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The Formation of a Heterotopia: An Inquiry into the Intermingling of Utopic Thoughts and Concrete Activities in Olivetti's Ivrea

Matthew Collins

In 1952,¹ the Museum of Modern Art held an exhibit that sought to “encourage our industries in the battle for good integrated design by illustrating the excellence of the Olivetti program.”² The article about the show in the museum's *Bulletin* went on to say that “the Olivetti Company, many critics agree, is the leading corporation in the western world in the field of design. For patronage in architecture, product design, and advertising it would indeed be difficult to name a second.”³ Clearly by the 1950s, roughly two decades after the particularly design-conscious Adriano Olivetti began to play a leading role in the typewriter factory founded in 1908 by his father Camillo, recognition for the company had spread widely—as had the company itself. The multifaceted work accomplished under Adriano Olivetti, who became company president in 1938 and died in 1960, has continued to receive high praise.

In architecture and urban planning, the term *utopia* is still rather frequently applied to the built environment that defined the appearance of the company's headquarters in Ivrea (Fig. 1). Yet, Laura Olivetti, Adriano's youngest daughter, has commented, “Adriano Olivetti viene descritto spesso come un utopista; personalmente ho sempre sentito un moto di profonda ribellione verso questo aggettivo poiché mi pare che all'idea sia seguita l'azione e infatti restano segni molto concreti del suo aver pensato e operato” [“Adriano Olivetti is often described as a utopist; personally, I disagree strongly with this description because I believe his ideas led to actions; there are many concrete indications that he was a man who thought *and* worked”].⁴ In Ivrea and in other cities with Olivetti factories,⁵ she said, one can find “la presenza di quella dose di utopia assolutamente necessaria per vivere e costruire, quell'utopia che è il contrario delle rassegnazione” [“the presence of that dose of utopia that is absolutely necessary for living and building, the sort of utopia that is the opposite of resignation”].⁶ Indeed, *utopia* may not be the right term to use.

¹ Thanks are owed first to Giuliana Minghelli, who encouraged this study, and who read and commented on an early draft. Conversations with Jeffrey Schnapp, Joseph Connors, Stefano Zordan, and Stephen Martin additionally provided invaluable insight. Thanks also to Lucia Alberton and the Archivio Storico Olivetti. My father, a collector and reader of books by and on Frank Lloyd Wright, pointed me toward several useful sources I have incorporated. Finally, Anastasiya Collins joined me in a journey to Ivrea, took most of the original photographs, and was consistently encouraging throughout this study.

² The Department of Architecture and Design, Museum of Modern Art, “Olivetti: Design in Industry,” *The Bulletin of the Museum of Modern Art* 20/1 (Autumn 1952): 3.

³ *Ibid.*

⁴ Laura Olivetti, “Presentazione,” in *Costruire la città dell'uomo. Adriano Olivetti e l'urbanistica*, ed. Carlo Olmo (Turin: Edizioni Di Comunità, 2001), XIII. My emphasis. All translations are mine unless otherwise noted.

⁵ This essay focuses exclusively on Ivrea and its environs, but there is no small number of examples farther afield, from Pozzuoli to Brazil and beyond. On Olivetti as a multinational corporation, see Adriana Castagnoli, “Across borders and beyond boundaries: How the Olivetti Company became a multinational,” *Business History* 56 (2014): 1281–1311.

⁶ Olivetti, “Presentazione,” XIII.



Fig. 1. The center of Olivetti's Ivrea in 1960, Associazione Archivio Storico Olivetti.

Laura Olivetti's rejection of this term to describe her father's endeavors in Ivrea resonates with an essential point in Michel Foucault's "Of Other Spaces," within which, I would suggest, one can also find a more suitable word for describing what took shape in Olivetti's Ivrea,⁷ especially between 1934, the year when the first architectural project began under Adriano, and c.1960, the year of Adriano's death. "Utopias are fundamentally unreal spaces," Foucault says—a statement which implicitly reaffirms Laura Olivetti's reasons for disliking the term in its application to Adriano and Ivrea.⁸ Heterotopias, however, are "a kind of effectively enacted utopia."⁹ Ivrea could be considered one such heterotopia, a particular type among those

⁷ By Olivetti's Ivrea, I mean to principally designate that part of the city south of the river where the company's headquarters are located, along with the satellite housing units built for workers and mostly found within several kilometers of the factory. It is actually quite difficult to precisely designate what "Olivetti's Ivrea" is as an entirely distinct entity from the city itself. The two were quite thoroughly and harmoniously intertwined.

⁸ Michel Foucault, "Of Other Spaces," trans. Jay Miskowiec, *Diacritics* 16/1 (Spring 1986): 24.

⁹ *Ibid.*

discussed by Foucault, who included examples of heterotopias that ranged from smaller spaces or specific buildings, such as cemeteries, gardens or hospitals, to larger complexes or even entire cities, such as boarding schools and religious colonies. He sought to capture the essence of a heterotopia by describing it in mostly general terms and with six principles, but from the start he noted that “heterotopias obviously take quite varied forms.”¹⁰ Thus, one cannot sum up every sort of heterotopia with principles, descriptions, or examples.¹¹ The main significance of *heterotopia* for the purposes of this paper aligns with a fundamental point of the essay: heterotopias are microcosmic embodiments of the unachievable macrocosmic utopia. For the function of heterotopias (the sixth and last of his general principles), Foucault detailed two possibilities: “to create a space of illusion that exposes every real space [...] or else, on the contrary [...] to create a space that is other, another real space, as perfect, as meticulous, as well arranged as ours is messy, ill constructed, and jumbled. This latter type would be the heterotopia, not of illusion, but of compensation.”¹² While one could not claim perfection in Olivetti’s Ivrea, it does seem to have functioned as a space of “compensation,” as indicated even in the MoMA *Bulletin* quoted earlier: Ivrea was a space unlike most other spaces, to be regarded as an outstanding example.

After a long string of well-coordinated projects had come into being under Adriano’s leadership, a certain heterotopic quality emerged. The headquarters of an international industry were carefully integrated within and around the small subalpine city of Ivrea. One might expect a less-than-felicitous outcome when a company grows to this magnitude within a quaint, scenic town. There was the risk that the surrounding landscape would be granted inadequate attention, and the relationship between the natural and the manmade compromised. But instead, Ivrea is a town in which modern industrial architecture sits thoughtfully amidst mountains and hills; a similar harmony is reflected within the city itself, which includes early- and pre-modern structures. One might also expect from a company of this sort no more than a routine concern for its workers. And yet, the attention that the Olivetti Company paid to the welfare of its employees and their families was strikingly genuine. This benevolence was manifest in the built environment through projects that went beyond the masterfully planned and designed workers’ housing units to include a holistically driven array of socially oriented structures. Ivrea and its surrounding areas could well be regarded as a heterotopic space that took shape over time. However, the point of this essay is not merely to claim that projects realized under Adriano contributed to the formation of a heterotopic space in Ivrea. It aims to show that this space came into shape precisely because of a confluence of influences: thinkers, planners, designers, and political factors. Together, these elements produced a sum that exceeded its many stellar individual parts. As Robert Nisbet observed regarding Olivetti, he “collected intellectuals

¹⁰ Ibid.

¹¹ Some may insist that Foucault is referring only to taboo spaces. Spaces of banishment are one sort of heterotopia, but examples that Foucault provides of heterotopic spaces are varied and cannot be easily reduced to such specific or narrow categories. According to the examples he offers, heterotopias can bear positive and/or negative connotations; they can be sacred or forbidden, politically neutral or deeply biased. As Michiel Dehaene and Lieven de Cauter put it, “when we review all the examples mentioned [...] we get the idea of the vastness of the concept” (*Heterotopia and the City: Public Space in a Postcivil Society* [London: Routledge, 2008], 4). Studies seeking to limit the scope of Foucault’s truly open-ended thoughts on this topic without using a very light touch may well be revising Foucault’s thoughts in the process.

¹² Foucault, “Of Other Spaces,” 27.

[including architects] as other industrialists collected art,¹³ and one might say that the result was nothing less than art on a grander scale.

What follows are investigations into specific elements that influenced Adriano and his dynamic and evolving entourage of architects and planners. Even if, as Carlo Olmo recognized, these influences are at times fragmented and difficult to trace,¹⁴ we can uncover indications through an approach reminiscent of Morelli's fingernails and earlobes, in that important clues emerge through specific details.¹⁵ The movements, individuals, and political regimes identified here as major influences in the shaping of Ivrea's heterotopic space are the Italian Rationalists (along with the Bauhaus and the Futurists, residually), Le Corbusier, fascism, and Frank Lloyd Wright. A noteworthy aspect of the relationship between these various elements and their realization in Ivrea is that one could regard some among these sources as bearing utopic qualities in the sense of being unrealized (and unrealizable) ideals. Here again, we can highlight the distinction between utopia, as Laura Olivetti implicitly and Foucault explicitly defined it, and heterotopia: in Ivrea, these utopic concepts were realized in limited and fragmented ways, according to what was practically reasonable and useful.

This essay generally follows a temporal trajectory in which each of the aforementioned elements is highlighted according to the moment of its prevalence in Olivetti's Ivrea. Yet, there is often such a significant overlap among them that this can only be regarded as an approximate chronology. A major turning point in Ivrea and elsewhere in Italy is the shift between the pre- and post-war State. After the Second World War ended, the influence of organic architecture became more overt, whereas beforehand, models of urban planning akin to those of Le Corbusier were more prevalent. This is not to suggest that there were no foreshadowings of organic proclivities before 1945. For example, architects had to abandon the use of materials like steel and glass (and these materials' geometrically driven outcomes) in the immediate aftermath of the invasion of Ethiopia in 1935, when the League of Nations imposed sanctions on Italy for war crimes. Architects were forced to turn to less processed materials as part of the fascist policy of *autarchia*; a notable example in Ivrea is Figini and Pollini's Asilio Nido, for which work began in 1939 and which relied heavily on local stone. The presence of Rationalist architecture never entirely disappeared, but it decreased in prominence in post-war projects. One of the most obvious shifts was the waning of fascist influence over architectural practices and planning endeavors, which was reflected in Ivrea in the mid- to late-1930s (as I will discuss) and which faded with the decline of the regime itself.

Before delving into the details of the growth and anatomy of this heterotopic space, some additional points regarding the Olivetti Company's history and origins ought to be addressed. Under Adriano's father Camillo, the first factory, known as *mattoni rossi* (the Red Brick Building), went up in 1908 (Fig. 2). The Olivetti Company, the first in Italy to produce typewriters, flourished within the *mattoni rossi*, which still stands in modified form beside the subsequent extensions of the factory that stretch along Via Jervis, the central road running through the industrial complex. The building was a fairly small, freestanding brick structure with arched windows and doors that permitted a minimal amount of natural light to enter. It was

¹³ Robert Nisbet, "Review: The Intellectuals and the Powers and Other Essays," *American Journal of Sociology* 79 (1973): 724.

¹⁴ Carlo Olmo, *Urbanistica e società civile. Esperienza e conoscenza, 1945–1960* (Turin: Bollati Boringhieri, 1992), 5.

¹⁵ In this case, though, it is not a matter of authorship (in a broad sense) as with Morelli's attributions, but of an author's influence, the concept of author being broadly defined here to include architects and other sorts of makers.

capped by a crenelated roof that has since been removed, which added a pre-modern element to the structure that was reminiscent, for example, of the peaks of the towers on Ivrea's fourteenth-century castle.

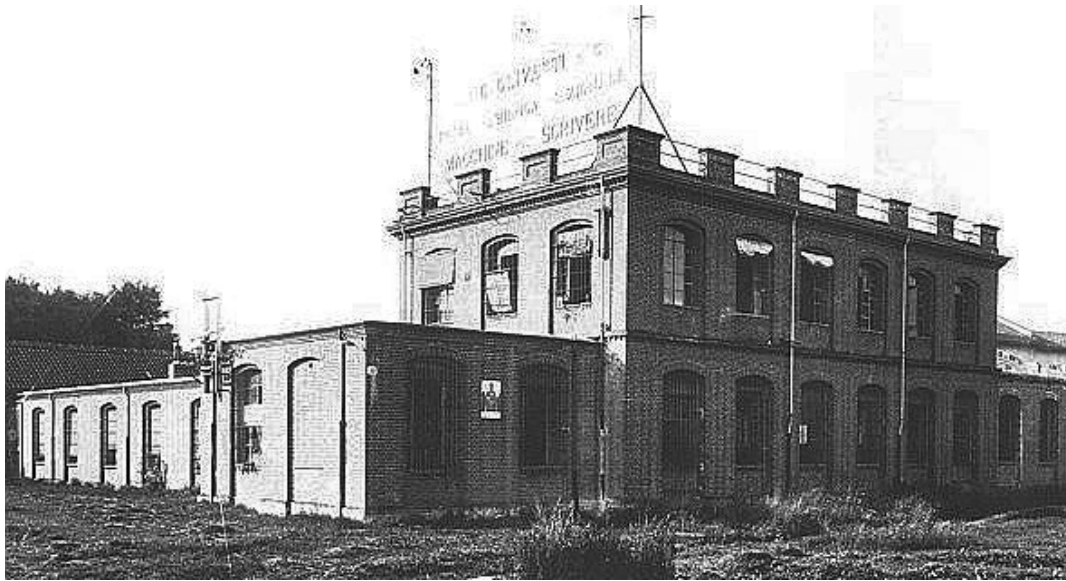


Fig. 2. *Mattoni Rossi*, the original Olivetti factory building, completed in 1908. Archivio Storico Olivetti.

Camillo obtained his degree in chemical engineering under the direction of Galileo Ferraris, and spent 1893–94 as a teaching assistant in Stanford University's Department of Electrical Engineering. He was a socialist; his son Adriano was born in Ivrea in 1901 and grew up alongside his father's company and under his father's influence,¹⁶ being "baptized" into the life of the factory from his youth.¹⁷ Adriano studied chemical engineering at the Polytechnic University of Turin, where he graduated in 1924. He returned to Ivrea to work in the company factory before travelling to America for a year with the goal of learning from American industries in order to improve his father's factory.¹⁸ In the 1920s, Adriano also came into contact with noted antifascist Leone Ginzburg and his wife Natalia, whose sister, Paola Levi, Adriano married. As for his role within the Olivetti Company, before becoming president, Adriano became general director in 1932, which was when the radical changes to the built environment of Ivrea began.

¹⁶ See Natalia Ginzburg, *Lessico familiare* (Turin: Einaudi, 1999), 79–80, in which Ginzburg recounts the impression that Camillo left upon her family, including the manner in which he raised his children.

¹⁷ Rossano Astarita, *Gli architetti di Olivetti. Una storia di committenza industriale* (Milan: Franco Angeli, 2012), 46.

¹⁸ On Adriano's visit to America and the subsequent role that American political developments, including the New Deal, had in shaping Olivetti's thoughts, see Giuliana Gemelli's chapter, "Costruire la modernità: Adriano Olivetti e l'America," in *Il regno di Proteo. Ingegneria e scienze umane nel percorso di Adriano Olivetti* (Bologna: Bononia University Press, 2014), 59–76. See also Valerio Ochetto's *Adriano Olivetti. La biografia* (Rome: Edizioni di Comunità, 2013).

The Rationalists and Ivrea

Looking at particulars within the constellation of influences present in the built environment of Olivetti's Ivrea, we begin with the most obvious and direct of influences in the formation of this heterotopic space: Italian Rationalism, an avant-garde approach to twentieth-century architectural design in Italy. The Gruppo 7, a noteworthy gathering of Italian Rationalists that was especially well-disposed to the abundance of industrial projects in northern Italy, formed in Milan in the mid-1920s. Two members of this group became central figures in the architectural and urban developments of Ivrea: Luigi Figini and Gino Pollini. They were the first architects hired by Adriano. From 1934 until completion in 1937, they extended the factory workspace beyond the old *mattoni rossi*. Pollini later recounted the first meeting between Adriano, himself, and Figini. He stated quite simply that “Adriano Olivetti non ci ha mai detto perchè ci ha chiamati a collaborare con lui. Sembra che, visitando la Triennale del 1933 si sia soffermato con interesse sulla nostra costruzione ‘Villa studio per un artista’. Infatti, subito dopo, ci ha affidato l’incarico per l’ampliamento dell’officina ICO” [“Adriano Olivetti never told us why he asked us to collaborate with him. It seems that, while visiting the 1933 Triennale [in Milan], our construction, ‘Artist’s house and studio,’ aroused his interest. In fact, he hired us immediately afterward for the job of extending the offices of the ICO workshop”].¹⁹ Figini and Pollini brought many influences with them, some of which are evident in this first project (Fig. 3). A prominent feature of Italian Rationalist architecture is the grid, evident along the principal face of this structure in the form of three strips of glass framed in perfect squares and set in perfect proportion between slabs of cement. Each of the three strips of glass in turn bears three squares, resulting in a doubling of threes, one smaller and one larger. This play on spatial precision is indebted to Gropius and the Bauhaus, as Pollini also directly acknowledged.²⁰ The salience of the grid would increase in the second extension of the factory (Fig. 4), carried out between 1939–40, when cement was replaced by a wall consisting almost entirely of gridded glass.

The Futurists were another source of influence on the architectural aesthetics of Ivrea, even though, by the 1920s, they were black sheep in the sphere of architectural practice. Their radical architectural thinking is embodied in Antonio Sant’Elia’s drawings for a Futurist city (Fig. 5) and his architectural manifesto. In the manifesto, Sant’Elia asserted, “just as the ancients drew their inspiration in art from the elements of the natural world, so we—materially and spiritually artificial—must find our inspiration in the new mechanical world we have created.”²¹ In his drawings too, two elements are conspicuously absent: people and the natural landscape. Instead, Sant’Elia showcases a city with an entirely mechanized topography and striking horizontality, presumably permitting greater technological efficiency. This is not the world of the Rationalists, who sought to distance themselves from the Futurists, and were indeed quite distinct; Sant’Elia’s world does not harmonize with Figini and Pollini’s work in Ivrea from its inception, where people and nature were prioritized—and yet, one cannot deny Sant’Elia’s influence. The turn toward mechanization and the praise for processed materials did have its residual effect. In Figini

¹⁹ This quote is drawn from a conference on the *Comunità* (Convegno sul tema “L’Immagine della *Comunità*,” 1) held in Reggio Calabria in 1982 in which Pollini presented various recollections, especially regarding specific building projects that he and Figini carried out with Adriano. The pagination here is according to a typewritten draft accompanied by a few handwritten changes in L’Archivio Storico Olivetti (U. Cons. 07, U. Arch. 146 in the Archivio Personalità Olivetti Ex. Zorzi). Hereafter I will refer to this document as “Presentation.”

²⁰ *Ibid.*, 3.

²¹ Antonio Sant’Elia, “Futurist Architecture,” in *Futurism: An Anthology*, ed. Lawrence S. Rainey, Christine Poggi, and Laura Wittman, trans. Lawrence S. Rainey (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2009), 198–202.

and Pollini's first factory extension project, glass was used to an unprecedented extent. This was, in essence, further from the unprocessed natural world than the bricks of the *mattoni rossi*. Yet, this processed glass paradoxically granted those within the building a greater sense of nearness to the natural world around them, as intended.²² Figini and Pollini thus introduced increased artificiality on a material level even while seeking to reduce the sense of an artificial barrier between the workspace and the landscape.



Fig. 3. Figini and Pollini's first factory extension (with later additions in the distance), 1934–37.
Photo: Anastasiya Collins (2014).



Fig. 4. Figini and Pollini's second (and in the distance, third) factory extension, 1939–40.
Photo: Anastasiya Collins (2014).

²² Pollini, "Presentation," 3.



Fig. 5. Antonio Sant'Elia, *The Electrical Center*, from his Futurist City drawings, 1914. Private Collection.

There were other avenues that facilitated the residual influences of the Futurists in Ivrea. Adriano studied and once positively referenced Sant'Elia's drawings in a 1937 article in *Meridiano di Roma*, deeming them a showcase of efficient industrial organization.²³ Another potential conduit through which the Futurists influenced Ivrea is found in Turin: in 1923, while Adriano was still studying at the university, Giacomo Matté-Trucco's Fiat-Lingotto factory—which has been regarded by some as the only truly Futurist structure ever to be built in Italy—was completed (Fig. 6).²⁴ As a student of engineering in Turin, the young Olivetti would have quite likely gone to see this factory building, that used its roof as a racetrack to test the cars produced below. Even if Olivetti and his architectural collaborators were not enthusiastic about drinking “the nourishing sludge” of “fair factory drain,”²⁵ the Futurists' influence, however partial, was present.

²³ Adriano Olivetti, “Piano regionale della Valle D'Aosta. Parte generale,” in *Civitas hominum. Scritti di urbanistica e di industria: 1933–1943*, ed. Giuseppe Lupo (Turin: Arago, 2008), 131.

²⁴ Caroline Tisdall and Angelo Bozzolla, *Futurism* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1978), 135. Matté-Trucco was not a Futurist, but their influence here is so notable that his building has nevertheless been regarded as such.

²⁵ F. T. Marinetti, “The Founding and Manifesto of Futurism,” in *Futurist Manifestos*, ed. Umbro Apollonio (New York: Viking, 1973), 21.

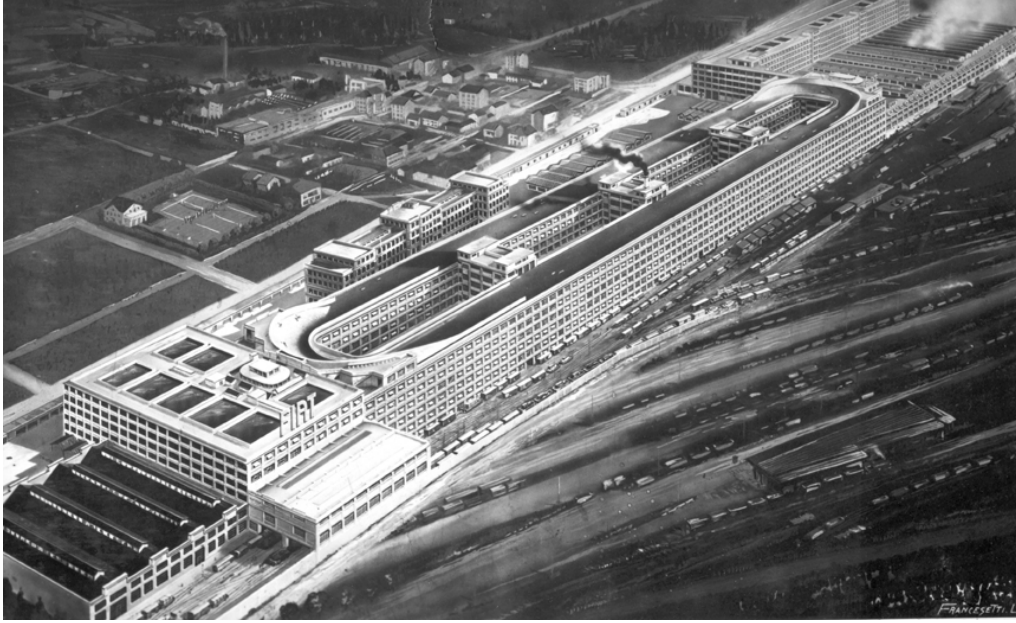


Fig. 6. Giacomo Matté-Trucco, Fiat-Lingotto factory in Turin, completed in 1923 (Wikimedia commons).

Le Corbusier and Ivrea

Le Corbusier's influence is principally indirect, despite direct contact. The proto-architect had visited Ivrea in 1936 potentially to work for Adriano. Like the Futurists, Le Corbusier loved technology and the machine. He wrote that "there is no dangerous futurism, a sort of literary dynamite flung violently at the spectator."²⁶ Further, as the final architectural image of the 1924 printing of his *Vers une architecture*, he featured the Fiat factory in Turin, accompanied by the book's final words: "Architecture or Revolution. Revolution can be avoided."²⁷ Le Corbusier was a champion of the engineer aesthetic, which sat unsurprisingly well with Adriano: in an article dating to 1935, Olivetti praised "ingegneri educati alla severa tradizione dell'architettura italiana" ["engineers educated in the austere tradition of Italian architecture"], implying his positive outlook on the increased intermingling of architecture and engineering.²⁸

Le Corbusier was no Futurist though, especially in his views on urban planning, which left their traces upon Olivetti's Ivrea. He was a great deal more concerned with the natural environment and human experience than the Futurists, though in his view, humankind ought to take a dominant role over the natural world around him. "Nature," he wrote, "presents itself to us as a chaos... a confusion," while "the spirit which animates Nature is a spirit of order," which spirit he considered strictly human.²⁹ "Placed in the midst of chaotic nature," he elaborated, "for his own security man creates and surrounds himself with a zone of protection in harmony with what he is and what he thinks."³⁰ He went on to say that the "twisted streets and twisted roofs" created to adapt to a given topography were signs of weakness, and he likened them to an

²⁶ Le Corbusier, *The City of To-Morrow and Its Planning* (New York: Dover, 1987), 178.

²⁷ Le Corbusier, *Toward an Architecture*, trans. John Goodman (Los Angeles: Getty Research Institute, 2007), 306–7.

²⁸ Adriano Olivetti, "Il piano regionale della Valle d'Aosta. Una chiarificazione," in *Civitas hominum*, 66.

²⁹ Le Corbusier, *The City of To-Morrow*, 18–19.

³⁰ *Ibid.*, 22.

aimless pack donkey that “meanders along,”³¹ and that “zigzags in order to avoid the larger stones, or to ease the climb, or to gain a little shade.”³² Rather than shape the built environment around a given topography, he too subjected the surrounding space to meet human need. As for the function of the natural world, he wrote that by “setting Nature in the midst of our labour,” one can “satisfy the deepest human desires.”³³ The aesthetic result of this philosophy was a more rigid organization of buildings that nevertheless seek natural surroundings, as drawings of his ideal city also demonstrate. In Adriano’s writings, especially those of the 1930s, one finds similar sentiments: he referred to the Alps, for example, as “un prezioso ed invidiato serbatoio di gioia” [“a precious and envied reservoir of joy”] for human appeasement.³⁴

Le Corbusier’s urban thinking, as expressed in *The City of To-Morrow*, is notably evident in the second project that Figini and Pollini carried out in Ivrea, which began in 1935: workers’ housing units located just off the road upon which the factory’s central building stood (Figs. 7–8). Unlike the housing units that would be built in Olivetti’s Ivrea in subsequent years, including Piccinato’s Bellavista (to be discussed later), these houses were arranged on a grid, thus avoiding the formation of the “twisted streets” that Le Corbusier so despised. Each unit is allotted a small, enclosed green space in front of the entrance, and beyond these enclosed spaces, the units have a larger shared plot of grass.



Fig. 7. Figini and Pollini, workers’ housing units, begun 1935.
Photo: Anastasiya Collins (2014).

³¹ Ibid., 24

³² Ibid., 7.

³³ Ibid., 78.

³⁴ Adriano Olivetti, “Piano regionale della Valle d’Aosta. 1938,” in *Civitas hominum*, 131.



Fig. 8. View of the workers' housing units from the side.
Photo: Anastasiya Collins (2014).

The young Rationalists were profoundly influenced by Le Corbusier, but they were not blindly devoted. During the 1933 CIAM conference in Athens, which was attended by Terragni and Pollini of Gruppo 7, they directly confronted certain views held by Le Corbusier and other architects from lands north of the Alps with their own perspectives on architectural practice that had stronger roots in an Italian-specific consciousness.³⁵ Yet conflicting views do not preclude influence—they are often conducive to it—and one cannot deny Le Corbusier's overwhelming and international sway. This influence hardly escaped the modernizing Italian architects, including Figini and Pollini. In fact, despite these divergences, “Figini and Pollini were deemed the Italian disciples” of Le Corbusier;³⁶ though an overstatement, this nevertheless speaks to their high regard for the Swiss architect.

Adriano also respected Le Corbusier, but not without a critical eye. When the architect visited Ivrea in 1936, the two could not agree on a potential project that would expand upon Figini and Pollini's aforementioned housing units along Via Jervis (then called Via Castellamonte). In Olivetti's final letter to the architect he wrote: “Non sono dell'avviso di rifiutare completamente la Sua collaborazione, ma di sottoporla ai risultati di una consultazione più approfondita” [“I do not intend to completely decline your collaboration, but to subject it to

³⁵ William Ward, “Rationalism: Architecture in Italy between the Wars,” *The Thirties Society Journal* 6 (1987): 37. This thinking was a product of the fascist propaganda machine that strongly celebrated Italy's *romanità*, especially in the early- to mid-1930s during the build-up to the war in Ethiopia.

³⁶ Astarita, *Gli architetti di Olivetti*, 181.

the findings of a more in-depth consultation”].³⁷ It would seem that Le Corbusier could not accept the collaborative, multifaceted nature of Olivetti’s Ivrea where no single view would predominate. One of the major issues that Le Corbusier raised regarding Ivrea was related to the same difference of opinion that had arisen in Athens three years prior: the plan was developing, in his view, according to “the ritualized continuation of old ideas (and particularly Italian ones) dating back to the time when the street was the principal center and the houses faced it.”³⁸ At this point in the development of Olivetti’s Ivrea, Le Corbusier’s criticism was not necessarily wrong; in the mid-1930s, Via Jervis was the street on which both the factory and the workers’ housing stood, and in rather close proximity. It would be an exaggeration to compare this arrangement to the long stretches of residential architecture that face major boulevards, as in the center of nearby Turin—and one might suspect that Le Corbusier did mean to imply such a comparison. Via Jervis was hardly encased by architecture; rather, it was saturated with views of the surrounding hills and mountains, and the number of structures along the street was still relatively sparse. Nevertheless, it was true that for the time being there was one street around which everything was being built, and at that moment, despite the status and prowess of Le Corbusier, Adriano chose not to espouse his perspective on how to move forward urbanistically. Despite this apparent falling out, the Swiss architect’s ideas continued to influence Ivrea’s built environment. Even in the 1950s, *Comunità*, one of Olivetti’s journals dedicated to the social ideology he had fleshed out in the mid-1940s, published writings by Le Corbusier on a regular basis.³⁹ He remained, however, one among the constellation of influences.⁴⁰

Fascism and Ivrea

The most complex of influences upon the built environment in Olivetti’s Ivrea is Italian fascism. An investigation into its influence requires a parsing of evidence regarding where Adriano stood in relation to the regime at various moments, as well as an inquiry into the extent to which the regime’s preferred means of shaping an industrial city according to its corporatist policies was evident in the architectural landscape of Ivrea. Further, this inquiry raises the question of the politics—or, the political allegiances—of style. Italian Rationalism has come to be regarded as almost inseparably intertwined with fascism, whether or not such comparisons and claims are entirely fair or accurate.

Adriano Olivetti’s close affiliation with Leone Ginzburg and the Levi family, known for their longstanding resistance to the fascist regime, further informed his already left-leaning political outlook. In the 1920s, when Adriano first came into contact with the family, we can be quite sure of his political leanings, which had been nurtured by the socialist views of his father. According to an admittedly fictionalized account provided by Natalia Ginzburg (after whom a

³⁷ Ibid., 182.

³⁸ Quoted in the original French in Giorgio Ciucci, “Le premesse del Piano regolatore della Valle d’Aosta,” in *Costruire la città dell’uomo*, ed. Olmo, 81: “Rituel des anciennes idées (très particulièrement italiennes), du temps où la rue était maîtresse et où les maisons étaient sur le rue.” Le Corbusier wrote this directly to Pollini in a letter. Ciucci has elsewhere written more on these epistolary exchanges, particularly those between Adriano and Le Corbusier, in “Le Corbusier e Adriano Olivetti negli anni ’30,” in *L’Italia de Le Corbusier*, ed. Marida Talamona (Paris: Éditions de la Villette, 2008), 55–82.

³⁹ Olmo, *Urbanistica e società civile*, 118.

⁴⁰ Le Corbusier later undertook a project for the Olivetti Company in 1964; Adriano’s son hired him to design a factory, which he did, though it was never built.

street in Ivrea is named) in her novel, *Lessico familiare*, Adriano not only opposed the regime but helped sneak Socialist leader Filippo Turati across the Italian border into France.⁴¹

Clearly, in the 1920s, Adriano felt little allegiance to the fascist regime; there is similar evidence of his views of the fascists in the 1940s. In 1944, he fled to Switzerland as a reemerging antifascist activist.⁴² The force of his antifascist sentiments is well represented by the changed name of the street along which the factory stands: formerly Via Castellamonte, Via Jervis was renamed after the former Olivetti employee, Guglielmo Jervis. An avid rock climber of Waldensian background, Jervis had helped Jews escape into Switzerland via the Alps until he was caught, tortured, and killed by the Italian SS.

Despite his antifascist sentiments in the 1920s and 1940s, one could argue that Adriano changed his views during the mid- to late-1930s. To adequately grasp the significance of his apparent support of the regime, a larger contextual understanding is necessary—particularly regarding the development of the so-called corporatist economic policies enacted by the regime, which increasingly resulted in the State’s involvement in industrial practice, including the planning of “new towns” that were often shaped around a particular industrial product. More than a dozen underdeveloped rural areas were transformed into functional towns, and many became industrial spaces. The stated reason behind this push for urban renewal was a rejection of big cities as corrupt and corrupting settings that removed people from their proper, natural surroundings; an apparently well-intentioned endeavor. In corporatism Mussolini “recognized the propagandistic value of distinguishing Italy from the Soviet Union and the USA in a manner that justified an authoritarian, yet beneficent, central government.”⁴³ Of course, such beneficence was purely tactical.

One among these industrialized rural towns was Torviscosa, whose name can be translated as Rayon Peak. Located in Friuli-Venezia Giulia, it housed a chemical factory that produced cellulose and rayon.⁴⁴ The town was nicknamed *Città della Cellulosa*. Work on the planning of the city began in 1937 (Fig. 9). In addition to factory buildings, under the planning of architect Giuseppe de Min, workers’ housing, green spaces, and social centers were constructed.⁴⁵ This may seem partially to parallel Ivrea, but only at first glance. In the hyper-organized space of the *Città della Cellulosa*, two of the city’s major buildings—the movie theater and the multifunctional recreational center—were located directly across from the factory. This formal arrangement suggests the contrived nature of the supposed concern for the people’s wellbeing, as

⁴¹ Ginzburg, *Lessico familiare*, 78. Natalia Ginzburg’s account of this episode in which Olivetti helped Turati has been corroborated and is widely accepted as historically accurate. See, for one example of corroboration, the important Italian socialist Pietro Lezzi’s presentation of the event in *Pagine socialiste* (Naples: Alfredo Guida Editore, 2002), 42.

⁴² Bruno Caizzi, *Camillo e Adriano Olivetti con 20 tavole fuori testo* (Turin: Unione Tipografico-Editrice Torinese, 1962), 195.

⁴³ David Rifkind, “‘Everything in the state, nothing against the state, nothing outside the state’: Corporatist Urbanism and Rationalist Architecture in Fascist Italy” *Planning Perspectives* 27 (2012): 54. Rifkind’s essay includes a discussion of *Quadrante*, which supported corporatist activities—a journal Olivetti played a supporting role in for a time, and to which Figini and Pollini were regular contributors.

⁴⁴ For a fuller history of Torviscosa, see Massimo Bortolotti, *Torviscosa. Nascita di una città* (Udine: Casamassima, 1988). For additional studies on the city, see Enrico Biasin, Raffaella Canci, and Stefano Perulli, eds., *Torviscosa: esemplarità di un progetto* (Udine: Forum, 2003), especially the first two chapters, one on Mussolini and Torviscosa and the other a presentation and discussion of the architecture and urban planning of Torviscosa, by Paolo Nicoloso (13–26) and Massimo Bortolotti (27–52) respectively.

⁴⁵ Robert Kargon and Arthur Molella, *Invented Edens: Techno-cities of the Twentieth Century* (Cambridge, MA: MIT Press, 2008), 56.

the health of the workers was all too directly connected to the operation of the factory. Further, by feeding the workers into these buildings—one of which showed films, purportedly the strongest weapon (*l'arma più forte*) of the fascist regime—after they finished the day's labor, it was possible to keep all aspects of their life under fascist control and oversight. There stood an eerily looming tower that functioned as an information and documentation space, calling to mind the all-seeing center of Foucault's panopticon. Further, it was only after the war that the name of the town's central square was changed to the Piazza del Popolo; it had formerly borne the name of the Piazza dell'Impero.⁴⁶ Fascist nomenclature can be quite revealing: at the heart of this town, and indeed, all of these “new towns,” was an interest not oriented toward the people but toward the fulfillment of fascist imperial dreams. The strengthening of the economy through industrial production within the country was needed for these dreams of empire, especially after 1935, when the League of Nations imposed sanctions in the wake of the Ethiopian invasion.⁴⁷



Fig. 9. Giuseppe di Min (principal planner), Tor Viscosa, begun 1937. L'Associazione Primi di Torviscosa.

Amidst all of this, Adriano saw an opportunity. After all, like these fascist “new towns,” Ivrea was a small city with a major industrial plant. Thus, beginning in 1935 with an article titled “Il piano regionale della Valle d’Aosta” [“The Regional Plan of the Valle d’Aosta”], which he published in the journal *Ottobre*,⁴⁸ Olivetti began publicly presenting his ideas regarding a large-scale plan for the Valle d’Aosta region, in which industry, society, and nature would be brought

⁴⁶ Ibid., 57.

⁴⁷ For more on the regime’s response to sanctions, see Matteo Fochessati and Gianni Franzone, *L’Italia farà da sé. Propaganda moda e società negli anni dell’autarchia* (Genoa: Il Canneto Editore, 2015), based upon the 2014–2015 exhibit at the Palazzo Ducale in Genoa.

⁴⁸ Olivetti, “Il piano regionale della Valle d’Aosta,” reprinted in *Civitas Hominum*, 57-64.

into harmony.⁴⁹ Through this and other articles in Olivetti's series of writings, one can obtain an in-depth glimpse of his early views and goals in industrial, architectural, and humanistic organization. He wrote of how architecture would be "combinata con le bellezze naturali" ["combined with natural beauty"],⁵⁰ and he referred to the ideal city as a "organismo armonico" ["harmonic organism"] in which industry and social life were mutually beneficial.⁵¹ He also wrote of the need to provide social structures such as schools and sports facilities, to maintain "spazi verdi ampissimi" ["large green spaces"],⁵² and the need for "un ideale di giustizia sociale" ["an ideal of social justice"].⁵³ At the same time, one finds Adriano's pro-fascist statements among these writings. He wrote in 1938 that his plan for the Valle d'Aosta was "Tracciato nel discorso del Duce sul Piano Regolatore" ["laid out in keeping with the discourse of the Duce"], thus posturing deference.⁵⁴ Shortly after the fascists had seized Ethiopia and declared empire in May of 1936, he wrote: "Si è detto un tempo della debolezza della industria italiana fondata sulla ineliminabile inferiorità della mancanza di materie prime. La valorizzazione dell'Impero dovrà modificare profondamente tale situazione" ["It is called a time of weakness for Italian industries, based upon an irrevocable inferiority due to the lack of raw materials. The development of the Empire will profoundly change this situation"].⁵⁵ In the same article, he went on to praise "il senso di responsabilità collettiva creata dal Regime" ["the sense of collective responsibility created by the regime"], and even spoke of "La potenza dello Stato Corporativo" ["the power of the corporative State"] that would create "un ordine sociale superiore" ["a superior social order"].⁵⁶ Not many years before and again several years after these statements, one sees in Adriano an antifascist taking personal risks to oppose the regime; here he sounds more like a card-carrying member of the party. But perhaps it is no accident that his heartfelt views on the merging of industry, workers, and nature were accompanied by words of praise for the regime; such praise may have seemed necessary for realizing his true goals.

The evidence remains open to interpretation, but unless something more definite to the contrary emerges, it is most likely that Adriano saw a potential opportunity amidst this new stage of corporatist activity to maneuver on a larger scale, even under the restrictive dictatorial state. As Jeffrey Schnapp has shown, during the dawn of corporatist activity, forward-thinking artists, writers, and architects were invigorated by the expectation that alongside this apparent economic development, there would be an unprecedented degree of receptivity to newer, bolder forms of modern cultural expression.⁵⁷ This is not to glorify the inevitably imperfect Adriano; it is possible that, as an industrialist and an architectural patron-author,⁵⁸ he was also caught up in

⁴⁹ Figini and Pollini joined this endeavor, as did all the members of the Milan-based group BBPR—Antonio Banfi, Ludovico Barbiano di Belgiojoso, Enrico Peressutti, and Ernesto Rogers—as well as Piero Bottoni. This enlarged collaboration principally took place in 1936–37, when they began designs (Ciucci, "Piano regolatore," 57).

⁵⁰ Adriano Olivetti, "Architettura al servizio sociale," in *Civitas hominum*, 71.

⁵¹ *Ibid.*, 69.

⁵² *Ibid.*, 70.

⁵³ *Ibid.*, 72.

⁵⁴ Olivetti, "Parte Generale," in *Civitas Hominum*, 135.

⁵⁵ Adriano Olivetti "Criterio scientifico e realtà industriale," *Tecnica ed organizzazione* (1937): 12.

⁵⁶ *Ibid.*, 13.

⁵⁷ This excitement among cultural producers was the continuation of similar stirrings that followed the ten-year anniversary of the fascist regime in 1932; see Jeffrey T. Schnapp, "The People's Glass House," *South Central Review* 25/3 (2008): 45–56, especially 48–53.

⁵⁸ Olivetti has stood in both positions, as a patron and as an active participant in the design process. As Pollini noted regarding his role in the 1935 workers' housing project: "Adriano ebbe una grande parte in questo lavoro, che porta

this wave of excitement. Yet, it seems he would have had a keener general understanding of the corporatist project than someone fully occupied with design or the arts. His publicly written statements favoring the regime also suggest a feigned tone, such as his supposed expectation of a “superior social order.” Wherever the truth lies, one can still affirm that Olivetti remained fundamentally antifascist; “an industrialist with a long Resistance past,” who was found over the course of his life among “left-wing Turinese circles,” as Diana Pinto and many others have highlighted.⁵⁹

In Mussolini’s response to Olivetti’s plans for the Valle d’Aosta, a simple “no” in blue pencil on a drawing of the plan, we find a strong indication of the essential ideological disharmony between the two men.⁶⁰ The influential Giuseppe Bottai, who regarded himself as the greatest intellectual among the fascists,⁶¹ was interested in Olivetti’s socially conscious approach to planning, even if his espousals of *corporativismo* were, in Emilio Renzi’s view, less than clear,⁶² but his was not the final say. According to Giorgio Ciucci, Mussolini saw no political or economic benefit for the endeavor.⁶³ Olivetti’s interests were simply not the same as Mussolini’s.⁶⁴ Thus, his years of planning and writing were in some sense wasted, insofar as none of these projects was actualized, although they are at least retained in the form of drawings, plans, and texts.⁶⁵ The plans for the Valle d’Aosta in attempted association with the regime’s corporatist activities had little overt influence on Olivetti’s Ivrea. But one could say that the years devoted principally to this endeavor constituted a lost opportunity for the planning and building of Olivetti-related structures, and in this respect, the influence of fascist corporatism is evident through a certain absence.

The gulf between Olivetti’s views and those of the fascist regime is further evident when one considers the extent to which genuine care for the workers was exhibited—indeed, this was hardly a heartlessly optimized economic policy developed for purely self-serving ends. During Adriano’s exile in Switzerland, he spent time thinking and writing about his social vision, the *Comunità*, about which he published the book *L’Ordine politico delle comunità* in 1945.⁶⁶ Urban planning was not the principal focus, but he understood that social thinking must take on urban forms, and so addressed some issues concerning the built environment. For example, he called for “La trasformazione delle grandi città alveolari in organismi urbani in cui la natura riprenda il suo grande posto e l’uomo abbia fuori del lavoro e nel lavoro il sentimento di una vita più armonica e più completa” [“the transformation of the great alveolar cities into urban organisms in which nature recovers its grand place and man has, *outside of work and during work, the sense*

anche la sua firma” [“Adriano had a major role in this undertaking, which also bears his signature”] (“Presentation,” 3).

⁵⁹ Diana Pinto, “Sociology, Politics, and Society in Postwar Italy 1950–1980,” *Theory and Society* 10/5 (September 1981): 675.

⁶⁰ Valerio Ochetto, *Adriano Olivetti* (Milan: Mondadori, 1985), 91.

⁶¹ R.J.B. Bosworth, *Mussolini* (London: Bloomsbury, 2010), 172. For an introduction to Bottai’s view of intellectualism in the fascist regime, see “Fascism as Intellectual Revolution” (1924) by Bottai, in *Primer of Italian Fascism*, ed. and trans. Jeffrey T. Schnapp (Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press, 2000), 75–87.

⁶² Emilio Renzi, *Comunità concreta. Le opere e il pensiero di Adriano Olivetti* (Naples: Alfredo Guida Editore, 2008), 24.

⁶³ Ciucci, “Piano regolatore,” 64.

⁶⁴ Rifkind, “Corporatist Urbanism and Rationalist Architecture,” 66.

⁶⁵ Olivetti and many of his planners compiled an edited volume presenting their endeavors in *Studi e proposte preliminari per il piano regolatore della Valle d’Aosta* (Ivrea: Nuove Edizioni Ivrea, 1943).

⁶⁶ Adriano Olivetti, *L’Ordine politico delle comunità: le garanzie di libertà in uno stato socialista* (Ivrea: Nuove Edizioni Ivrea, 1945).

of a more harmonious and complete life”].⁶⁷ Though this was written in the mid-1940s, one finds such perspectives from the beginning of Adriano’s involvement in the built environment—and quite notably, amidst those years of apparent support for the fascist regime. As Pollini pointed out, referencing an article by Olivetti on the 1935 workers’ housing project, one can see the very sensibilities that would be more extensively developed in his 1945 book: “Nella presentazione scritta per Casabella egli affermava, anticipando la visione di Comunità, che ‘la città industriale doveva trovare il giusto rapporto col villaggio agricolo un’unità di scambio e di vita sociale’” [“in the written presentation for *Casabella* he affirmed, anticipating the vision of the *Comunità*, that ‘the industrial city must find a proper relation between the agricultural village as a unit of exchange and of social life’”].⁶⁸

One of many glimpses into Adriano’s concern for healthy relations between work and well-being, and between natural and man-made environments, is the complex at the Marina di Massa. In 1948, he hired Annibale Focchi and Ottavio Cascio to build this structure, enabling the factory workers’ children to spend time each year under the Tuscan sun. At the Marina, children from the ages of six to twelve stayed for one month of the summer, while those from the ages of twelve to fourteen camped nearby.⁶⁹ French children from the Union française des œuvres de vacances laïques joined the young vacationers from Ivrea for the sake of the cultural development of the workers’ children.⁷⁰ One can sense from the beginning genuine, holistic concern for the workers and their families in the planning projects that Adriano oversaw. This was hardly the manipulative pseudo-concern that the fascist regime espoused for factory workers as a part of its attempt to build an empire with the help of industrial production.

In terms of architectural style, there is a palpable trace of fascism in Olivetti’s Ivrea. To explain this, we must consider the oft proclaimed political affiliations and implications of Italian Rationalism. Mussolini was chameleonic in his espousals of architectural style, praising both modern innovation and neoclassical recapitulation. Glass, it was claimed, was fascist.⁷¹ So was stucco (and nearly anything else, from antiquity to cinema; from agriculture to literature). In this environment, architects of all stylistic persuasions vied for Mussolini’s favor in order to claim that *their* style embodied fascism. Thus, it is not without cause that fascism and Rationalism are closely intertwined in architectural historiography. Indeed, the Rationalists asserted many times how very fascist their style was, and some (but not all) among them were firm supporters of the party.

And yet, whether true believers or expedient individuals feigning respect to maintain work, the Rationalists who worked with Olivetti operated under his very different vision. The principal purpose of the extended uses of glass, for example, as Pollini recounted it, was to enable the

⁶⁷ Ibid., 10; original italics.

⁶⁸ Pollini, “Presentation,” 3–4.

⁶⁹ “Colonia e Campeggio a Marina di Massa,” *Notizie Olivetti* 43 (1957): 32.

⁷⁰ In *Olivetti camping. Giornale di campeggiatori di Marina di Massa*, an internal publication about the Marina di Massa, a young camper recounted her second visit to the campsite, including her appreciation for the French exchange: “Fra un mare di pini, simili a vele, ecco le tende: minuscole case senza muri, che fanno pensare ad un villaggio antichissimo. Ma i visi che ci accolgono non sono affatto quelli barbuti ed animaleschi degli uomini preistorici: sono francesine e francesi dal sorriso cordiale” [“the tents stand among a sea of pines looking like sails: little houses without walls, which call to mind an ancient village. But the faces that greet us are not those of bearded, animalistic men from prehistoric times: they are those of young French girls and boys with cordial smiles”] (July 1952).

⁷¹ As Schnapp points out, in “magazines like *Il vetro*, the official review of the Fascist Association of Glass Manufacturers [...] glass figured at once as the most Italian and fascist of materials” (“The People’s Glass House,” 53).

workers to gaze outward at the subalpine landscape beyond the factory walls: “Adriano, e noi stessi con lui, abbiamo sempre rifiutato la tipologia dell’officina chiusa da muri verso l’esterno. Ovunque possibile abbiamo cercato che gli ambienti si aprissero sulle visuali del paesaggio circostante” [“Adriano, and we ourselves, always rejected the type of workspace that is [aesthetically] closed to the outside through [opaque] walls. Whenever possible we looked to keep the spaces open to the visual presence of the surrounding landscape”].⁷² Fascist buildings also used glass, Terragni’s Casa del Fascio in Como being a salient example (Fig. 10), but to different, propagandizing ends.⁷³ In light of the above discussion on the influence of fascism on Olivetti’s Ivrea and the questions regarding Adriano’s relations to the regime, leading to this final issue regarding the purpose underlying the glass-walled factories along the Via Jervis, it could be proposed that if Terragni’s Casa del Fascio was the *most* fascist of Rationalist buildings (in any case, a work of highly charged pro-fascist propaganda), this structure could be regarded as among the *least* fascist in essence. Yet, if the regime did not continue supporting this (and other) styles for its own ends, these modernist developments picked up by Olivetti would not have had room to blossom on the Italian peninsula. At least to this extent, the presence of the very style itself speaks to another element of fascist influence.



Fig. 10. Giuseppe Terragni, Casa del Fascio, 1936.

Frank Lloyd Wright and Ivrea

Amidst the constellation of significant influences that bore concrete manifestations in Olivetti’s Ivrea, Frank Lloyd Wright may be the least direct element. Unlike Rationalism, which was explicitly present in the form of buildings realized by leading Rationalist practitioners; Le

⁷² Pollini, “Presentation,” 3.

⁷³ For example, according to Richard Etlin in *Modernism in Italian Architecture, 1890–1940* (Cambridge, MA: MIT Press, 1991), Terragni claimed that his building was meant to embody a statement supposedly made by Mussolini that “fascism is a house of glass into which all can look” (439). Notably, no known published source confirms that Mussolini said this. As for Etlin, he writes that Terragni claims Mussolini said it. I would like to thank one of the anonymous reviewers for pointing out this often overlooked distinction.

Corbusier, who visited Ivrea (even if no direct collaboration resulted); or fascism, which Adriano plainly and, for a time, frequently addressed, it was a sort of second-hand Frank Lloyd Wright that he encountered through a few significant individuals. Giulia Veronesi referred to the years following the war as “Wright’s hour” in Italy.⁷⁴ Indeed, in 1951 the American architect was granted honorary citizenship in the Palazzo Vecchio, and that same year an exhibition of his work was organized in the Palazzo Strozzi. Wright also influenced Olivetti’s Ivrea, and one can pinpoint specific conduits through which Wright’s work and thoughts reached the subalpine city, even in concretely evident ways.

During his exile in Switzerland, Adriano dedicated significant time to the writings of Lewis Mumford, in whose work one can find an amalgam of influences that significantly includes Wright,⁷⁵ as well as Ebenezer Howard whose “garden cities” are not all that far afield from Wright’s thoughts, even if the latter refused to acknowledge this.⁷⁶ Mumford greatly respected Wright: “few architects in any age have had anything like his feeling for the site and the surrounding landscape: in that respect, he is the most universal of our architects in the very act of being the most regional,” he once wrote.⁷⁷ And yet, Mumford was no wholehearted devotee. He explained his view, particularly on Wright’s Broadacre City, to the architect himself in a personal letter: “the type of city you have so admirably worked out in Broadacre City is one of half a dozen potential urban types that we can develop in order to achieve the maximum possibilities of life.”⁷⁸ His *Culture of Cities* which was published three years after he wrote this letter—a book to which Olivetti paid particular attention—essentially expresses the same sentiments towards Frank Lloyd Wright’s utopia as those contained in the letter of 1935; he admired it, acknowledged it, and yet regarded it as one possibility among an array of sources to be considered. Mumford’s relation to Frank Lloyd Wright is reminiscent of Olivetti’s exchange with Le Corbusier: they both greatly esteemed the respective architects, but not to the exclusion of other perspectives. Perhaps it was this dispositional and methodological similarity that drew Adriano to Mumford’s thinking.⁷⁹

Bruno Zevi was another significant conduit who brought Wright’s ideas to Ivrea, and to Italy more generally, becoming Wright’s Italian ambassador of sorts. Zevi was an ardent supporter, with far fewer reservations than Mumford regarding Wright’s ideals,⁸⁰ as evidenced in

⁷⁴ Maristella Casciato, “Wright and Italy: The Promise of Organic Architecture,” in *Frank Lloyd Wright: Europe and beyond*, ed. Anthony Alofsin (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1999), 80.

⁷⁵ Kargon and Molella, *Invented Edens*, 98–99.

⁷⁶ Though I do not concentrate on Howard here, one can certainly recognize a significant resonance between his thoughts in *The Garden Cities of To-Morrow* and the ideals expressed by Olivetti and his fellow architects—indeed, they were all familiar with this seminal thinker. Howard suggested that beside the town and country, a third alternative could be formed, the town-country, “in which all the advantages of the most energetic and active town life [including the factory], with all the beauty and delight of the country, may be secured in perfect combination” (Ebenezer Howard, *Garden Cities of Tomorrow* [London: Swan Sonnenschein & Co., 1902], 15). Wright’s sources for Broadacre City are in fact many, even if mostly unnamed. See George Collins, “Broadacre City: Wright’s Utopia Reconsidered,” in *Four Great Makers of Modern Architecture: Gropius, Le Corbusier, Mies vander Rohe, Wright* (New York: Columbia University, 1963), 44–54.

⁷⁷ Frank Lloyd Wright and Lewis Mumford, *Frank Lloyd Wright & Lewis Mumford: Thirty Years of Correspondence*, ed. Bruce Brooks Pfeiffer and Robert Wojtowicz (New York: Princeton Architectural Press, 2001), 189.

⁷⁸ *Ibid.*, 165.

⁷⁹ The respect was mutual: Mumford wrote that Olivetti was a “magnificent man” (Lewis Mumford, *Sketches from Life* [New York: Dial, 1982], 482).

⁸⁰ Even decades later, Zevi wrote that “there is no other architect in history as powerful or sublime” (Bruno Zevi, “Wright and Italy: A Recollection,” in *Europe and beyond*, ed. Alofsin, 75).

his book of 1945, *Verso un'architettura organica*; “the first architectural book to appear after the war,” as he pointed out later.⁸¹ In this work, he referred to Wright as a “revolutionary” and an “unshackled genius.”⁸² Zevi’s book was another important marker of the aforementioned turning point in Italian post-war architecture: in its play on the words of Le Corbusier’s *Vers un architecture*, its title signaled a shift away from the era of functionalist architecture and towards Wright’s organic thinking; the semantic maneuver was certainly not without insight regarding a new direction in Italian architectural trends.⁸³ In 1946, Zevi founded L’Associazione per l’Architettura Organica (A.P.A.O.). As for Zevi’s associations with Olivetti, there were more than a few connections between them. In 1947, Zevi began to co-direct *Metrón* along with Luigi Piccinato and a group of architects and thinkers from Olivetti’s circle,⁸⁴ and in 1957, Olivetti commissioned Zevi and three others to build a bridge in Ivrea.

For one example of the influence of Wright’s organic architecture in Olivetti’s Ivrea, we return to another work by Figini and Pollini: the social services building completed in 1958, sitting directly across from their glass walled factory on the Via Jervis (Figs. 11–14). Other examples exist of Wright’s aesthetics among the buildings in Ivrea, including the study center designed by Eduardo Vittoria which began to take shape in 1954,⁸⁵ but the social services building is an especially salient indicator of Wright’s influence, both because of its location and because of its designers. Facing the emblematically Rationalist factory, it visually interacts with the duo’s earlier project, especially the second floor balcony, which stretches across the length of the building, producing one long horizontal line that partly mimics the perfectly perpendicular structure just across the way.



Fig. 11. Figini and Pollini, Social services building, 1958. Photo: Anastasiya Collins (2014).

⁸¹ Ibid., 67.

⁸² Bruno Zevi, *Towards an Organic Architecture* (London: Faber & Faber, 1950), 88, 114.

⁸³ Casciato, “The Promise of Organic Architecture,” 82.

⁸⁴ The founding contributors to Olivetti’s *Comunità* were all founding contributors to *Metrón*—a journal principally dedicated to promoting Wright’s thinking—with the exception of Giovanni Astengo and Gino Pollini, who were not foundationally involved in the latter journal. Gino Calcaprinta, Luigi Piccinato, Luigi Figini, and Eugenio Gentili helped establish both.

⁸⁵ The purpose of this building provides yet another indication of Adriano’s genuine humanistic impulse: it was principally created as a space for academic lessons where the factory workers could study for free and obtain degrees.



Fig. 12. Social services building, view from behind, facing Via Jervis.
Photo: Anastasiya Collins (2014).



Fig. 13. Social services building, view from beneath the porch.
Photo: Anastasiya Collins (2014).



Fig. 14. Social services building, view from inside, facing the factory across Via Jervis.
Photo: Anastasiya Collins (2014).

Yet, because of the close proximity of these buildings, the extent to which these same architects had diverged from their previous style is strikingly clear. As emblematic as the factory is, so too is the social services center: it shows how much Figini and Pollini had evolved (as did many architects during these years—including Le Corbusier, one of whose noteworthy transformations was publicly declared in 1934, and in Venice no less).⁸⁶ It is no accident that this building calls to mind Wright’s Fallingwater, with its iconic projecting porches that appear from a distance as long horizontal lines that are balanced by a projecting vertical center—elements likewise evident in Figini and Pollini’s building, though on a smaller scale. The first edition of Zevi’s *Verso un’architettura organica* presented an image of just a single building by Wright: “Because of a shortage of glossy paper,” Zevi explained, the book “contained only one photo, and that was on the cover: Fallingwater at Bear Run (Fig. 15).⁸⁷ As a result, this became the emblematic structure of Wright’s work among Italian architects for some time.

Figini and Pollini, however, did not stop with plays upon the geometrical qualities and spatial distribution of Fallingwater: reminiscent of the tree that altered a minor detail of the driveway trellis in the exterior of Wright’s building, the Italian architects found a way to do something similar by integrating trees into the design of the porch that projects onto Via Jervis (Fig. 13). As AnnMarie Brennan observed, the grid declined rapidly in the postwar years, especially due to its affiliation with fascism.⁸⁸ Brennan further suggested that the Italian architectural firm BBPR’s design for a memorial in the Monumental Cemetery in Milan “could also be seen as a kind of monument to the grid itself.”⁸⁹ One could similarly suggest that Figini and Pollini created their own monument to the rationalist grid within their new, organic

⁸⁶ See Richard Etlin, “A Paradoxical Avant-Garde: Le Corbusier’s Villas of the 1920s,” *Architectural Review* 181 (January 1987): 21–32, in which Etlin discusses Le Corbusier’s announcement of “*the second period of machine civilization* [...] consecrated to harmony” (31).

⁸⁷ Zevi, “A Recollection,” 67.

⁸⁸ AnnMarie Brennan, “The Big O,” *AA Files* (2012): 117. This is not to say that things were so clear-cut and definitive.

⁸⁹ *Ibid.*

structure: along the stairwell that connects the first and second floors of the social services building, just inside the extended porch, is a small grid through which one can catch a glimpse of the factory in all its rationalist glory (Fig. 14).

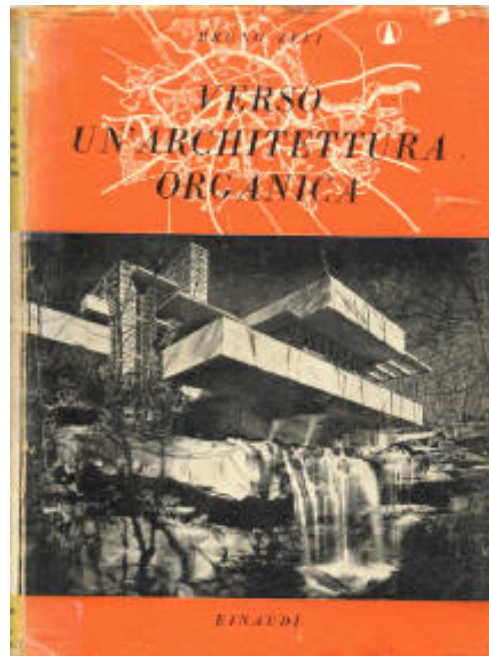


Fig. 15. Cover of Bruno Zevi's first edition of *Verso un'architettura organica* (1945) with an image of Frank Lloyd Wright's Fallingwater (1935).

On the cover of Zevi's 1945 book is another important detail, indicating an additional aspect of Wright's influence: backgrounding the text bearing the book's title is a city plan. Wright was concerned not only with architecture, but also with urban planning, as embodied in his dreams of Broadacre City (Fig. 16),⁹⁰ and this likewise had an influence upon Olivetti's Ivrea, even if only partial—in a Mumfordian manner, one might say. Specifics aside, Wright defined the following as essential to his ideal city: “the architectural features of the Broadacre City [...] arise naturally out of the nature and character of the ground on which it stands and of which it is a component if not an organic feature.”⁹¹

Unlike Le Corbusier, Wright preferred to allow the site to shape the arrangement of buildings and their individual designs,⁹² and he held the presence of ample green space in even higher regard—to the point that he wished each family to have its own acre of land. These leanings notably influenced Luigi Piccinato's urban plan for the Quartiere Bellavista (Fig. 17), a workers' housing unit designed for 1,000 inhabitants less than two kilometers from the factory center.⁹³

⁹⁰ Wright wrote three books on Broadacre City: *The Disappearing City* (New York: W.F. Payson, 1932); *When Democracy Builds* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1945); and *The Living City* (New York: Horizon Press, 1958).

⁹¹ Wright, *The Disappearing City*, 47.

⁹² Wright considered Le Corbusier the embodiment of a deplorable camp of modern architects and urban planners to whom he felt that he was in full contrast.

⁹³ “1000 abitanti per il quartiere Bellavista,” *Notizie di Fabbrica* (April 1961), 1. By 1964, the number of inhabitants had already grown to 1,200, as indicated in an article on Canton Vesco, another workers' housing unit likewise

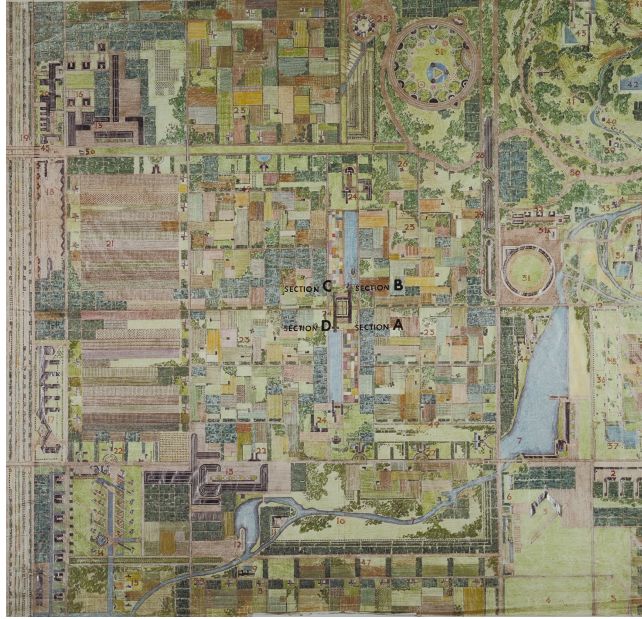


Fig. 16. Frank Lloyd Wright, Drawing of Broadacre City, begun 1924.
 Copyright © Frank Lloyd Wright Foundation, Scottsdale, AZ.
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 (The Museum of Modern Art | Avery Architectural & Fine Arts Library, Columbia University).



Fig. 17. Luigi Piccinato (planner), Quartiere di Bellavista, began 1958.
 Associazione Archivio Storico Olivetti.

located a bit further afield from the factory center. See “Un asilio di quartiere nella zona sud di Ivrea,” *Notizie di fabbrica* (February 1964), 1.

Piccinato was also a foundational participant in forming the aforementioned A.P.A.O. and thus a key player alongside Zevi in promoting Frank Lloyd Wright’s ideas. In Bellavista, one can trace the effects of Wright: buildings are no longer rigidly aligned on a grid, and the natural space of the site is thoughtfully integrated into the landscape (Figs. 18–19). Admittedly, this is in part due to its increased seclusion and distance from the center—but such a gesture is itself a maneuver that one could trace to Wright, who loathed developments of “citified citizens” he considered “slave[s] to herd instinct” manifested in big cities.⁹⁴ While Ivrea was no such big city, Bellavista was nevertheless removed from the center of activity and immersed in nature. It was hardly Broadacre City, but Wright’s utopia had nevertheless left its traces.



Fig. 18. One of the large, central green spaces in Bellavista.
Photo: Anastasiya Collins (2014).



Fig. 19. A housing unit and its immediate environs in Bellavista.
Photo: Anastasiya Collins (2014).

⁹⁴ Wright, *The Disappearing City*, 3.

Conclusion

From the factory to the social services building, from the 1935 workers' housing unit to Bellavista, and functioning for many of these years under a supposedly totalitarian regime that increasingly attempted to assert itself in the realm of city planning,⁹⁵ Olivetti's Ivrea passed through a rather exemplary process. It did not become a space of fragmentation and incoherence, but rather, an embodiment of thoughtfully eclectic incorporation, due in no small part to the attitude held by Adriano: influences were not set rules but potential elements of a larger project that was unique unto itself. Many of these elements—most obviously Le Corbusier's "city of tomorrow" and Frank Lloyd Wright's Broadacre City, but also the fascist corporatist projects and even to some degree the supposed stylistic implications of Rationalist architecture—could be regarded as utopic (or dystopic). Olivetti's Ivrea was thus the heterotopic result of a selective incorporation of utopic sources.

The apex of the Olivetti Company and its holistically-driven architectural and urban planning projects has passed, and this is likewise evident in the current state of numerous projects that were carried out during the same era. Some buildings have changed administrative hands and are kept in good order; one of Figini and Pollini's factory extensions, for example, is now inhabited by a part of the University of Turin's political science department. Other buildings are reaching the point of dilapidation. In 2001, the Museo dell'Architettura Moderna was opened to revive interest in Olivetti's Ivrea. It was an open-air museum that led visitors through architectural highlights, but this endeavor has become a ruin of sorts itself. Outdoor signs remain, but its operation has been shut down.

As Foucault implied in his talk of 1957, it is utopic to expect a heterotopia to last forever. Heterotopias are not only limited by space; they are "most often linked to slices in time" as well.⁹⁶ Olivetti's Ivrea is no exception. Yet, its history still stands as an example of how the heads of large industrial and/or corporate organizations could conduct themselves to widely beneficial ends, and it evinces the beauty that can be achieved in socially and environmentally conscious architecture and city planning.

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⁹⁵ I say "supposed" in homage to Hannah Arendt, who keenly observed that "since totalitarian movements exist in a world which itself is nontotalitarian, they are forced to resort to what we commonly regard as propaganda" (*The Origins of Totalitarianism* [New York: Harcourt, Brace & World, 1966], 342). Totalitarianism was a myth fostered through forms of media, including architecture and city planning.

⁹⁶ Foucault, "Of Other Spaces," 26.

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