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Architecture in a Foreign Language

How Italy has Recognized Foreign Architecture in the Last Twenty Years

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Italian architecture of the 1960s and 1970s, thanks to the remarkable design and theoretical contributions of the Tendenza group and the Radicali, soon become influential in the international scene. The intensity of this revolutionary intellectual activity started to wane at the beginning of the 1980s. The exhibition La Presenza del Passato curated by Paolo Portoghesi at the first Venice Biennale of Architecture held in 1980 and Manfredo Tafuri's publication of the book Storia dell'architettura italiana 1944-1985, through different ideological assumptions, marked the inception of a structural crisis in architecture and opened new horizons for the discipline in Italy. In the last decade scholars have dedicated their studies to the recovery of Italian architectural history of the '60s and '70s. On the contrary, less attention has been paid to the development of Italian architecture in the following years. So what ever happened to Italian architecture since 1980?

Part of a wider critical study that takes into account new themes, such as the mutation of the Italian university system; the consolidation of a design method well appreciated abroad and the exaltation of the architect as practitioner and the subsequent lost of his intellectual and ethical role in society, this paper seeks to provide an introductory account of the history of contemporary Italian architecture since 1985. Focussing on the analysis of the reception of foreign architecture in Italy in the last twenty years, the paper aims to give an overview of the recognition of foreign architects and their work in the national context. It also tries to highlight how this "intrusion" has affected the crucial question of the existence of a national architectural identity in Italy. Through the examination of case studies, it has been possible to observe how these buildings, despite their peculiar architectural languages—sometimes self-referential, sometimes contextual—have been useful instruments for re-activating construction activity in Italy after the dark years of Tangentopoli.



Italian architecture is experiencing a dramatic situation. While in other European countries, particularly in France, Germany, Spain, in recent decades major works of social interest have been carried out with significant transformations of the urban environment by providing citizens with new services that express the spirit of our time, in Italy such initiatives can be counted on the fingers of one hand, they lack a thorough scheduling and are due mainly to the intervention of foreign architects.¹

—“L’Appello degli architetti italiani,” *Corriere della Sera*.

This is the opening statement of the *Appello* (appeal) by thirty-five Italian architects, published on September 11, 2005 on the web page of one of the main Italian newspapers *Corriere della Sera* and intended to arrive on the desks of the President of the Republic, Carlo Azeglio Ciampi, the Italian Prime Minister, Silvio Berlusconi and at institutions such as the Ministry of Heritage and Culture and the Venice Biennale. The appeal, written by Paolo Portoghesi and signed, among others, by Guido Canella, Vittorio Gregotti, Franco Purini and Ettore Sottsass, emphasizes deep concern over the lack of project work given to Italian architects, which is likely to affect architecture’s generational turnover and belie the existence of a national architectural identity. However, it was an article written by Pier Luigi Panza, entitled “Architects in Revolt: Invaded by Foreign Designers,” that appeared in the same newspaper four days earlier in anticipation of the document, which defiantly deformed the terms of the discourse.² In his article, Panza implies the existence of a “feud” conducted by Italian architects against international starchitects,³ presumed to be stealing assignments from local designers. Debate on the topic continued animatedly on the web until a significant result was achieved: the following year, the Venice Biennale with the support of the Ministry of Heritage and Culture (both directly implicated in the Italian architects’ appeal) organizes for a permanent Italian Pavilion to be housed on the site of the Arsenale.

The establishment of an exhibition space uniquely dedicated to Italian architecture at one of the most prestigious international cultural venues may well have been a satisfactory conclusion to the whole affair, except that it actually disclosed a further set of real and urgent issues. In fact within the debate triggered by the appeal, one question remains unanswered and can no longer be postponed: is it profitable to accept, as a given assumption, an

1. “L’Appello degli architetti italiani,” *Corriere della Sera*, September 11, 2005, online at www.corriere.it; re-published with the complete list of signatories in *Rassegna di Architettura e Urbanistica* 133 (2011): 55-56.

2. Pier Luigi Panza, “Architetti in rivolta: invasi da progettisti stranieri,” *Corriere della Sera*, September 7, 2005, 21.

3. For an overview of the phenomenon, see Gabriella Lo Ricco and Silvia Micheli, *Lo spettacolo dell’architettura. Profilo dell’archistar*© (Milan: Bruno Mondadori, 2003).

undeniably clear separation between Italian and foreign architects (and their works)—that is, to identify the “Italianity” of an architecture?

4. See Marco Brandolini, “Che fine ha fatto l’architettura italiana,” in *Next: 8. Mostra Internazionale di Architettura 2002*, catalogue of the Venice Biennale of Architecture (Venice: Marsilio, 2002), 406-407.

In the catalogue of the eighth edition of the International Architecture Exhibition of the Venice Biennale held in 2002, Marco Brandolini wonders if someone is thinking of the image that Italy wants to take on in the first decade of the new century.⁴ His text, which introduces the “Italy” section, is followed by a compilation of projects designed in Italy, but mainly by foreign architects: those by Italians—Mario Bellini Associati, Gregotti Associati International, Massimiliano Fuksas, Architects Garofalo Miura, Sottsass Associati and Paolo Piva—are outnumbered by those of foreigners—Arata Isozaki & Associates, Bolles + Wilson, Boris Podrecca, David Chipperfield, Diener & Diener, Grafton Architects, Jean Nouvel Atelier and Odile Decq-Benoît Cornette Architects. A similar mixture of Italian and foreign architects is evident in the jury’s selection for the 2009 international competition to design a New headquarters for the province of Bergamo. Out of the 130 proposals received, nine progressed to the second phase—those by Mario Botta, Josep Llinás Carmona, HLT—Henning Larsen Tegnestue, Gonçalo Byrne, OMA, Paul Tomato, OBR Open Building Research, Marco Brandolisio and Arata Isozaki & Associates. Only three Italian architectural firms were selected and eventually the project by Isozaki wins the first prize. Together with all other assignments entrusted to Isozaki in Italy—such as the Tower and residential buildings of Citylife in Milan (2003), the Olympic stadium in Turin (2000-06) and the TGV station in Bologna (2008)—the project for the New headquarters for the province of Bergamo justifies Isozaki’s decision to open an office in Milan. This intense design activity by Isozaki on ‘Italian ground’ aligns him with other internationals—the American architect Richard Meier, the Catalan Santiago Calatrava, the Swiss Mario Botta, the English David Chipperfield and the London-based Zaha Hadid—who stand out as the most active foreign architects in the country.

Since the 1990s, the availability of the Italian environment to accommodate buildings made by international designers has accelerated at an unprecedented rate, with Italy never experiencing a similar condition of “openness.” Most of the projects for Italian cities developed in the 1950s and 1960s by foreign architects (among them proposals by Frank Lloyd Wright, Le Corbusier and Louis Kahn for Venice) remained on paper. The



same fate befell six of the eight projects designed by Alvar Aalto for Italy at Pavia, Siena, Turin and Como; though Aalto was able to build a church for the small community of Riola, near Bologna, and the pavilion of Finland in the Giardini of the Venice Biennale. In this context we should also recall the Mondadori headquarters in Segrate by the Brazilian architect Oscar Niemeyer, who also designed the Piedmontese headquarters for the Burgo and Fata companies and also the exhibition district in Bologna designed by the Japanese Kenzo Tange. Rome, Italy's most international city, has however welcomed institutional buildings linked to the architect's country of origin: the Institute of Japanese culture by Isoya Yoshida, the Academy of Denmark by Kay Fisker, the Embassy of Britain by Basil Spence and the Embassy of the Federal Republic of Germany by Alexander Freiherr von Branca.⁵ Similar consideration could be made of the national pavilions at the Venice Biennale⁶ but these pavilion buildings largely appear as harmless intrusions of exceptional rarity, located in "free zones" within cities or in remote provincial areas.

The underlying reason that Italian clients, especially the public ones, desired to use architectural "external forces" with increasing frequency has to be carefully understood. As well as a pervasive (and superficial) passion for things foreign, a symptom of the growing Italian provincialism, there is also an attempt by clients to stay away from corrupted practices that had heavily affected the public system of building procurement in previous years.⁷ This period has been remembered under the name of Tangentopoli⁸ that corresponded to a system of corruption, bribery and illegal financing of political parties at the highest levels of the Italian political and financial world during the 1980s and at the beginning of the 1990s. The phenomenon was rooted in Milan, which permanently lost its role of "moral capital" of the country. Politicians, civil servants, entrepreneurs, managers, builders and professionals, including many architects,⁹ connected by an intricate network of patronage, were cited and investigated, highlighting a capillary parasitic "mechanism," soon extended to most of the nation.

The Time of Mayors

Italian political institutions quickly became aware of the extraordinary opportunities presented by international architecture, because "architecture has to do with power

5. Piero Ostilio Rossi, "Urbanistica, architettura, città" in *Roma. Dieci anni di una capitale*, by Alessandro Aronica, et al. (Rome: Donzelli, 2003), 72.

6. Marco Mulazzani, *I padiglioni della Biennale di Venezia* (Milan: Electa, 2004).

7. Ricky Burdett, "Roma: il sindaco e i suoi architetti," *Domus* 832 (2000): 70-83, esp. 76.

8. The word "Tangentopoli" was invented by the journalist Piero Colaprico, see Gianni Barbacetto, Peter Gomez, Marco Travaglio, *Mani pulite. La vera storia 20 anni dopo* (Milan: Chiarelettere, 2012), 17.

9. Enrico Regazzoni, "Architetto sarà lei!" *Repubblica*, February 27, 1993, 31.

10. Deyan Sudjic, *Architettura e potere. Come i ricchi e i potenti hanno dato forma al mondo* (Rome and Bari: Laterza, 2011), 4.

11. Aurelio Musi, *La stagione dei sindaci* (Naples: Alfredo Guida Editore, 2004).

12. “Sotto il ponte di Calatrava non scorre soltanto l’acqua del Canal Grande. Massimo Cacciari risponde a Francesco Dal Co,” *Casabella* 769 (2008): 124-27.

13. “La città post-olimpica. Il sindaco di Torino Sergio Chiamparino risponde alle domande di Alessandro De Magistris,” *Casabella* 755 (2007): 14-18.

14. Alessandro De Magistris, “Dopo I Giochi del 2006. Uno sguardo alla Torino post-olimpica,” *Casabella* 755 (2007): 6-13.

15. Italo Insolera, *Roma moderna. Da Napoleone I al XXI secolo* (Turin: Einaudi, 2011), 334.

16. Ricky Burdett, “Roma: il sindaco e i suoi architetti,” *Domus* 832 (2000): 70-83.

17. Francesco Rutelli, *Memoria, bellezza e futuro* (Roma: Ministero per i beni e le attività culturali, 2008), 42.

First, architecture tells the story of those who created it.”¹⁰ While the endemic political conflict of the 1990s largely prevented the planning and implementation of significant works at a national level, the country’s most interesting architectural gambles were now played at the municipal and provincial level. The promulgation of Law no. 81, signed in 1993 by the Prime Minister Carlo Azeglio Ciampi, which envisaged the direct election of mayors, presidents of provinces and municipal and regional councils, opened the so called “time of Mayors.”¹¹ Relieved of a crippling bureaucracy and armed with a greater decision-making autonomy, the new local councils had the opportunity to enjoy an unprecedented freedom of action. International architecture immediately became an instrument of political propaganda, effective for giving lustre to programs of city renewal promoted by mayors and provincial governors.

The Costituzione bridge designed by Santiago Calatrava for Venice—an architectural work that consecrates, in the collective memory, the municipal reign of Massimo Cacciari, Mayor of Venice from 1993 to 2000—opens an extraordinary period of construction in Italy. Almost by surprise, Cacciari was re-elected mayor of Venice for the third time in 2005, allowing him to affect a triumphant pose by the bridge on the banks of the Grand Canal as he took part in the opening ceremony on September 11, 2008.¹² Similarly, it is possible to associate the name of Sergio Chiamparino, Mayor of Turin from 2001 to 2011, to the sports facilities of the 20th Winter Olympic Games in 2006,¹³ of which Palahockey designed by Arata Isozaki is the most prominent building. The Olympic adventure was embedded in a period of construction that had already been initiated and concentrated on the reconfiguration of a new image for the post-industrial city, avoiding the danger that “Turin 2006” would become a white elephant.¹⁴

However, it is the newly elected mayor of Rome, Francesco Rutelli (like Cacciari and Chiamparino, a representative of the left coalition) who might act as an emblem of the “architectural revolution” that engulfed Italian cities at this time. Italo Insolera noted that “Rome in those years became the great capital of world culture.”¹⁵ Among various goals set in his political program, Rutelli intended to revitalize the cultural prestige of the capital by strengthening Rome’s museum network,¹⁶ particularly after the international success gained in Bilbao with the construction of the Guggenheim Museum designed by the Californian architect Frank O. Gehry.¹⁷



Already in 1993, the same year of the municipal elections, the construction of the museum at the Campidoglio by Carlo Aymonino took place: a roof of iron and glass allowing the reuse of the Roman Garden and as protection for the equestrian statue of Marcus Aurelius. In 1997, the year in which Rutelli was re-elected Mayor of Rome, the palace Altemps opened and the Palatine Antiquarium was reopened. The competition for the National Museum of XXI-Century Arts (MAXXI), a Ministerial initiative supported by the City Council, was launched in 1998. This was followed, in 1999, by the assignment entrusted to Nemesis Studio (Maria Claudia Clemente and Michael Molè) for the design for a light walkway at the Mercati di Traiano, with the aim of transforming the entire monumental complex of markets into a permanent museum. The Museum of Contemporary Art (MACRO), designed by French architect Odile Decq, is the result of an international competition which, although organized in 2001 by the city council led by the new mayor Walter Veltroni, belongs to the cultural plan initiated by Rutelli, including the reconstruction of the ex Serra Piacentini at Palazzo Esposizioni (2003-07), with its large glass cube enhancing the museum's exhibition potential, designed by ABDR Associates Architects (Maria Laura Arlotti, Michele Beccu, Paolo Desideri, Filippo Raimondo).¹⁸

But the work planned by Rutelli that would seal the cultural “relaunch” of Rome is the museum that houses the ancient altar to peace, Ara Pacis Augustae. In 1995, without holding an international competition, the project was directly entrusted to Richard Meier & Partners Architects, one of the most prestigious American architectural firms, with decades of experience in the field of museum construction. After Tangentopoli, when architectural competitions were also understood as a transparent process, the reasons why Rutelli chose to make such a forced play (a choice that elsewhere has been called “prudent”¹⁹) cannot be understood as merely political in nature. International architecture studios guarantee a high “efficiency” in the design process, being generally seen as outside the logics of ‘patronage’ that have often polluted the Italian construction sector. This is a crucial factor, considering that Rutelli was promoting what amounted to risky “open heart” surgery on Rome, that is, the construction of a contemporary public building within the circle of the ancient Aurelian Walls in the very centre of the city. The outcome of Meier’s project is a contradictory work, able to ensure passers-by the visual enjoyment of Ara Pacis from the road by means of

18. On building activity in Rome during the last two decades, see “Dossier Roma,” *Casabella* 639 (1996): 40-73; the monographic issue “Roma moderna,” *Abitare* 408 (2001); Sebastiano Brandolini, *Roma. Nuova architettura* (Milan: Skira, 2008).

19. Francesco Dal Co, “Gli strati della città,” in Carmen Andriani, et al., *Richard Meier. Il Museo dell’Ara pacis* (Milan: Electa, 2007), 115-16.

two immense glass side-walls, but at the same time incapable of satisfactorily solving the problem of presenting a “monument within a monument”. In contrast to the original modest protective pavilion designed by Vittorio Ballio Morpurgo (1937-38), the considerable bulk and functional complexity of the new museum diminish the urban role of Ara Pacis, downgraded to the role of “museum piece”. Despite Meier’s efforts, the altar remains a “prisoner” of his reinforced concrete building.

“Building Complex” Syndrome

There is a psychological parallel between marking territory with a building and the exercise of political power: both depend on an act of will. To see one’s vision of the world established in an architectural model, through the reduction of an entire city to the size of a dolls’ house, itself exercises a certain fascination But even more attractive is the possibility to physically impose one’s own will in the same city Architecture feeds the ego of predisposed individuals. They become increasingly dependent in such a way that architecture itself turns into a goal, which attracts fanatics and pushes them to build more and more, on an increasingly large scale. Building becomes the means by which the egotism of individuals is expressed in its purest form: the “building complex.”²⁰

20. Sudjic, *Architettura e potere*, 13.

21. Vincenzo De Luca has served as Mayor of Salerno for two consecutive mandates between 1993 and 2001. Both in 2006 and in 2011, he was re-elected Mayor of Salerno.

22. Vincenzo De Luca, *Un'altra Italia tra vecchie burocrazie e nuove città* (Rome and Bari: Laterza, 1999).

On December 12, 2009, with the notes of the concert in Aranjuez by Joaquín Rodrigo in the air, Vincenzo de Luca, in his fourth term as mayor of Salerno,²¹ publicly presented a gigantic model of the architectural and urban renewal of the southern Italian city. The spectacular model included projects on the waterfront along a stretch that runs from Piazza della Libertà to Piazza della Concordia, promoted by his city council in order to boost the image of Salerno.

The ambitious program carried out by Mayor De Luca²² backs the decision of his predecessor, Vincenzo Giordano, to consult the Spanish architect and planner Oriol Bohigas in the design for the reorganization of Salerno, a city of 150,000 inhabitants that was plagued by severe socio-economic depression and a progressive decline in population at the beginning of 1990s. Bohigas’s design idea and the pragmatism of Mayor De Luca merged together and, as early as April 1994, lead to the city’s



“Urban Planning Document.” Based on the idea of transforming Salerno from a marginal city into a “city of tourism,” the strategy of the document was to give a new role to the waterfront, the historic centre and the road axis along the river Irno.²³ Bohigas, former architect of the revival of Barcelona for the Olympics of 1992, aimed to rebel against the rigidity of the old urban strategy, the General Regulatory Plan (PRG) then in force, and suggests to intervene directly in the city, according to the dialectic of the “plan-project” rather than through the old adherence to zoning. Finally approved in 2006, the new plan aims to “build a ‘limited city with a contained density,’ which overturns the tendency to scatter or displace urban facilities to the outskirts of Salerno, and even beyond its borders.”²⁴

23. Maurizio Russo, *Il progetto urbano nella città contemporanea: l'esperienza di Salerno nel panorama europeo* (Naples: CLEAN, 2011).

24. Russo, *Il progetto urbano nella città contemporanea*, 74.

The architectural project that more effectively interprets Bohigas's revolutionary urban vision is the New Law Court designed by David Chipperfield, completed in 2011. Strategically located in an abandoned area near the railway station and close to the first stretch of the new road Lungoirno (that is, within the historic city and its twentieth century western expansion), the architectural complex was renamed the “Citadel of Justice” for its fragmentation of volumes that blends with the urban context. But it is the design of the new waterfront, organized on a linear equipped system, that will become the linchpin of the visionary mission of urban redemption conceived by the partnership De Luca-Bohigas. With the approval of the municipal administration to proceed with the demolition of obsolete buildings—an extremely rare attitude in an Italian cultural environment conservative by nature—Salerno is about to take on a new tourist identity, complementing its original artisanal roots. In quick succession, international competitions were organized and building sites opened including the Marine Passenger Terminal, designed by Zaha Hadid and the Piazza della Libertà, defined by a monumental exedra designed by Ricardo Bofill, as the public spatial climax of the waterfront. Bofill is also responsible for Le Vele tower, while Santiago Calatrava designed the club of the ferry terminal Marina d'Arechi, supported by funding from private parties.

Like tested examples of European cities undergoing redevelopment, such as Basel, Bilbao and Barcelona, the linguistic diversity of the projects merged in Bohigas's plan for Salerno helps to enrich an already substantial local artistic heritage, which was supplemented in 2010 by the white Ravello auditorium by

Oscar Niemeyer, spectacularly overlooking the Amalfi coast. The massive contribution of international contemporary architecture not only has aligned Salerno with the best European cities, matching the expectations of De Luca; it has also become an instrument of a laudable—though in some respects desperate—attempt to reorganize the city’s social and economic environment. The media success so obtained by the new overall urban-architectural project of Salerno blurs—without neutralizing—the rampant scourge of reckless building activity promoted by Camorra (the local Mafia) in the region of Campania, whose devastating socio-environmental consequences have been documented in the movie *Gomorra*, by Matteo Garrone (2008), based on the investigative book by Roberto Saviano published two years earlier.²⁵

25. Roberto Saviano, *Gomorra: Viaggio nell'impero economico e nel sogno di dominio della camorra* (Milan: Mondadori, 2006) (Engl. ed. *Gomorra: Italy's Other Mafia*, London: Panmacmillan, 2011).

The Power of Pre-Existing Architecture.

In the story of the new headquarters of the Lombardy Region in Milan (a north region of Italy), political propaganda and architectural symbolism fully merge. The building, which came into operation in late 2010 but actually opened much earlier on January 23 of the same year, was played like a strategic “card” by the outgoing President of the Lombardy Region, Roberto Formigoni, ahead of regional elections scheduled for March 2010. Showcasing the desire to further extend his ambitions, on the occasion of the presentation of the building, the Lombardy Region representatives and the designers proudly pointed out that the New headquarters is the first major public building built in Milan after the fifteenth-century Sforza Castle.

An outcome of design collaboration between the American firm, Pei Cobb Freed & Partners Architects LLP of New York, and the Italian Caputo Partnership and System Millennium, the architectural complex consists of four nine storeys, curvilinear buildings topped by a 161 metre high-rise tower. If the curved buildings, housing the administrative and commercial activities, freely intersect each other creating a dynamic system of public spaces opening up to new urban areas, the tower has its explicit architectural reference in the nearby Pirelli Tower, where the offices of the Lombardy Region were previously housed. Such a historical reference, however, was suggested in the announcement of the international competition held in 2003, attended by (among others) Gehry LLP and the Italian Metrogramma studio (Andrea



Boschetti and Alberto Francini). The slender Pirelli Tower, designed in the 1950s by Gio Ponti and Pierluigi Nervi, had a strong symbolic value that, together with the use of advanced building systems, made it a perfect vehicle for expressing the idea of progress that was at the basis of the construction of modern Milan: the kind of strategy that governor Formigoni desired to re-enact. Despite the fact that the tower of the new headquarters (now Palazzo Lombardia) exceeds the height of the Pirelli skyscraper by 33 m, the symbolic power of the latter remains unmatched. Inserting itself in the meeting point of two sinusoidal buildings, the tower designed by Pei Cobb Freed & Partners is in fact formally devoid of any attachment to the ground, without being innovative on this point. The continuous cloak of glass panels that fully wraps the building—a double-skin curtain wall containing sliding brise-soleil—endows it with a linear elegance that is an undeniable link to the Pirelli tower.

With regard to the undulating forms of the building, Pei Cobb Freed & Partners have indicated their source of inspiration in the morphology of the valleys, rivers and lakes of Lombardy. And here one wonders why so many foreign architects, when they are going to design in Italy, consider themselves compelled to pay homage to a supposed “Italian” spirit (or more accurately, “Lombard,” “Piedmont,” “Tuscan” or even “Milanese,” “Venetian,” “Roman,” as applicable) as if—in the cradle of an ancient architectural civilization, ranging from ancient Rome to the Milan of Ernesto N. Rogers and Aldo Rossi—an uncontrollable anxiety of “environmental pre-existences” (variant of the better known “Stendhal Syndrome”) assailed the unfortunate architects. For example, in Milan, Jacques Herzog and Pierre de Meuron feel the need to justify the choice of the “hut” shape of the two long buildings making the headquarters of the Giangiacomo Feltrinelli Foundation (2008), by evoking the Gothic tradition and the structure of the Lombard farmhouse so beloved by their ‘master’ Aldo Rossi²⁶. The giant spiral above the Unicredit skyscraper in Milan (2004-12) by Pelli Clarke Pelli Architects and situated within the Porta Nuova masterplan, explicitly seeks to echo the pinnacles of Milan Cathedral. The planned (and unrealized) Museum of Contemporary Art (2004-10) by Daniel Libeskind at CityLife, with its twisted volume that passes progressively from a square to a circular plan, intends to evoke—at least in the mind of its author—the Leonardian *homo ad circumum et quadratum*, while the “bowed” skyscraper, again

26. Marco Biraghi, “Herzog & de Meuron o delle preesistenze ‘ideali,’” in *MMX. Architettura zona critica*, ed. Marco Biraghi, Gabriella Lo Ricco and Silvia Micheli (Rovereto: Zandonai, 2010), 83-84.

by Libeskind and again at CityLife (2004), also elects as its own model the Gothic arches of Milan Cathedral.

In contrast, other foreign architects working on Italian ground—going beyond figurative precedents that are more or less literal—prefer to track rhythms, movements or spatial intervals belonging to the “DNA” of Italian architecture. In this sense, the Petra Winery in Suvereto (1999-2003), by Mario Botta, with “its strong plastic image and the *barchesse* (wings on the sides), reinterprets the typology of large villas in the Tuscan countryside.”²⁷ Curiously, the winery does not present “Tuscany” much more than one might find in Botta’s Observatory of Jaipur. And this also applies—*mutatis mutandis*—to the extension on the top of the Scala Theatre, Milan (2002-04), also by Botta, where one can notice a not entirely resolved linguistic and formal relationship with the neoclassicism of Piermarini. For the extension of San Michele cemetery in Venice (1998-2007), David Chipperfield proposes the element of the fence as a matrix for the project, inferring it from the historical Venetian cemetery and other famous Italian graveyards. In order to act on the existing, “changing and redefining [it] with a soft hand,”²⁸ the resulting enclosed courts configure as many copies of that limited horizon that Jean-Paul Sartre talks about²⁹: a limitation that, consciously or unconsciously taken by Chipperfield, is in any case the most relevant spatial translation of the meaning of the cemetery.

Among the projects of the *Légion étrangère* of architects transiting through the Italian peninsula that best fulfill the task of setting themselves into the existing urban context while maintaining their specific architectural language that supposedly brought them to Italy in the first instance, we can mention the MAXXI museum designed by Zaha Hadid in Rome (1998- 2010). The exhibition complex, with its large sinuous volumes of concrete, is a celebration of that *forma fluens* which is a particularity of Hadid’s design work. These volumes—even dimensionally reduced by almost half compared to the first version of the project—although very different from any other built before in the eternal city, prove to be adequately set in the Roman context, being proportionated to its urban scale. In addition to that, in spite of accusations of egotism which it has been subject to,³⁰ the MAXXI reveals an unexpectedly wise attitude to context. In fact between Hadid’s museum and the long, low existing building in front of it, now used as a research centre and a functional space for exhibitions, one can find a space of rest and contemplation, at the same

27. From the project report, see www.mariobotta.ch.

28. Daniele Pisani, “‘Variare’ e ‘ridefinire’” *Casabella* 764 (2008): 27-33, esp. 28.

29. Jean-Paul Sartre, *L’ultimo turista* (Milan: Il Saggiatore, 1993), 89.

30. Vincent Noce, “MAXXI, le tout à l’ego,” June 8, 2010, online at www.liberation.fr/culture.



time an urban connection between two streets in the Flaminio district.³¹ The extension of the campus of the Bocconi University (2002-08), designed by Shelley McNamara and Yvonne Farrell of Grafton Architects, faces a crossroads of the historical inner ring of Milan, between Porta Romana and Porta Ticinese. Its perfect integration with the urban context is made possible by the building's exhibition hall being partially underground. Facing the street with a long glass wall, it establishes an interior/exterior visual relationship, which is highly unusual in the Milanese urban environment.³² But even more significant is the study of the system of public walkways operated in the blocks of departments and offices, whose obstruction at the ground is significantly reduced thanks to the use of bold structural solutions developed by the engineering firm Emilio Pereira.

31. On the history of the museum, see Zaha Hadid Architects, *MAXXI* (Milan: Skira, 2010).

32. Emilio Battisti, "Colta e moderna," *Casabella* 768 (2008): 98-104.

Completed in 2007 in Bergamo and designed by Jean Nouvel, the so called "Red Kilometer" is the new branch of the Brembo company that overlooks the motorway A4 Milan-Venice by means of a long facade covered with red flaming, enamelled plates in aluminium. Despite the considerable longitudinal extension, the Red Kilometer neither devastates the nature of the territory nor is alien to it. Rather, the linear façade puts order in a "lost" place—or better, one that never existed—by reorganizing its components: highway, industrial warehouses, advertising billboards, the steady stream of cars: "All that the project proposes comes, in essence, from what already exists."³³ With this interpretation Alberto Ferlenga attributes to Nouvel a capacity of synthesis between reality and invention that cannot be easily found in other contemporary projects built in Italy. This invention stands out even more if associated to the completion of the adjacent Research and innovation centre for Italcementi Company (2005-12), designed by Richard Meier in which, by contrast, the architectural language is entirely self-referential. This dichotomy clearly reveals the gap between those architects who are available to respond to the Italian context with innovative solutions and those whose attitude is to import a mannerist architecture.

33. Alberto Ferlenga, "Jean Nouvel. Il Kilometro Rosso," in *MMX Architettura zona critica*, ed. Biraghi, Lo Ricco and Micheli, 268-69.