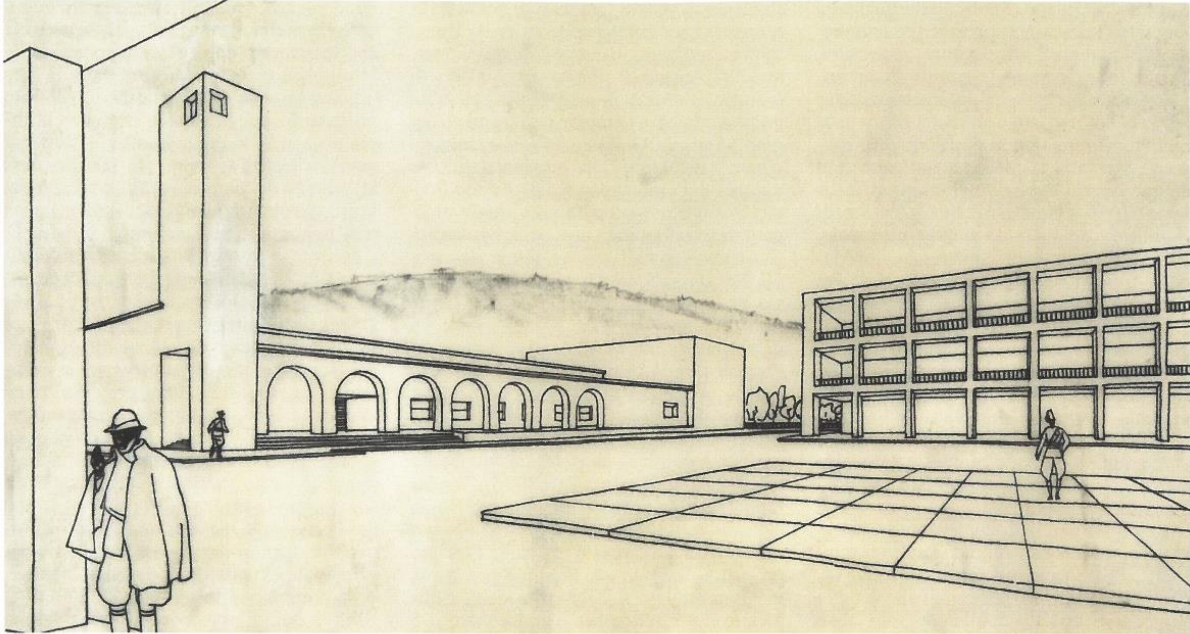


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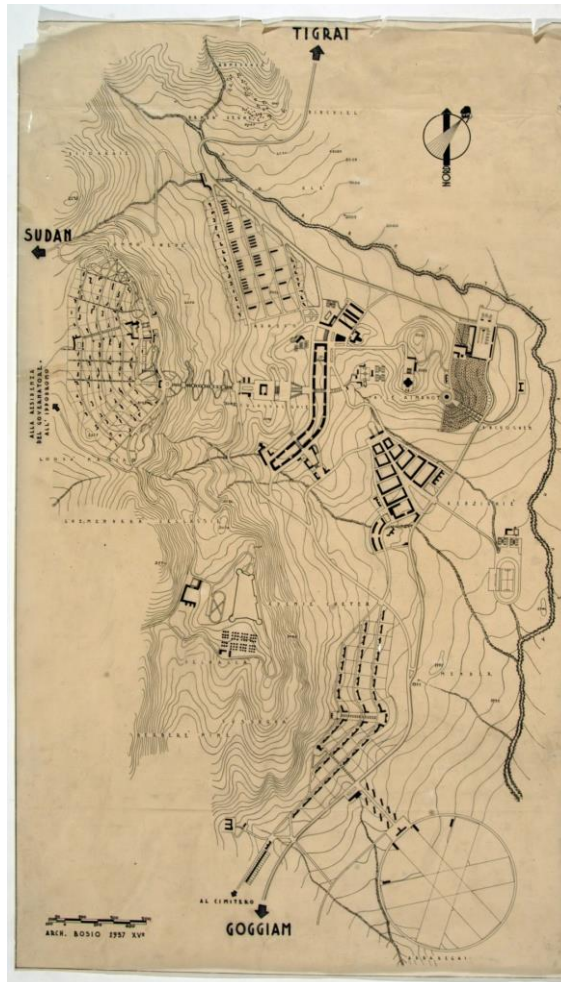


Figure 13: Gherardo Bosio, General master plan of Gondar, 1937, pencil on heliography (?), AEGB.

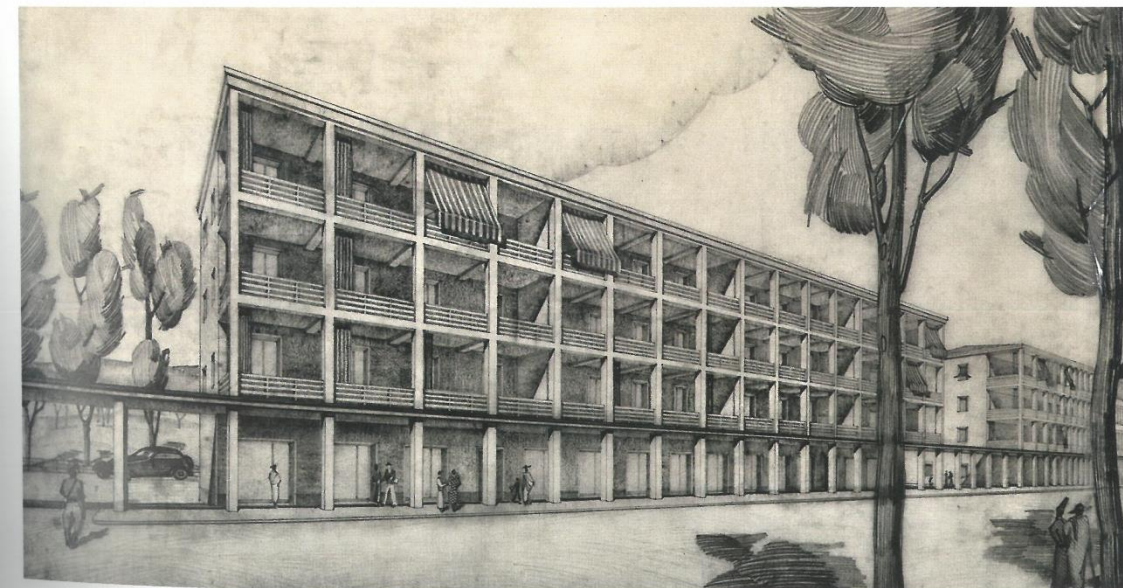


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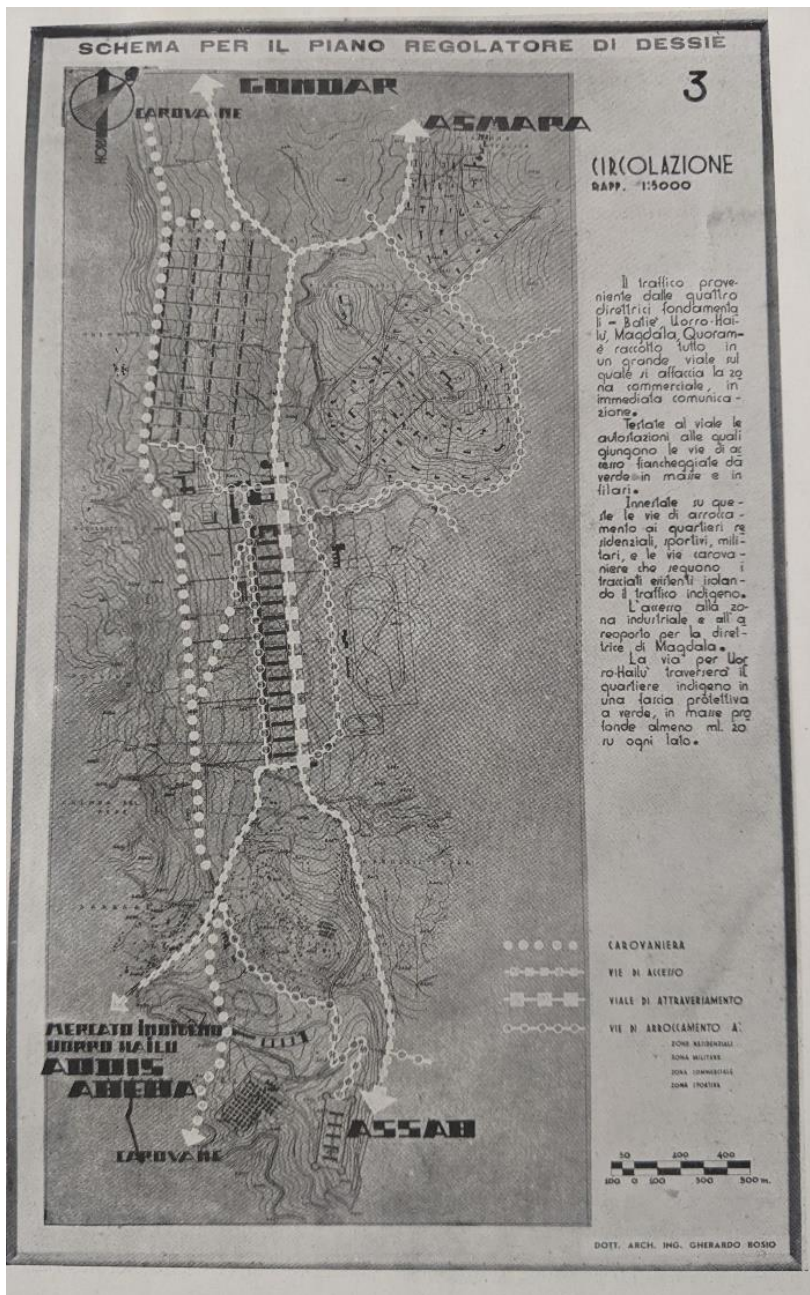
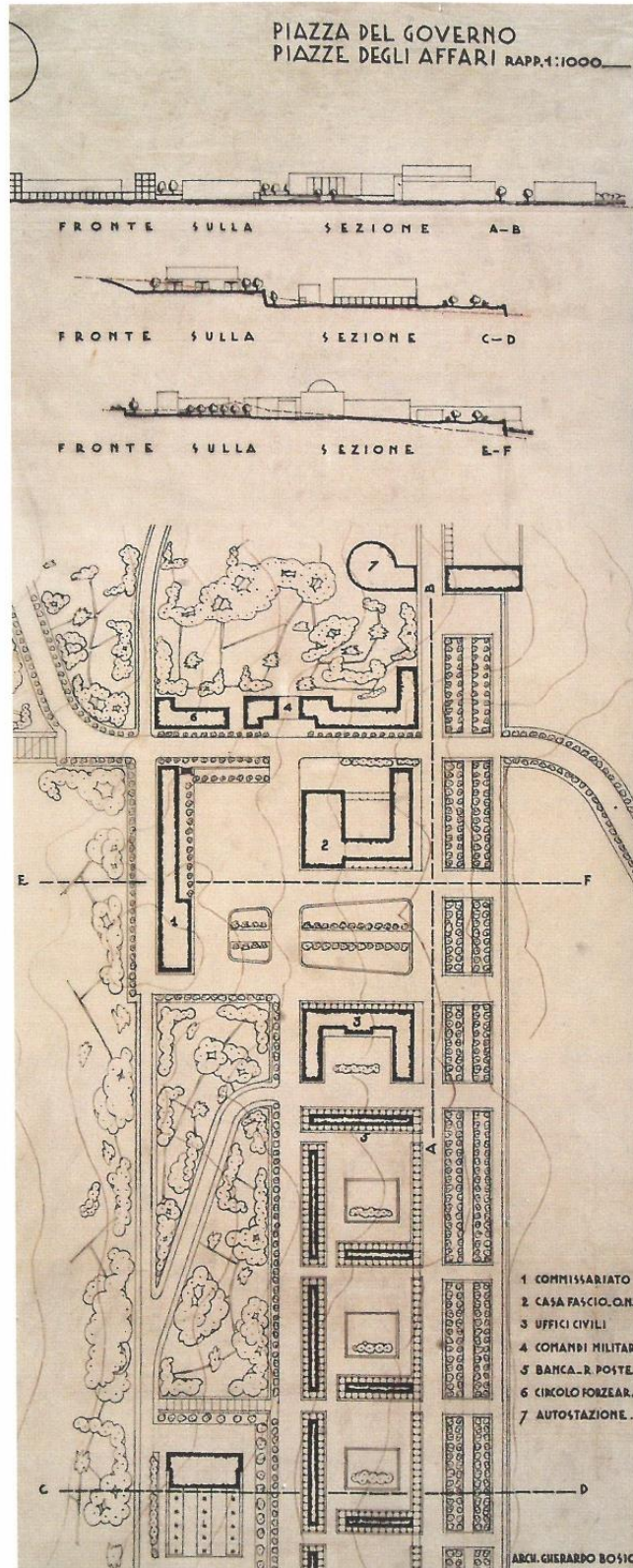


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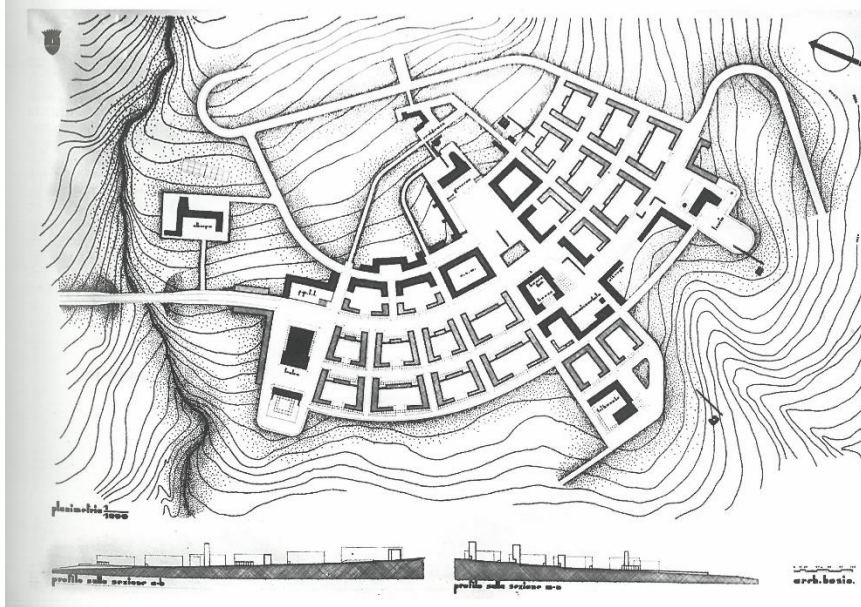


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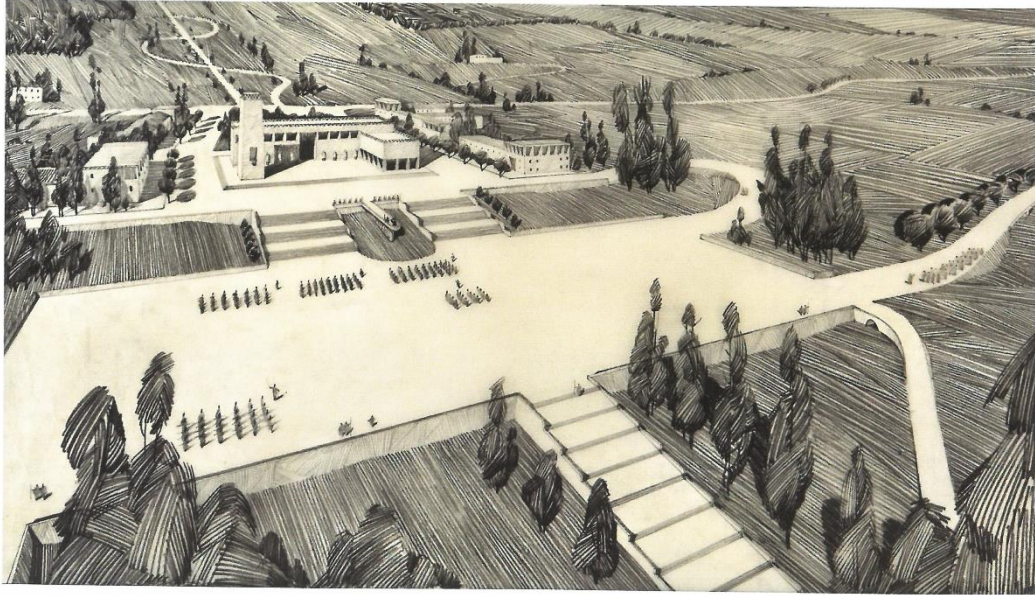


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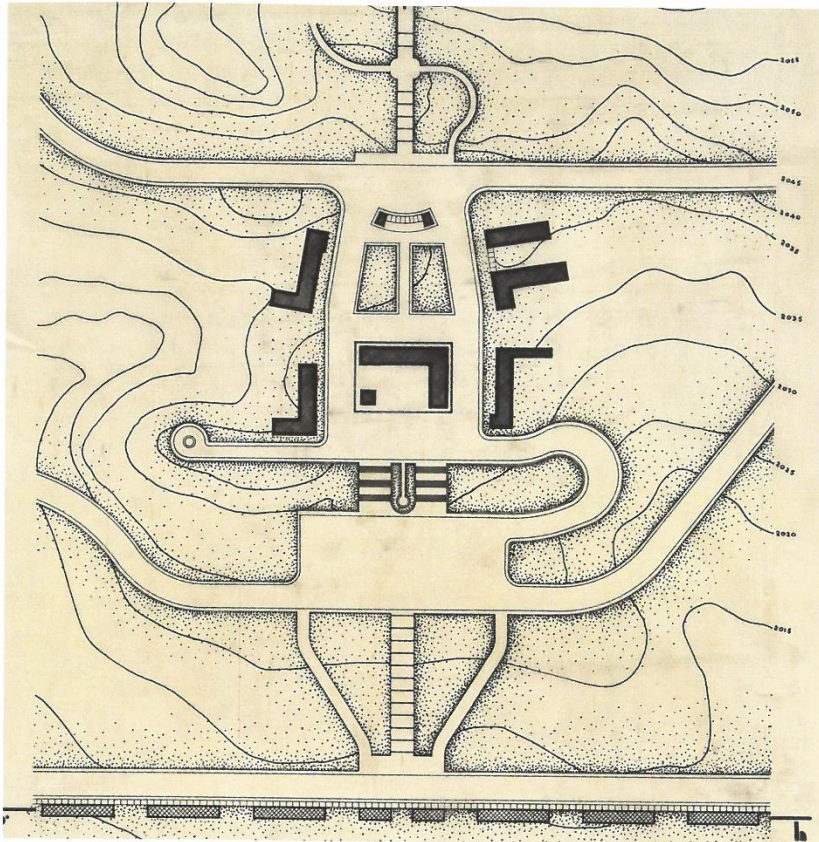


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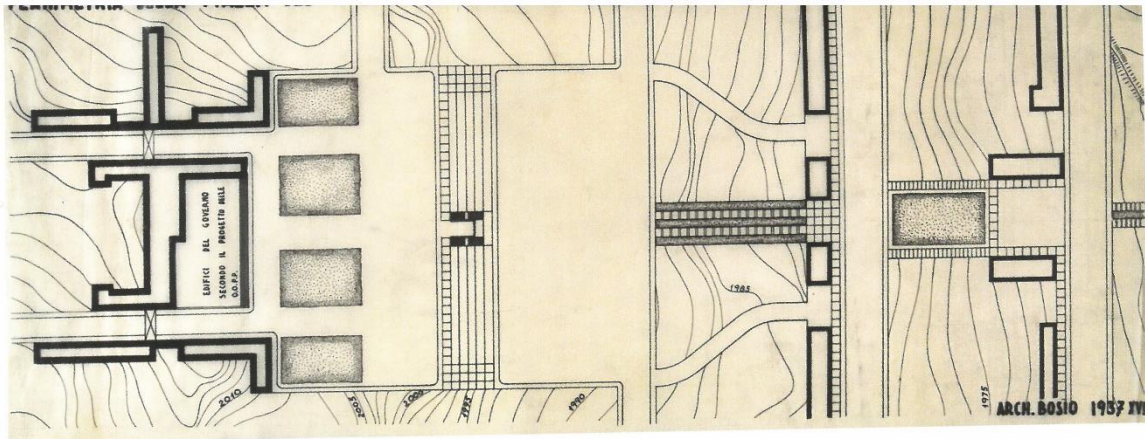


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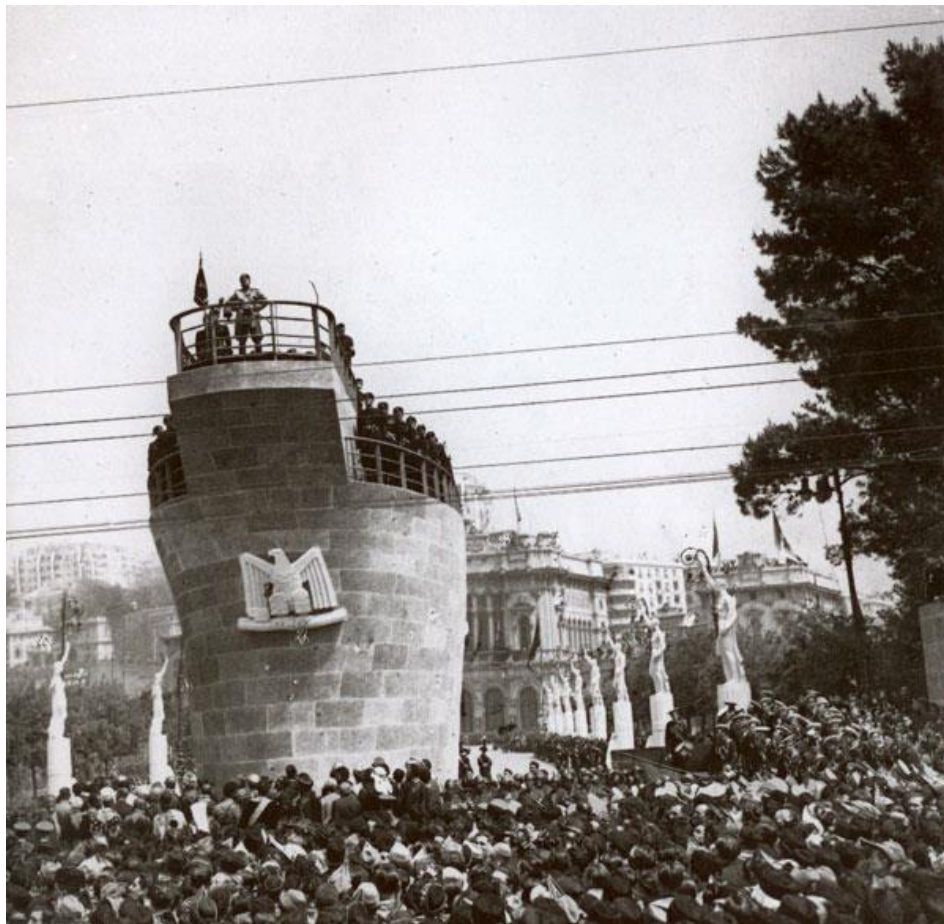


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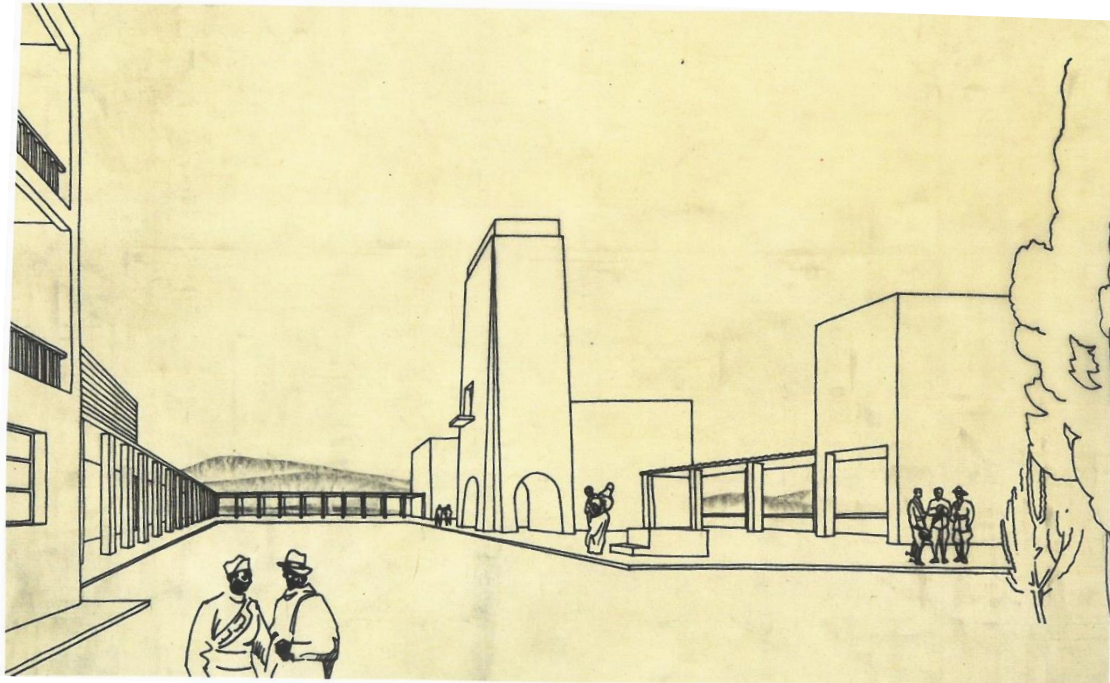


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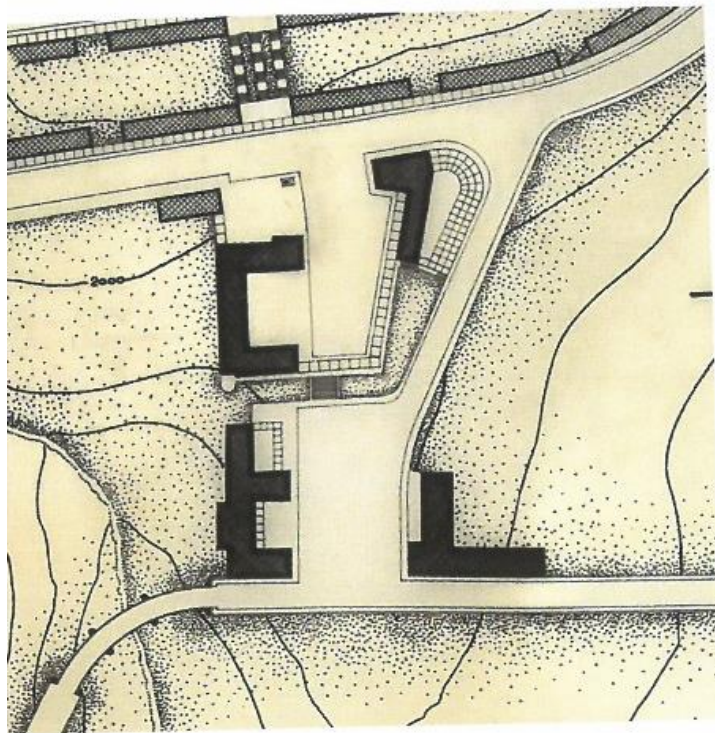


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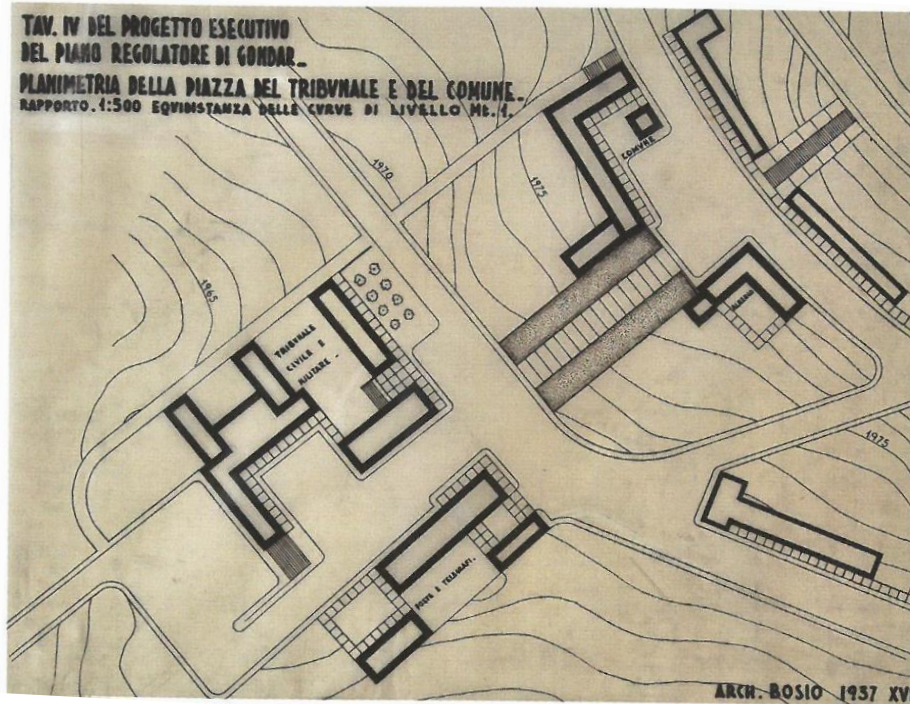


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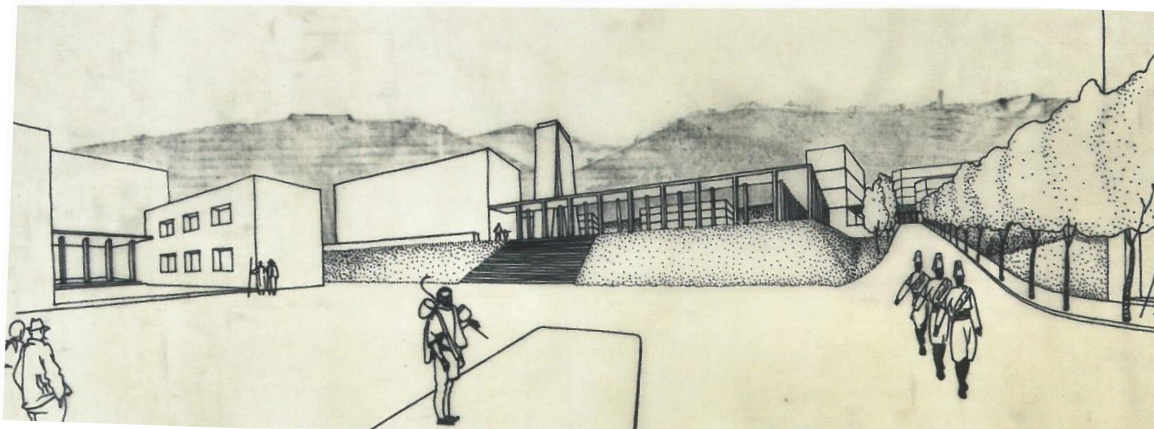


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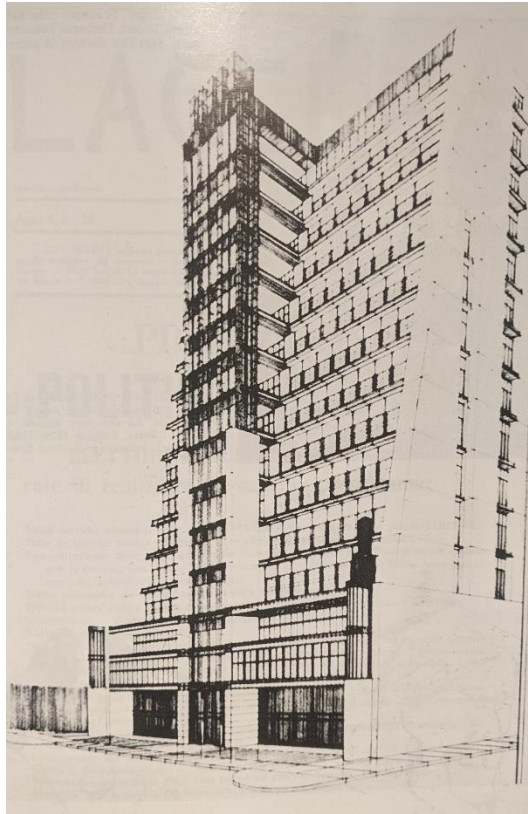


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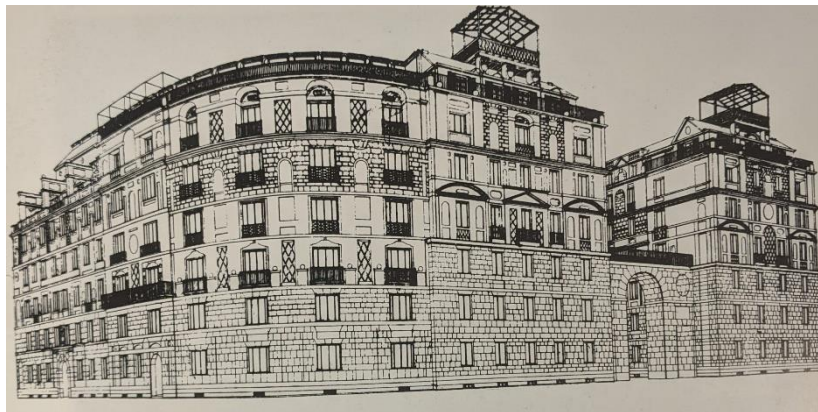


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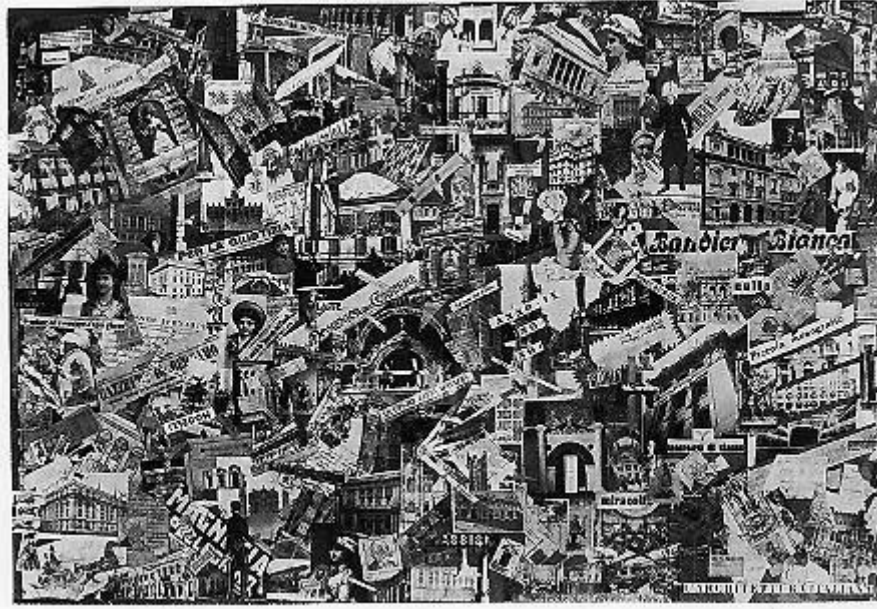


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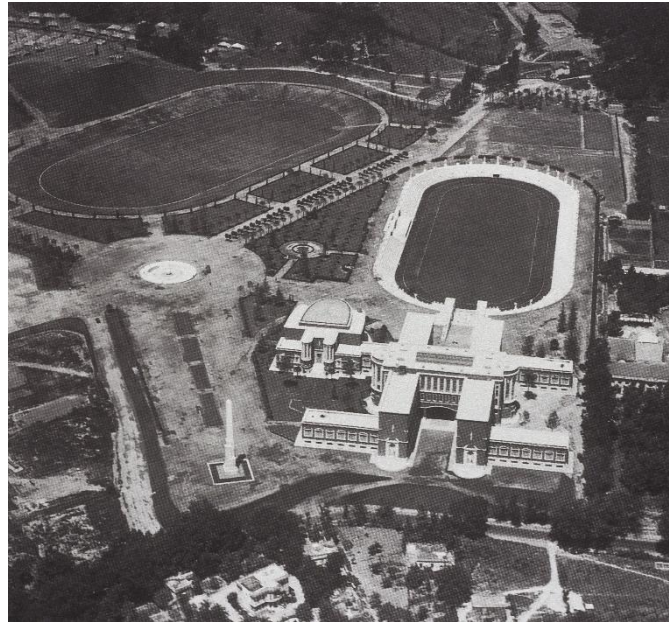


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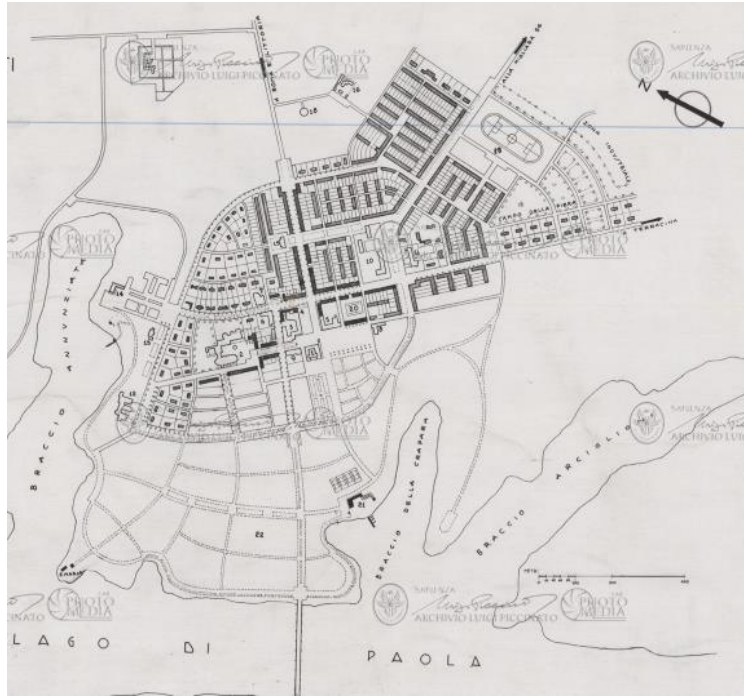


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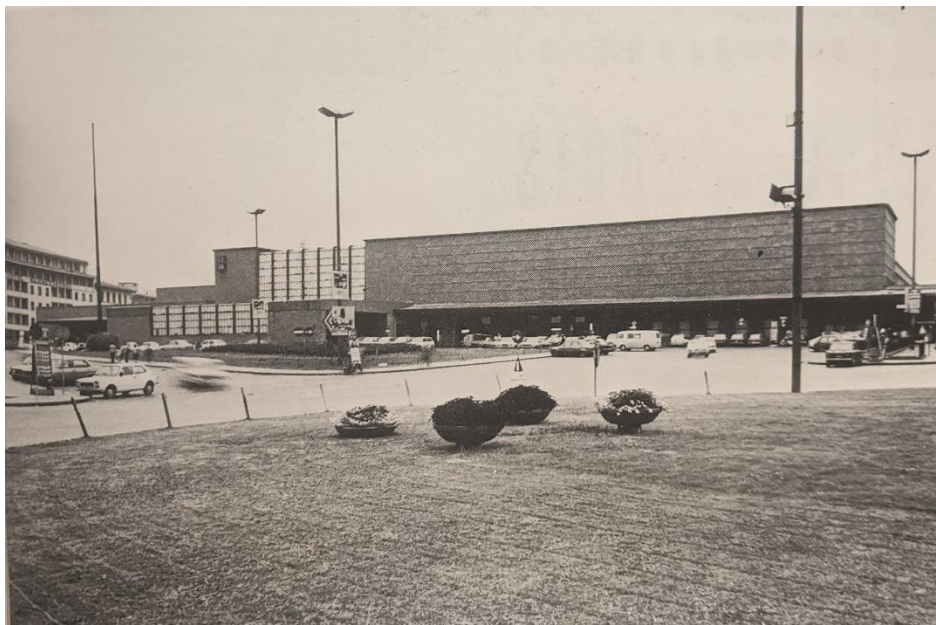


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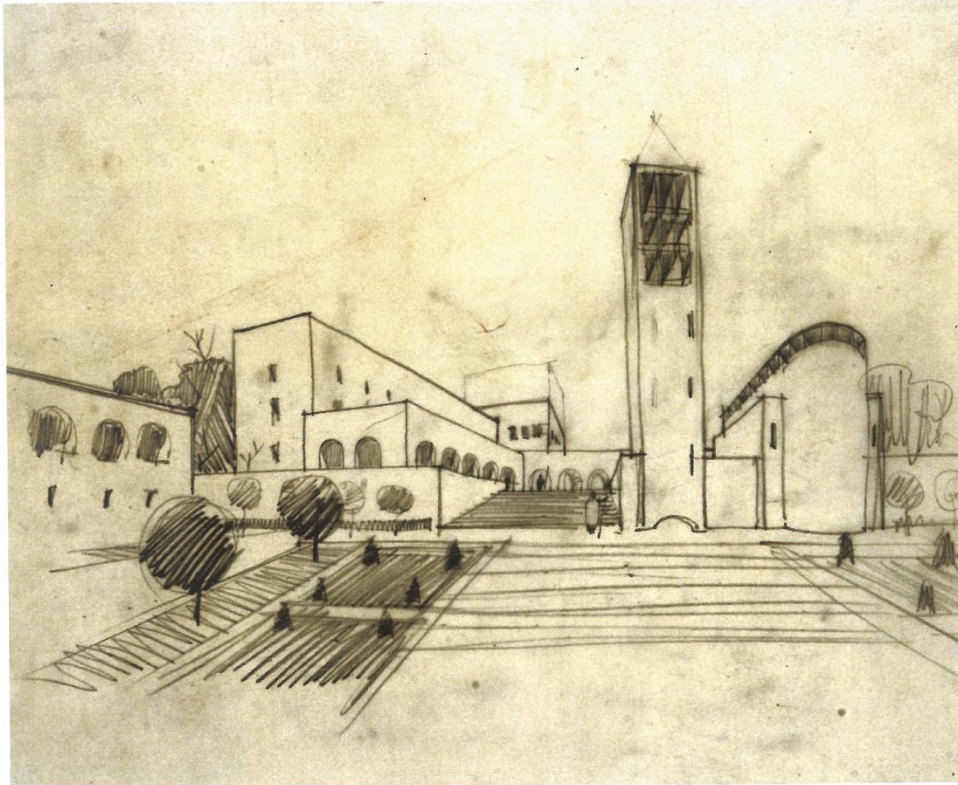


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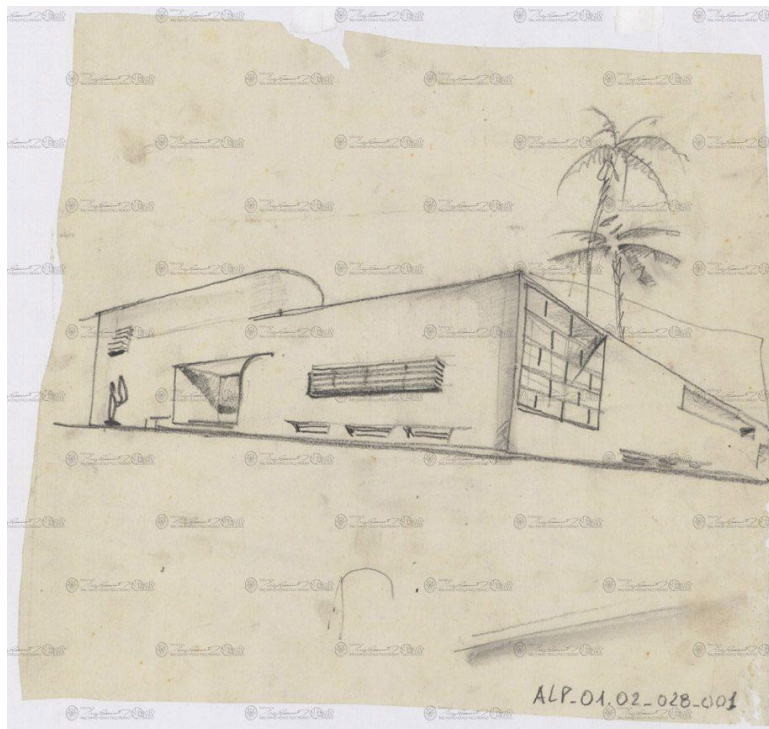


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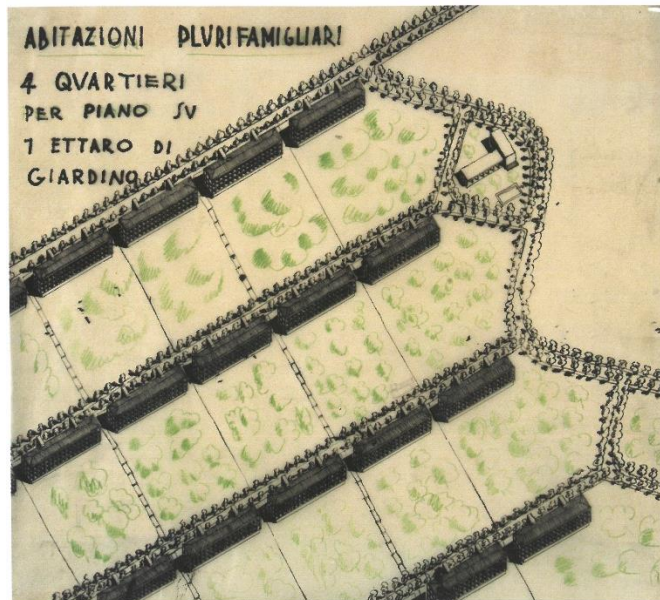


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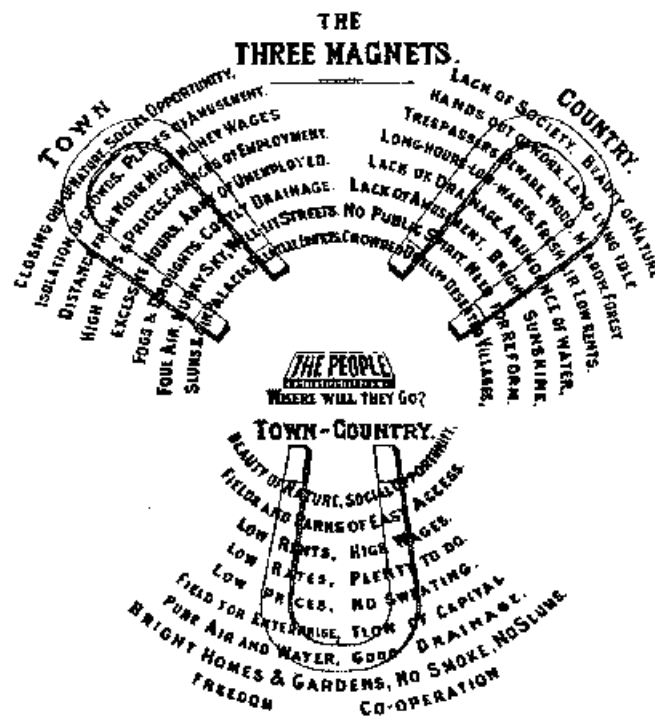


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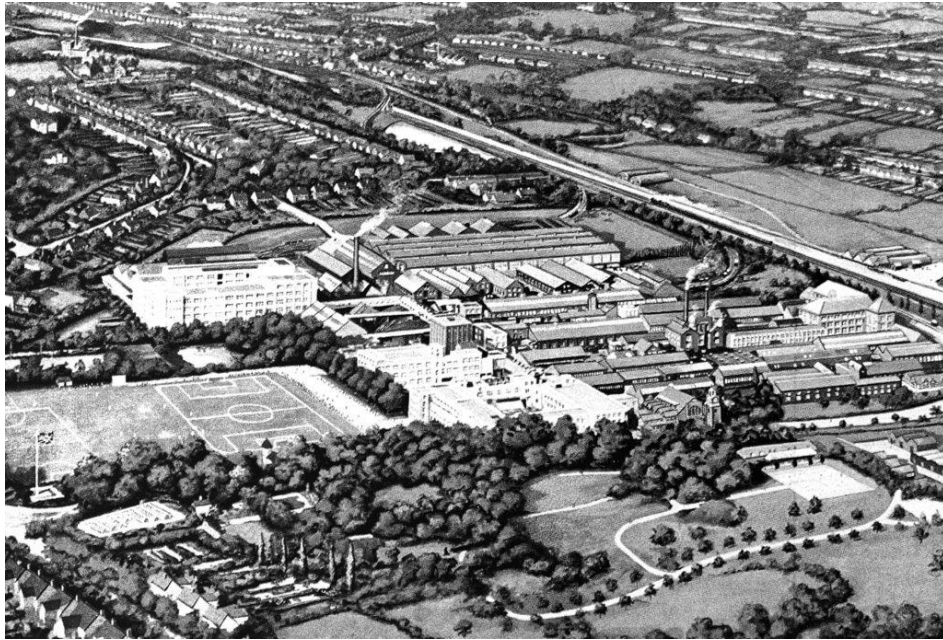


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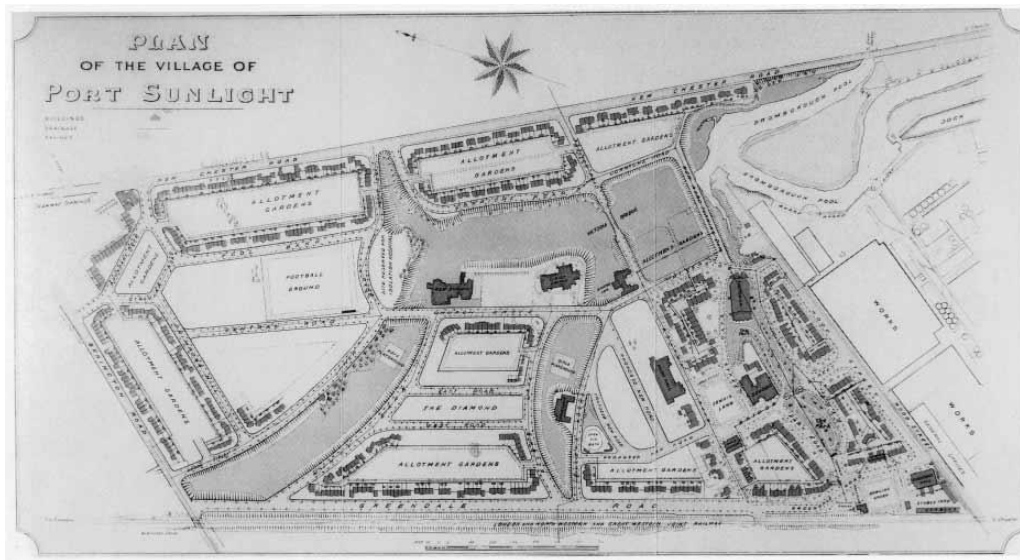


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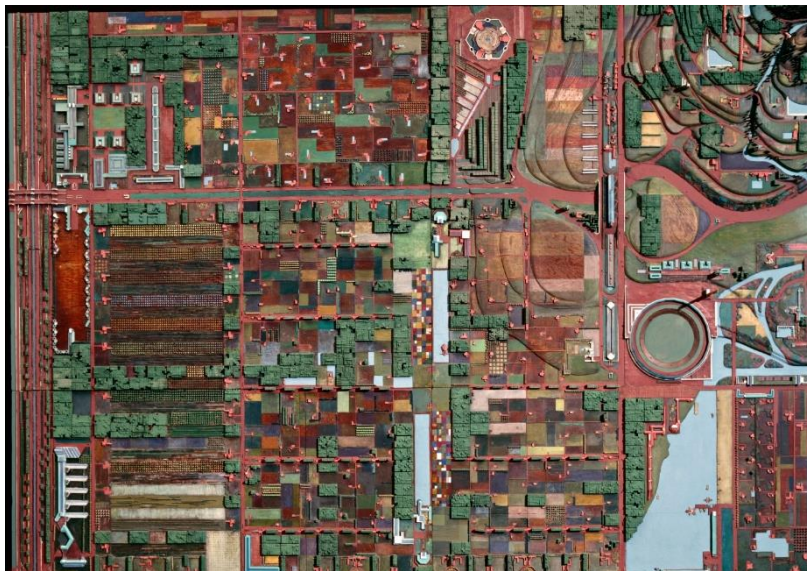


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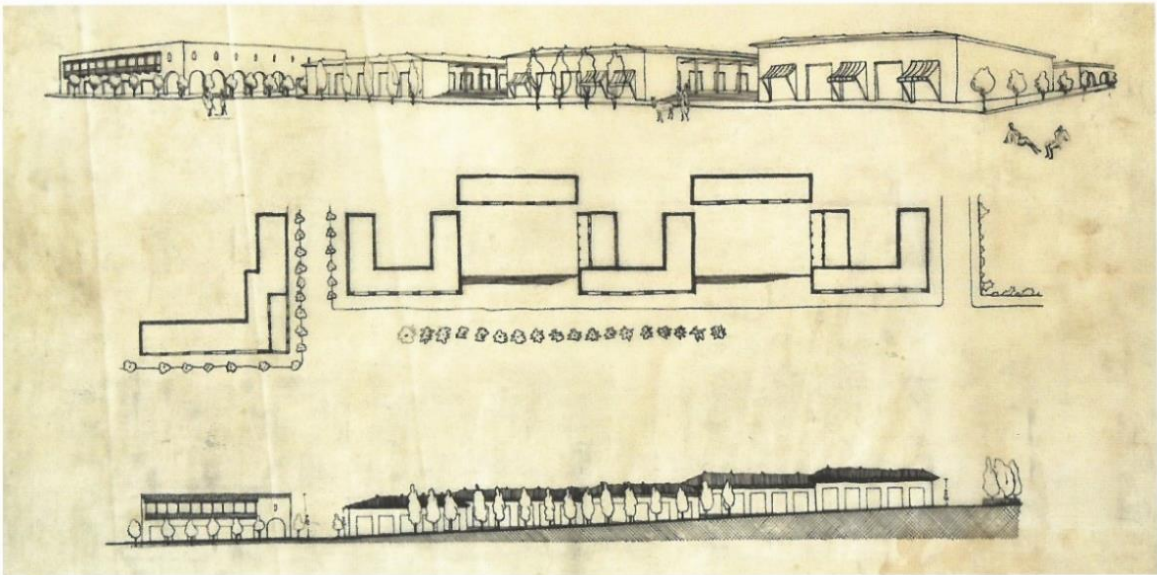


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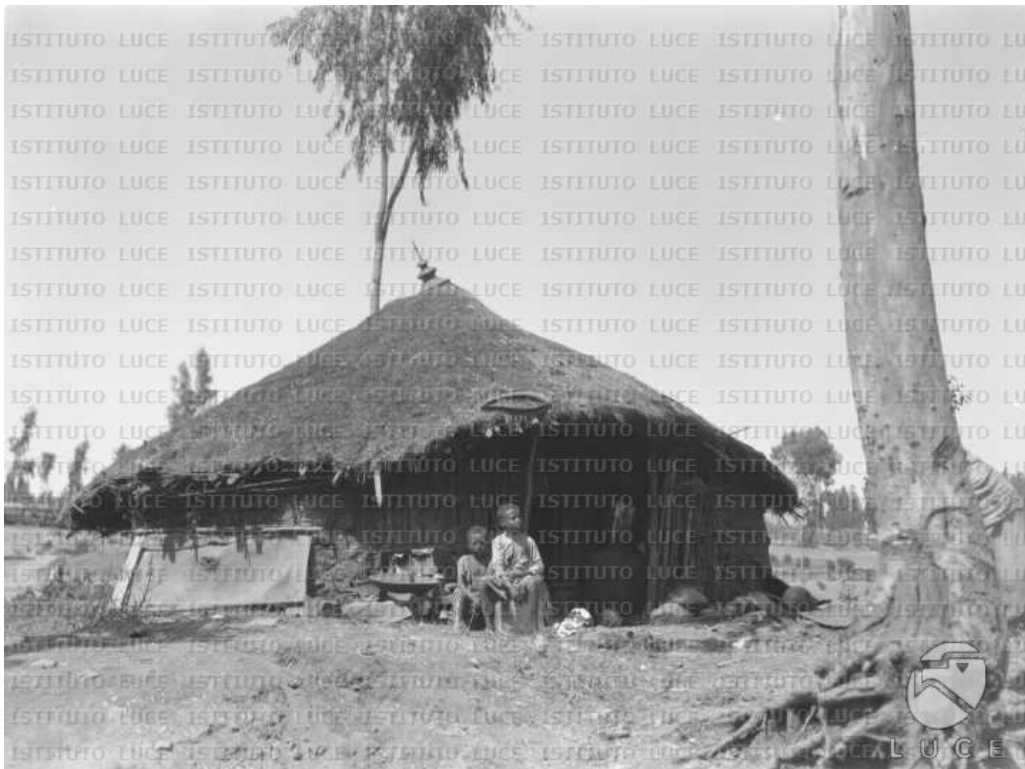


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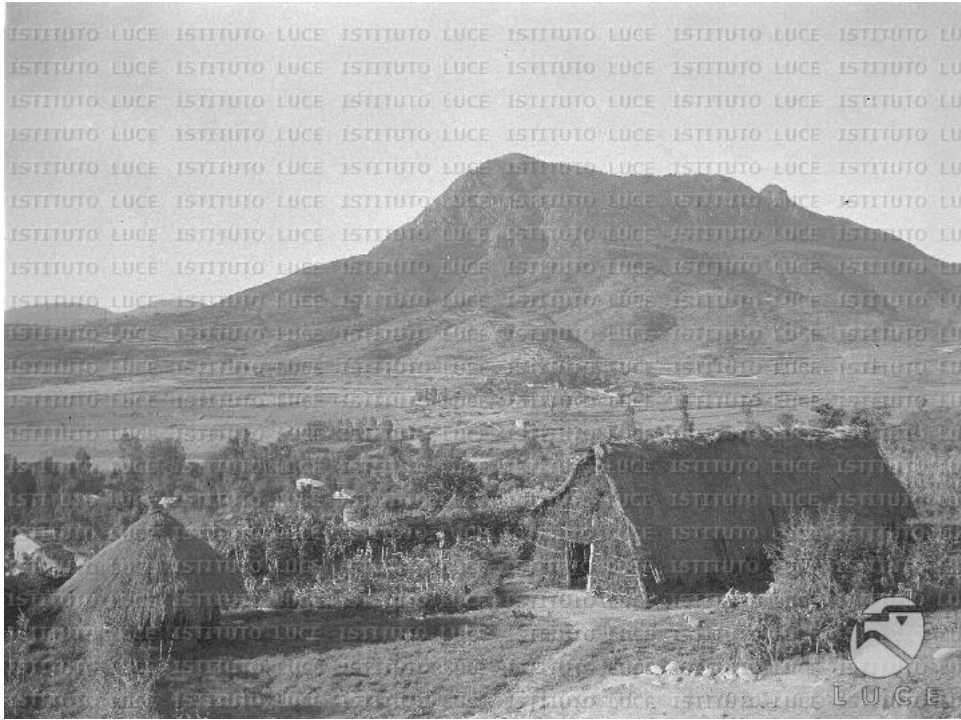


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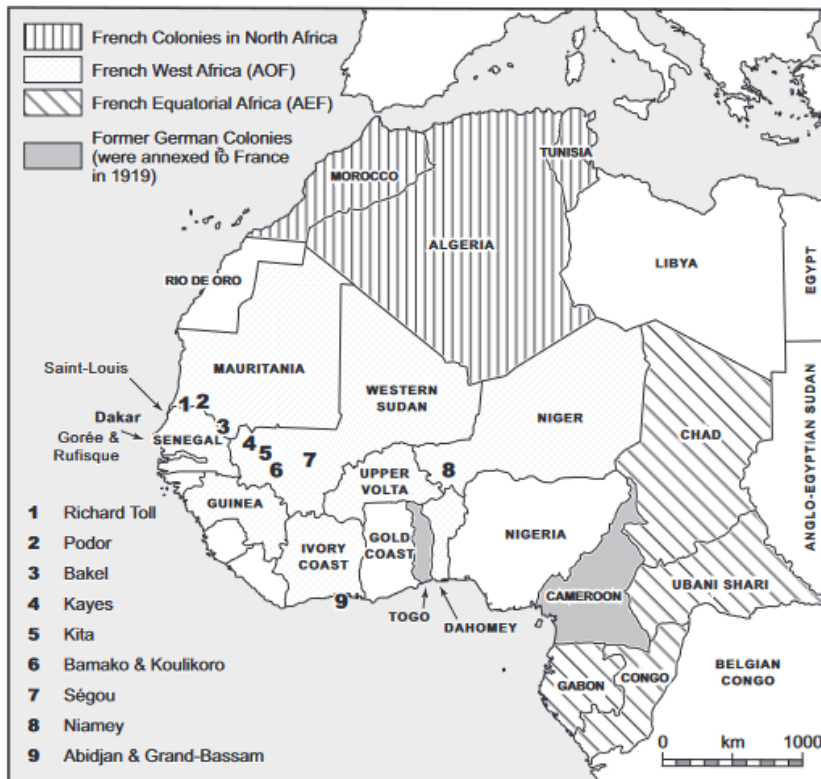


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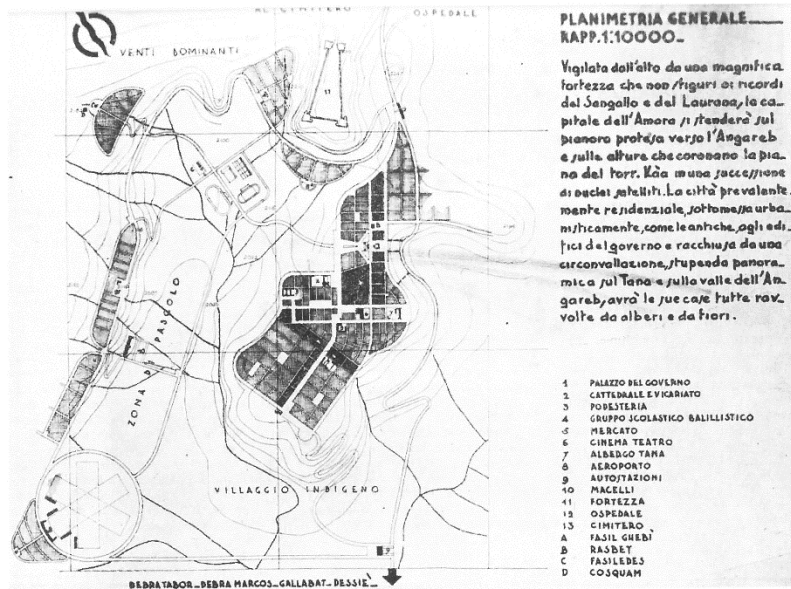


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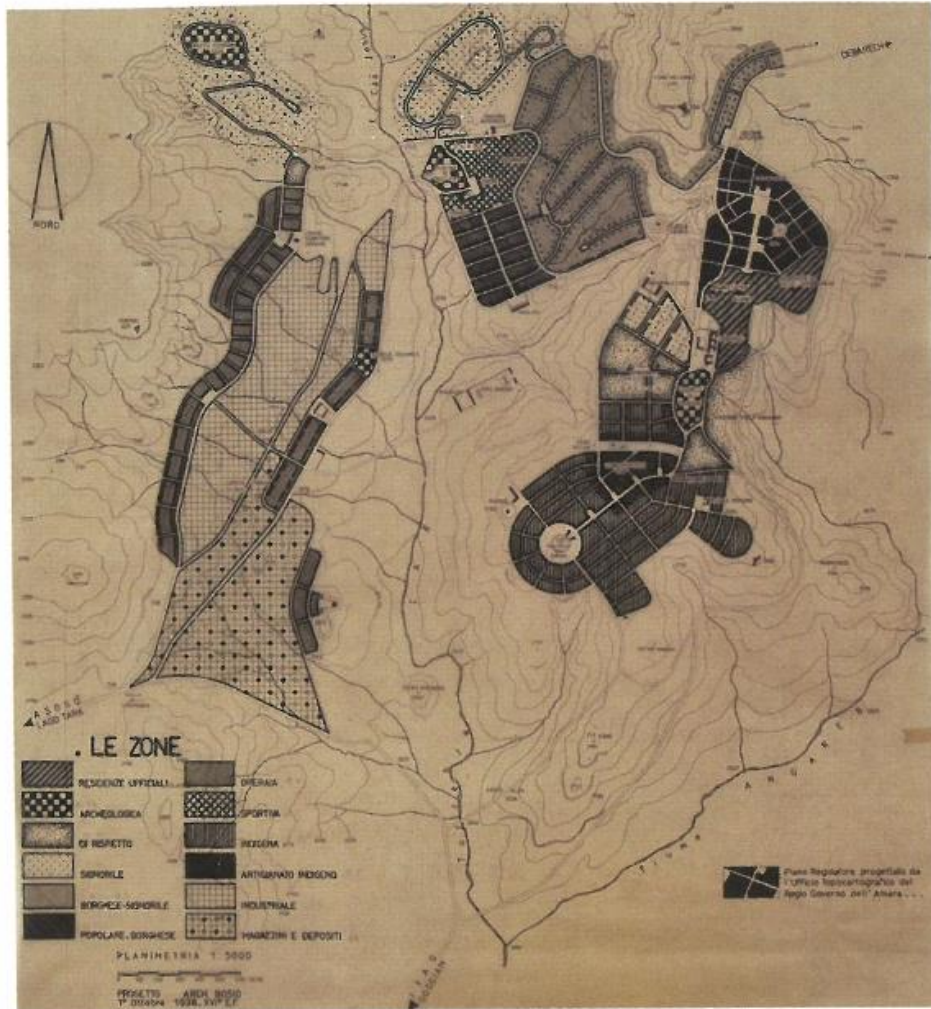


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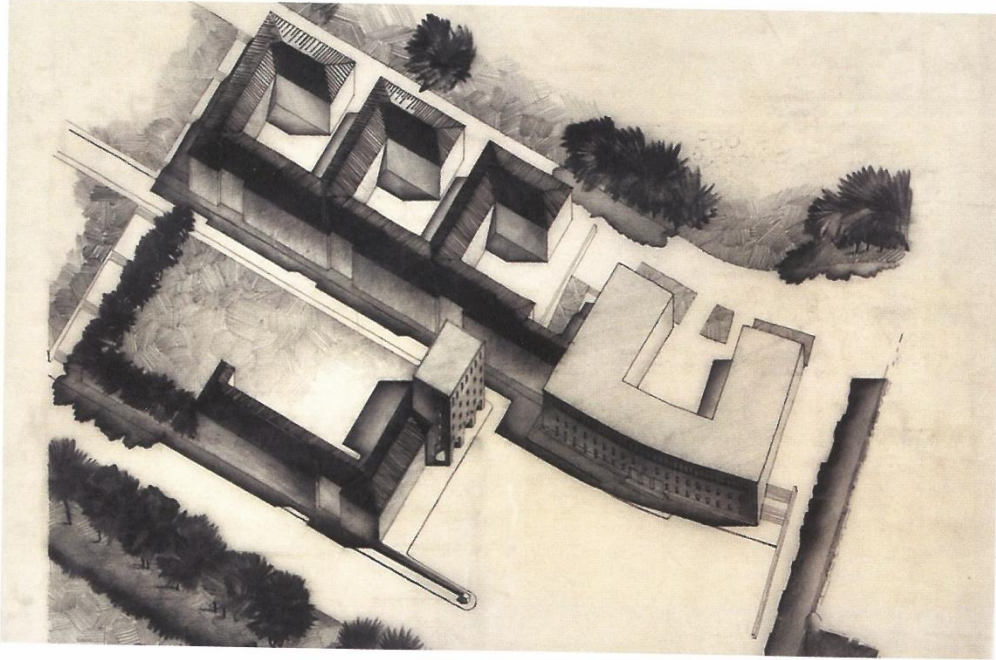


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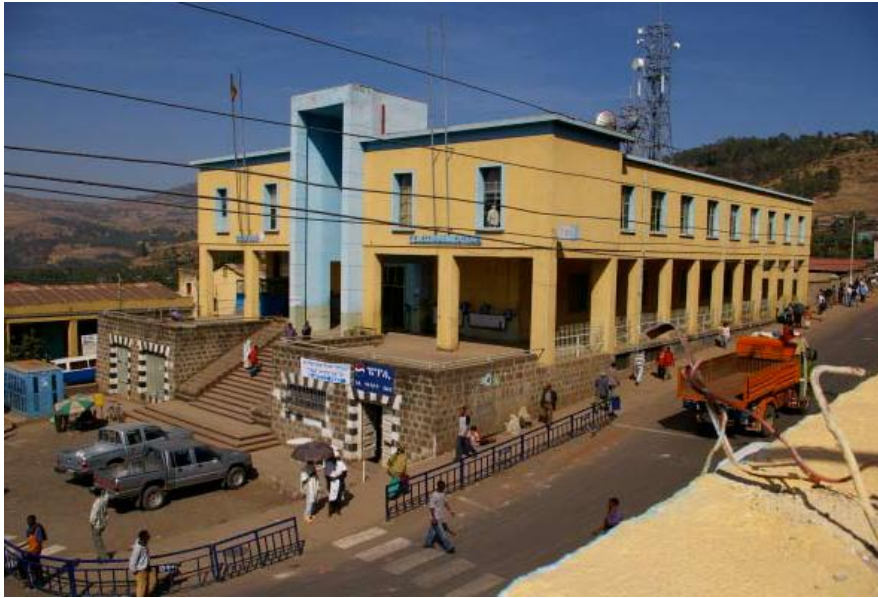


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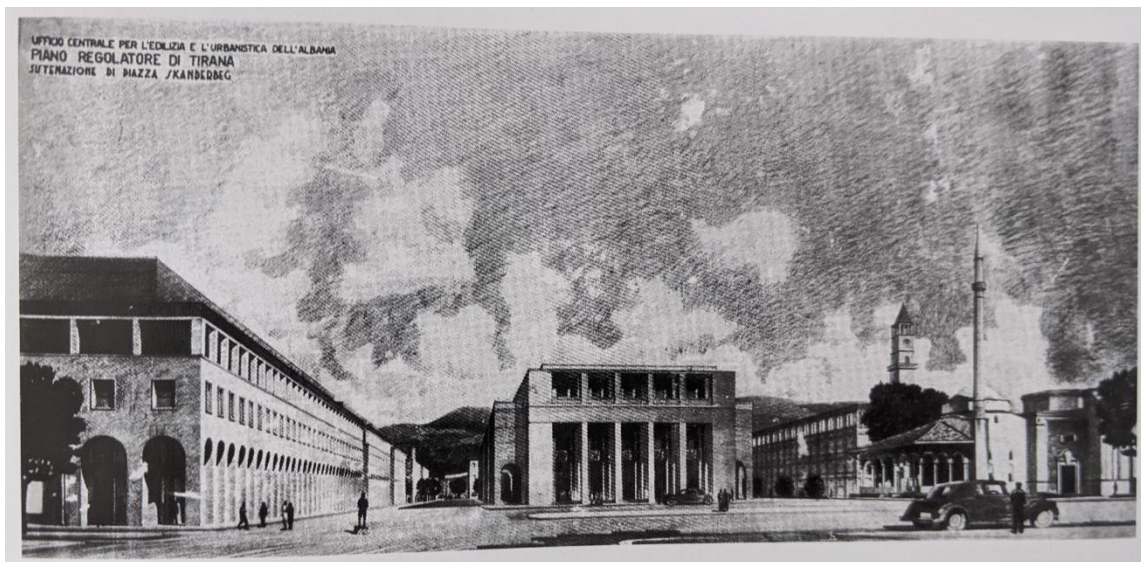


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