



## Excavating the Corporativist City

Jeffrey T. Schnapp

Towards the end of 1933, five of the leading champions of the modern movement in Italian architecture—the engineer Gaetano Ciocca and his young partners and followers, the members of the architectural firm Banfi, Belgioioso, Peressutti, and Rogers—presented a “totalitarian” city plan for the northern city of Pavia within the framework of a contentious and highly publicized competition. Their comprehensive city plan was meant to crystallize what fascist modernists thought to be the core values of Mussolini’s corporativist revolution and represented a gesture of defiance addressed to the piecemeal approaches to urban planning that informed rival proposals put forth by traditional urbanists. Whereas the latter sought gradual, incremental solutions to the problems created by the city’s burgeoning economy, solutions that extended and built upon Pavia’s long history as a regional capital and urban center, the Ciocca/BBPR plan proposed a clean break. Through an ambitious program of demolition and new construction, it sought to transform Pavia into a model city, rigorously laid out according to the criteria of rationalism and functionalism, as recently articulated by the likes of Le Corbusier, Ernst May, and Walter Gropius at the Athens meeting of the International Congress for Modern Architecture (CIAM). Yet—here lies the apparent (but only *apparent*) paradox with which this essay will concern itself—the Ciocca/BBPR Pavia plan promised to effect this transformation while renewing the city’s ancient Roman origins. In both the formal proposal known as the *Relazione* and a subsequent exhibition dedicated to corporativist urbanism held at the Galleria del Milione in Milan in early 1934, the plan was framed by a quote from Titus Livy: NUNC IN CORPUS UNUM CONFUSI OMNES (all are united

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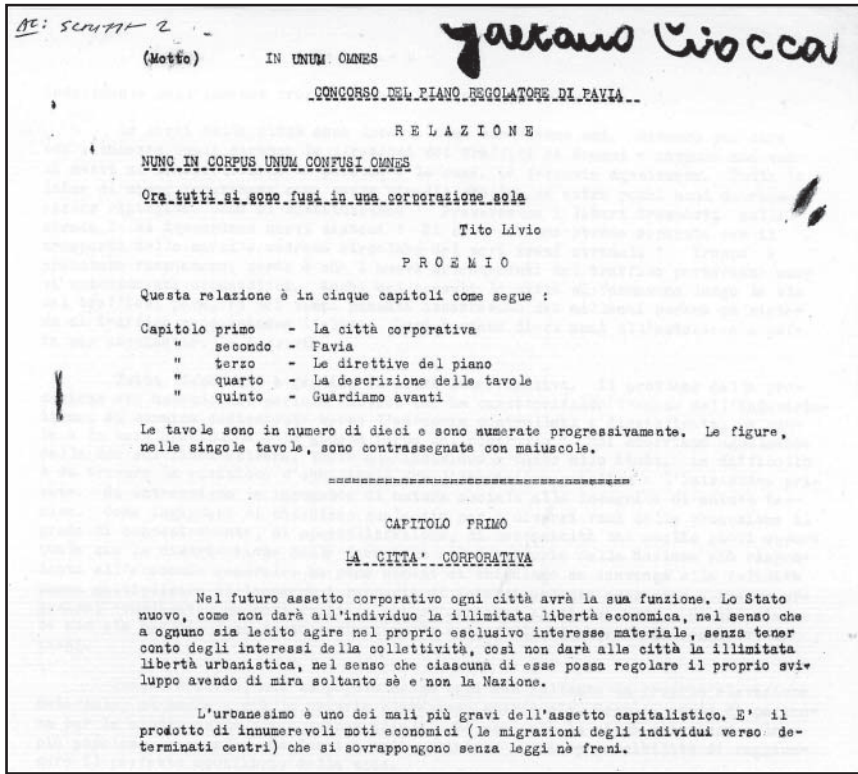
90 now in a single body)—a quotation from book 34 of the *History of Rome* in which Caesar's work as an empire builder and urban planner is evoked within the context of a broader discussion of Cato the Elder's Spanish campaign of 195 B.C. (fig. 1).<sup>1</sup>

How to reconcile the modernist setting with the ancient text, the talk of a clean break with the promise to renew ancient origins, Roman bodily metaphors with fascist corporativism? This brief essay will answer these questions by teasing out how the passage from Livy stitches together the rhetorical horizons of the Ciocca/BBPR project. For the radical rupture with Pavia's immediate past promised by the city plan is linked by its authors to the restoration of a martial past identified with Hannibal's vanquisher and the legendary founder of the city, Publius Cornelius Scipio. Scipio, Cato, Caesar: such is the triumvirate that is made to sustain the claim made not only by Ciocca and BBPR, but also, in a broader and less explicit sense, by many other leading proponents of the new architecture both inside and outside of Italy, that rationalism and functionalism may be the foundation stones of a new international style, but that they are, nonetheless, profound expressions of an originary moment within Mediterranean culture. Whether the moment in question is Roman, Etruscan, or Minoan, or whether it is associated instead with the Mediterranean's vernacular architectures, matters less than the conviction that the city of the future coincides with the city of a prelapsarian remote past. The avant-garde's degree zero of representation and construction, its revolt against merely ornamental forms of historicism, its blank slates and utopic grids, close the door on antiquity only to reopen it once again in the mode of an archaeology of archaic structures. It is thus not by accident that in his 1923 *Towards a New Architecture*, Le Corbusier placed the lesson of Pompeii at the center of his plea for an architecture of engineers:

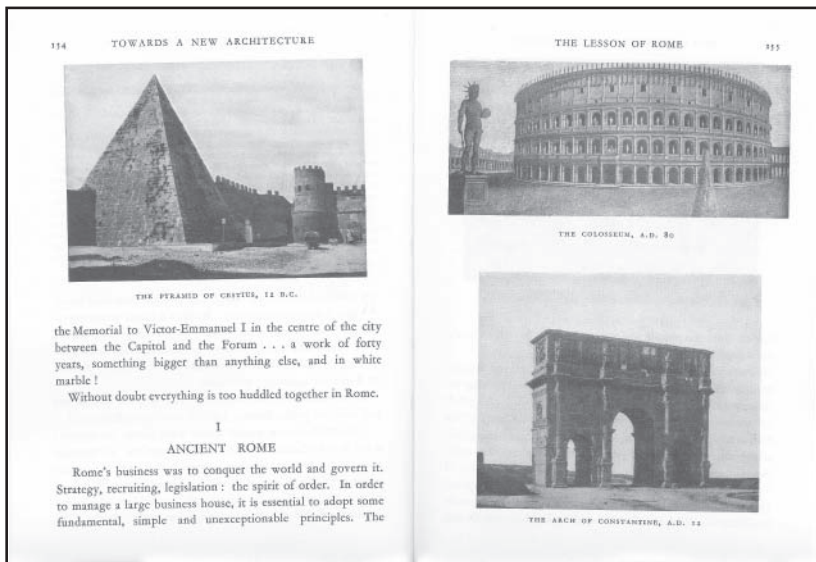
Pompeii must be seen, appealing in its rectangular plan. They [the Romans] had conquered Greece and, like good barbarians, they found the Corinthian order more beautiful than the Doric, because it was more ornate. On then with the acanthus capitals, and entablatures decorated with little discretion or taste! But underneath this there was something Roman, as we shall see. Briefly, they constructed superb chassis, but they designed deplorable coachwork rather like the landaus of Louis XIV.<sup>2</sup>

Pompeii's "truth" is the naked rectangle, the elementary structure, the chassis without coachwork (fig. 2). The lesson of Pavia will take the argument one step further: namely, that there exists a distinctively avant-gardist antiquarianism, intimately linked to scientific archaeology, that strips away the dense foliage of acanthus leaves so that, instead of imitating the past, it can make it new.

Before addressing the particulars of the Ciocca/BBPR Pavia plan, the passage from Livy and the larger narrative within which it is embedded in the *Relazione* invites some comment. Book 34 of Livy's *History* begins by recounting Cato the Elder's campaign against the repeal of the *Lex Oppia*: the set of emergency measures decreed in 215 B.C. after Rome's defeat at Cannae, prohibiting women from wearing multicolored garments and ostentatious gold jewelry, as well as from being driven in carriages within and around the immediate periphery of cities, except on the occasion of religious fes-



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 Fig. 1. Cover page, Ciocca/BBPR proposal for a new city plan for Pavia, late 1933; source: Ciocca Archive, Museo di Arte Moderna di Rovereto/Trento (MART).



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 Fig. 2. "The spirit of order:" Sample page from "The Lesson of Rome" chapter in Le Corbusier's *Towards a New Architecture* (TNA).

92 tivals. Six years after Hannibal's definitive defeat (in 195 B.C.), a generalized revolt broke out against these restrictions and triumphed, despite the impassioned opposition of Cato, for whom Livy devises a windy and only mildly sympathetic speech championing the moral austerity of yore. For Cato, the *Lex Oppia* represents a bulwark against licentiousness, the disorderly circulation of persons, the mixing of social classes, excesses of female luxury, the loss of authority, the emasculation of men: in short, all of those "oriental" and "African" attributes that rendered once disciplined Rome vulnerable to the assault of a Carthaginian general. Following his defeat on this pressing issue of public morality and order, and the law's repeal, Cato sets about continuing the work of bringing peace through war to the very country from which, decades before, Hannibal had set out toward Rome: namely, Spain. He embarks on a sea voyage and arrives with a small army in the coastal city of Emporiae (Ampurias) and there encounters a partitioned city, divided up between Spaniards and Greeks, each side diffident and fiercely vigilant with regard to the other. In the end, Cato scatters and vanquishes the Spaniards by means of an action that, Livy implies, anticipates subsequent actions performed by Julius Caesar. The full passage reads:

Roman colonists later formed a third class of inhabitants [alongside the Spaniards and the Greeks]; these were added by the divine Caesar after the final defeat of Pompey's sons, and *at the present time all the inhabitants have been amalgamated into one body*, after the granting of Roman citizenship, first to the Spaniards and finally to the Greeks [*nunc in corpus unum confusi omnes Hispanis prius, postremo et Graecis in civitatem Romanam adscitis*].<sup>3</sup>

The single body politic prefigured by Cato's conquest of the enemy and fulfilled through Julius's amalgamation of the city's three districts subjects the unruly Spaniards and Greeks to Roman discipline and Roman law. And this triumph of discipline and law is why the *con-fusio* of persons here doesn't imply precisely the sort of social disarray and unruly circulation that Cato feared would result in the wake of the revocation of the Oppian laws.

There are many echoes of Livy's tale in the Ciocca/BBPR report, particularly in the second chapter, devoted to the city's history. Pavia is described, like Ampurias, as a tripartite city, divided into three areas—*Pavia vecchia*, *Pavia ampliata*, and *Pavia nuova*; three areas that, despite the rigorous logic of a still visible Roman city plan, have become segregated from one another over the course of the city's two millennia of history. But the deeper connection is to Hannibal's true opponents, the patrician family of the Scipios, to whose second great patriarch, Publius Cornelius Scipio, the *Relazione* attributes the foundation of Pavia along the banks of the River Ticino:

We should like to imagine that Pavia was established in the Roman year 535 by Publius Cornelius Scipio when, having fully armed Piacenza, he set out to thwart the advance of Hannibal. Rome was never wont to await the enemy behind its lines of defense, nor can there be any doubt that the army of the consul was burning with desire to face an enemy on an open battlefield that had eluded it by fleeing along the Rodano river the prior month. [R, 3]

The fortified camp or *castrum* that would later become Pavia was established, in other words, at the time of Publius Cornelius's skirmishes with Hannibal in the Ticino/Rodano region. After Hannibal's defeat of Publius in 218 B.C. that fortified camp would be reoccupied and built up along the lines of the original city plan—less a “plan” in the modern sense than a series of rudimentary square-shaped furrows—by Scipio Africanus Major, Publius's son and Hannibal's definitive vanquisher. The ties between Ampurias and Cato to Pavia and the Scipios may be complex. But the authors' intent is clear: to establish Pavia's martial foundations, to enfold these foundations within a genealogy of powerful Roman patriarchs, to associate the city with ancient Roman law and moral rigor, and to oppose it from the very moment of its foundation to barbarism, effeminacy, and orientalism. The totalitarian Ciocca/BBPR city plan will give rise to a future Pavia in harmony with and indeed *literally based upon* the simple geometries of Pavia's now buried Roman origins. And it effects this recovery not by awaiting behind its own lines the assault of modernity's foes, but by seeking them out on the open battlefield of public opinion and competitions.

So the story of the Scipios looms large in chapter two's attempt to account for why “the spirit of Pavia has, throughout the centuries, been a warrior spirit, its shield the shield of soldiers: that of faith and sacrifice . . .” (*R*, 3). But this still doesn't address the question of why a quote from Livy appears at the report's beginning and end. Why its presence on every one of the photomontage panels placed on display at the Galleria del Milione? The answer, I believe, lies in the realm of political metaphors. To put it simply, Ciocca and BBPR read the word *corporatist* (not *corpus*) into Livy's *nunc in corpus unum confusi omnes*. They deliberately fascistized the Roman historian's text in order to advance the causes both of fascist corporatism and of rationalist architecture as the true interpretation of fascism's corporatist revolution.

The years 1933–1935 marked something of a turning point with respect to Mussolini's promised transformation of the relation between the economy and the state. The experiment had commenced in 1930 with the creation of seven national “guilds” or “corporations”—the Italian word *corporazione* means both—representing agriculture, commerce, industry, banking, navigation, transportation, and the professions, coupled together at the level of a national council responsible for coordinating their policies and harmonizing them with national priorities, as set by the central government. Twenty-two such entities would eventually come into being. But the forced incorporation of representatives from labor and capital within self-governing organs was never truly brought to term because of resistance on the part of entrenched institutional interests and industrialists. The Corporations were eventually reduced to empty shells and denied genuine clout vis-à-vis industry and genuine independence with respect to the state. In short, the experiment was already starting to run into trouble by the time of the 1933 Pavia competition. True believers, so-called “left-wing” fascists like Gaetano Ciocca, were battling the “conservative” opposition by championing a radical and integral approach to corporatism which, Ciocca and company argued—to the delight of the cultural *arrière-garde*, among whom corporatist skeptics abounded—was the necessary ideological counterpart to the new architecture and urbanism.

94 In a forthcoming book devoted to Ciocca, entitled *Building Fascism/Communism/Democracy*, I have spelled out at length the engineer's view (shared with other "integral corporativists" like Ugo Spirito) that corporativism represented a third way to modernization combining the best of capitalism and socialism, individualism and collectivism, within the framework of a belief system committed to endowing "mere" economic reason with a higher, more spiritual logic.<sup>4</sup> So I will not rehearse the argument here. But it is surely worth noting that neither Ciocca's devotion to corporativism nor his advocacy of an avant-gardist understanding of *romanitas* were matters of opportunism. On the contrary, in the course of the fascist decades this now forgotten but extraordinary engineer emerged as a major interpreter of corporativist doctrine in the domain of architecture and technics, and as a key mediator between fascist Italy, the Soviet Union, and the United States. Author of *Giudizio sul bolscevismo* (Judgment on bolshevism), *Economia di massa* (The mass economy), and *La strada guidata* (The guided roadway); chief engineer for the enormous RIV ball-bearing plant that was a centerpiece of Stalin's Five-Year Plan and of Fiat's effort to displace Ford in the Soviet marketplace; inventor of the "fast house" (*casa rapida*) and of the "guided roadway" (*strada guidata*); the Ciocca of the 1930s and 1940s dedicated himself with passion and selfless devotion to building a corporativist society through technical innovation. His mass theater projects answered Mussolini's call for the creation of facilities that could house a new fascist theater of the masses for the masses by devising a coliseum-like mass-spectacle factory much like those he had seen firsthand in the Soviet Union. His experiments in the field of social housing involved industrially mass-produced, prefabricated, rationalist peasant and worker homes bolder and more ingenious in design than those of many far more renowned architects. His ventures into animal husbandry, defined by one critic as an effort to build a sort of modernist Grand Hotel for pigs, brought to the agrarian world the same zeal for rationalization that he applied to the design of corporativist city plans, fast houses, fortresses (*fortini*), and mass theaters. Last but not least, he labored to bring about the construction of a nationwide transportation system of self-steering vehicles on guided roadways—a "rational" system that would reconcile the need for mass transit with private circulation, the collectivity with the individual—a fascist third way but in the domain of transportation.

After a life of only modest prominence working as a builder and transportation engineer in Milan and Turin, Ciocca was suddenly skyrocketed to fame in 1933, thanks to a rave review of *Judgment on Bolshevism* that appeared anonymously in a September issue of *Il Popolo d'Italia*, the more or less official daily of the National Fascist Party.

A number of stylistic tics betrayed the secret that its author was Mussolini. The review was immediately recycled as a first preface to the second edition of Ciocca's book, now paired with the original preface by Pietro Maria Bardi, one of the modern movement's leading champions and impresarios. At the time of the Pavia competition, the engineer was a good twenty years the senior of his partners, who were under twenty-five at the time, and there can be little doubt—judging from seniority, content, style, and the manuscript tradition—that he was the principal author of the *Relazione*. Cer-

tainly, the *Relazione's* interlacing of avant-gardist and antiquarian themes is a recurring feature in Ciocca's writings, from *Judgment on Bolshevism* to the *Discorsi sulle cose reali* (Discourses on things real) published in the popular magazine *Tempo* in the mid-1940s to his post-World War II technical writings.<sup>5</sup> Allusions to Greco-Roman literature abound. But so do claims like the following, always made with simplicity and genuine conviction:

When geometry is applied to architecture, the latter assumes the name of Rationalism. The Coliseum and the Roman aqueducts, to this day the most compelling instances of Rationalist architecture, are geometry pure and simple. The false Rationalisms that sometimes afflict us are little more than false geometry, erroneous theorems, logical receptacles riddled with holes. What I propose to do is to demonstrate how a strictly geometrical method, based on a simple and clear set of norms, can resolve all the problems . . .<sup>6</sup>

Whether the problem of the moment was social housing, pig farms, canals, or drainage projects, Ciocca shared much the same view that was propounded by Le Corbusier and by other Mediterraneanist modernizers, a heterogeneous group extending from the likes of Giuseppe Terragni to literati like Ezra Pound. For them, Roman architecture was an architecture not of ornamentation and rhetoric but of rigorous geometries and structures, an architecture of power and for power devoted to “good arrangement, a single idea, daring and unity in construction, the use of elementary shapes, a sane morality.”<sup>7</sup> That such geometries and structures had once been dressed up in painted, ornately carved sheets of marble seemed an accident of history. “The Romans,” writes Le Corbusier with his usual aphoristic economy and gift for hyperbole, “knew *nothing* of the use of marble” (*TNA*, 159; italics in original) (fig. 3). According to this view, true Roman architecture consisted in naked structures freed from decorative incrustations by the march of time. Time was on the side of modernity, not history or tradition, whether this meant ticking the clock back to that moment when, in the process of their construction, ancient stone structures were complete but still free from decorative cladding; or ticking the clock forward to 1919 when the cult of architectural “honesty of thought and feeling” became integral to the program of a newly founded Bauhaus.<sup>8</sup> Even in its corrosive effects, time simplified things; it reduced them to their essential elements. Only structure and form, not ornamentation applied as marble and/or as paint, could stand time's test. It follows that the sound principles and austere geometries of true Roman city planning could be renewed by accelerating time's march by means of digs and demolitions. To strip a once ancient cityscape of modern incrustations of architectural verbosity, bad arrangement, and confused ideas—incrustations always already fated to tumble into heaps of rubble because of their faulty design—meant to bring back to life a city of the past that is identical to the city of the future.

Such was the spirit of the 1933 Ciocca/BBPR plan for Pavia. It sought to apply the principles championed by the 1933 Athens meeting of the CIAM: a functionalist approach to urban planning; the delimitation of distinct residential, recreational, and industrial zones; the pursuit of optimal population density and hygienic living condi-

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daring and unity in construction, the use of elementary shapes. A sane morality.

Let us retain, from these Romans, their bricks and their Roman cement and their Travertine and we will sell the Roman marble to the millionaires. The Romans knew nothing of the use of marble.

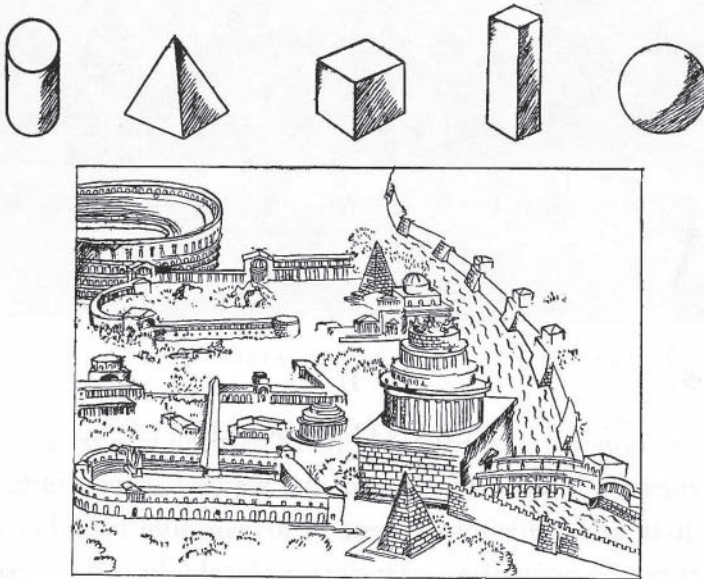


Fig. 3. "The Romans knew *nothing* of the use of marble." Sample page from "The Lesson of Rome" chapter in *TNA*.

tions; the integration of modern technology and mass transit into a comprehensive overall plan; access to natural areas, recreational facilities, and places of mass entertainment. And in so doing, it sought to transform this regional capital into a fascist new town "laid out according to actual functionalist particulars," consisting in subdivision of the city into three interwoven and interconnected zones:



*the old city core*, where more than a dozen city blocks were to be razed, refashioned, and rationalized according to a two-stage plan, so as to form a more aesthetically pleasing and hygienic city center with abundant green areas and space for several new buildings of value to the public like a Palace of Corporations [*Palazzo delle Corporazioni*] and a Ciocca-style mass theater;

*the expanded city*, where industrial plants and working class neighborhoods would be interspersed with military zones (including anti-aircraft defenses sheltered in a park), and where a complex of urban vegetable gardens would be developed in the name of autarchy and the integration of agricultural practice into the fabric of urban life;

and *the new city*, where the city's transportation links would be used carefully to set apart, among other features, two areas designed to "shape the perfect Italian of tomorrow": a tranquil "city of studies" (*città degli studi*) and a brand new "city of sports and water recreation" (*città balneare sportiva*) intended as one of the major such centers of attraction in all of Italy. [R, 8–12]

The plan was prefaced by a lengthy theoretical statement, authored by Ciocca and Rogers and subsequently published in the combative Rationalist review *Quadrante*, defining corporatist urbanism as a response to the disorderly and unhygienic consequences of untrammelled capitalist urban development. It concluded by sounding the militant call for legal reform that would become one of Ciocca's leitmotifs in the later 1930s and the postwar:

New laws will be necessary, laws that do not yet exist, so as to eliminate all obstacles to the reconstruction of cities, be they of time, place or procedure. It will be necessary to establish by law that demolitions for reasons of hygiene should be unlimited and must take place only and as soon as hygiene demands. Nor should the owners of properties demolished in the interest of public hygiene be free to rebuild as they see fit on the irregular spaces that will be freed up (because to do so would simply perpetuate the anarchy that has resulted from the lack of planning in the past). . . . New state construction laws need to be devised that will help to regulate condominium maintenance fees as well as the financing and hygiene of construction projects . . . These are the principal difficulties that corporatism must and will overcome. *Nunc in corpus unum confusi omnes* [All are united now in a single body]. [R, 16]

As has already been hinted, the closing quote from Livy makes explicit what had been anticipated in chapter two, the historical preface to the *Relazione*, namely, that what is at stake is the recovery and renewal of an ancient modernity that encompasses the Italian peninsula as a whole:

If future auspices are to be derived from the history of the past, then Pavia has a glorious destiny lying before it. Italian cities are returning to their former state of Roman *castris* or fortresses. New fortresses where the people constitute a militia and every citizen has a responsibility to observe, a discipline to respect, a goal to achieve. Roman Pavia is ready for a new war, the war that Italy prefers and that pleases Caesar, who is at once a soldier and a farmer. [R, 3]

98 The web of references that links Cato the Elder's austere morality to the Scipios' military prowess to the protocorporativism of Julius Caesar to a present in which every citizen is a militiaman hints at a broader set of equations. The old piecemeal urbanism = Africa and Carthage; the new Rationalist urbanism = *romanitas* (correctly interpreted as the architecture of engineers) = cities worthy of a modern corporatist Italy united behind a twentieth-century Dux.

The Pavia city plan was submitted to local authorities in late 1933 and roundly rejected on the grounds that the legal means were unavailable to undertake the massive demolitions envisaged by Ciocca and BBPR. A far more conventional and incremental city plan was adopted in its stead. The outcome was not unexpected given that the plan involved knocking down fully *one half* of the housing stock found within the city walls as well as undertaking an ambitious program of new constructions including parks, mass auditoria, and athletic arenas. But as news of the project's defeat spread, Bardi smelled blood. He seized the occasion to transform the project into a *casus belli* in his battle against Italy's architectural arriè-re-garde by doing precisely as had been done in April 1932 to launch Alberto Sartoris's militantly Rationalist treatise *Gli elementi dell'architettura* (The elements of architecture): he mounted a show at the influential Galleria del Milione with the collaboration of the gallery director, Edoardo Persico, and the gallery owners, the Ghiringhelli brothers (fig. 4). The show in question opened in early 1934 and, like the Sartoris show (which had been animated by cinematographic panels executed by Gino Ghiringhelli and Luigi Figini) was built around the ten two-meter by four-meter photomontages produced for the competition, which were hung in the gallery, interspersed with handwritten excerpts from the proposal and additional polemical photomontages especially produced for the occasion. The panels were dedicated to the central themes of the Ciocca/BBPR project and bore the titles:

I. *The Pavia of Yesteryear* (made up of different city maps from 1483 to 1724 in which "the persistence of Roman patterns" is made apparent, flanked by a representation of how Polybius described the city center; the Roman matrix is shown to have gradually succumbed to "the chaotic succession of contingencies" after 1724) (R, 8).

II. *Let's Clean it Up!* (an "ethical and aesthetic" appeal for a return to Pavia's ancient austerity and denunciation of the love of dark and quaint neighborhoods with their "tubercular picturesque" beauty; "the true crowning glory of a city is its *decus*, that utility which translates into beauty") (R, 9) (fig. 5).

III. *The Overall Urban Layout and its Major Zones* (divided into a main transportation axis and four zones devoted to university study and recreation, military bases, farming and parks, and industry and work).

IV. *The City Plan* (the tripartite city incorporated into a single urban corpus) (fig. 6).

V. *Traffic* (comparing current traffic flow patterns with future ones with emphasis placed on the weak points that are remedied by the new plan) (fig. 7).

VI. *The Transportation System* (a complete account of all the railway, bus, car, and other linkage systems, past and future).

VII. *In the Name of Health and Beauty* (a mapping of the current and future natural and cultural resources of the city, to be greatly expanded thanks to the plan; a film strip cuts across the right side of the diagram tracing an ideal itinerary through the cityscape's major monuments, including archaeological walks; concentric circles linking bad hygienic

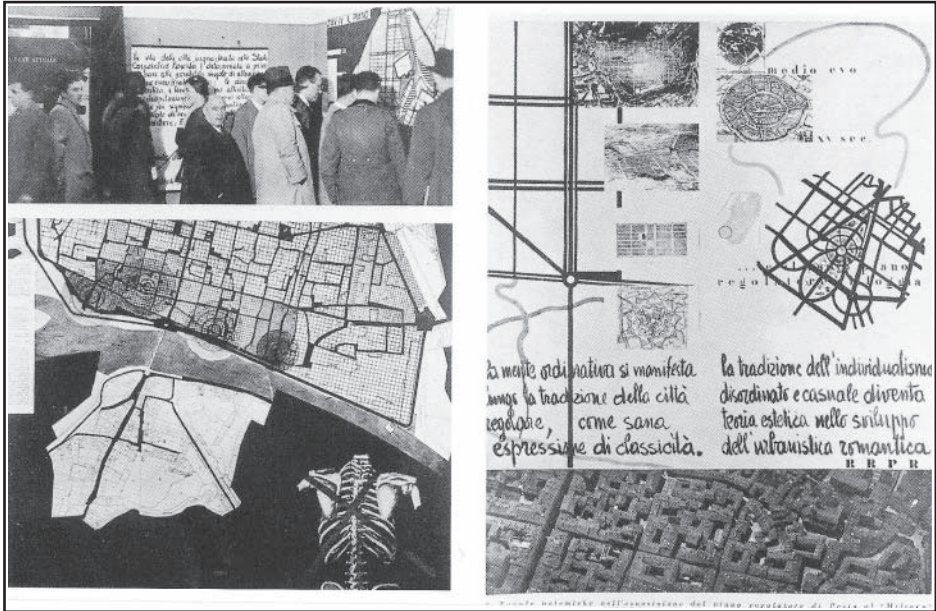


Fig. 4. Coverage of the inauguration of the Galleria del Milione show on the Ciocca/BBPR city plan for Pavia in *Quadrante II* (March 1934).

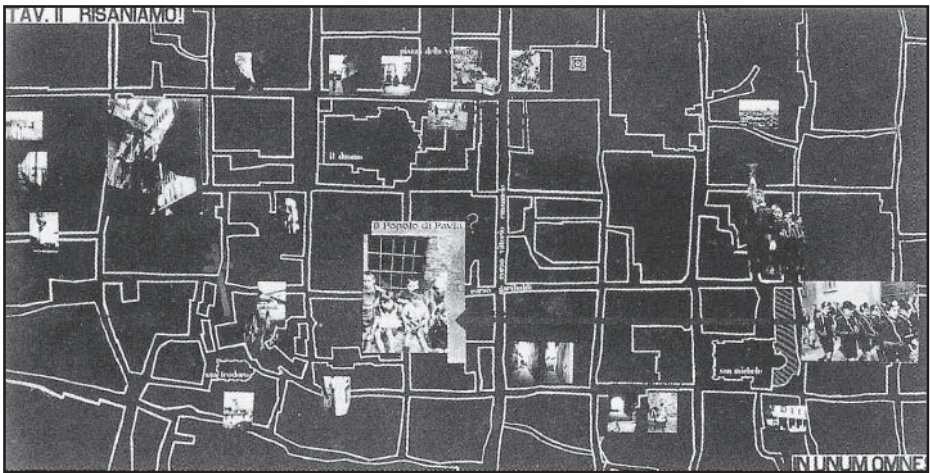
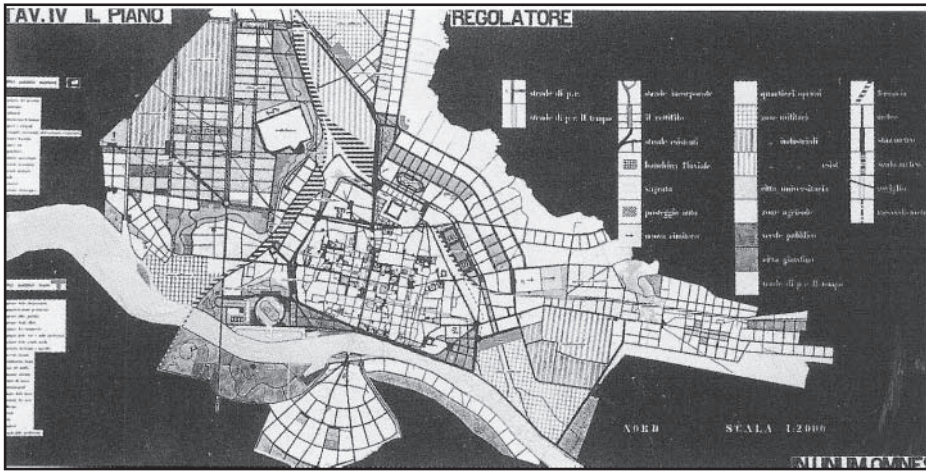


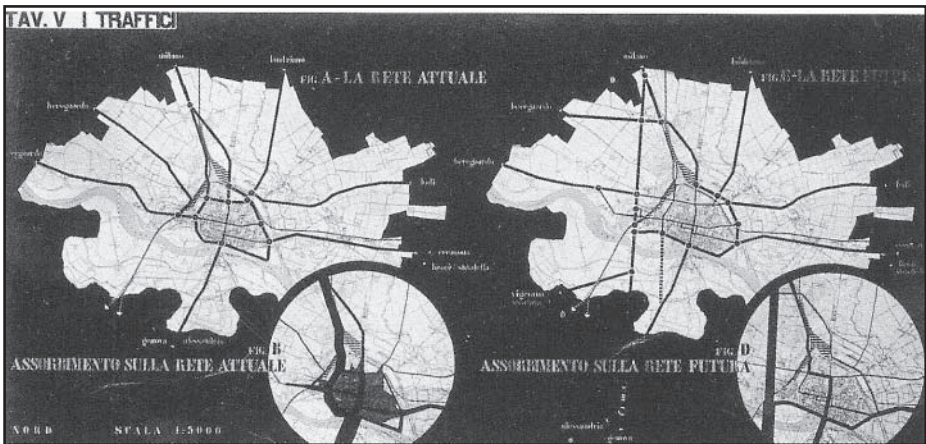
Fig. 5. BBPR, photomontage panel II (*Let's clean it up!*), Galleria del Milione show on the Ciocca/BBPR city plan for Pavia, February 1934; source: Ciocca Archive, Museo di Arte Moderna di Rovereto/Trento (MART).

conditions to morbidity rates show the consequence of the lack of planning) (fig. 8).

VIII. *Details* (close-up analysis of four key interventions in the urban fabric: three associated with squares surrounding churches, the fourth of the historical core of the city itself; extensive demolitions of buildings from the past two centuries to clear space around these areas in the name of hygiene, as well as the construction of state-of-the-art sports facilities along the banks of the Ticino River) (fig. 9).



▲ Fig. 6. BBPR, photomontage panel IV (*The city plan*), Galleria del Milione show on the Ciocca/BBPR city plan for Pavia, February 1934; source: Ciocca Archive, Museo di Arte Moderna di Rovereto/Trento (MART).

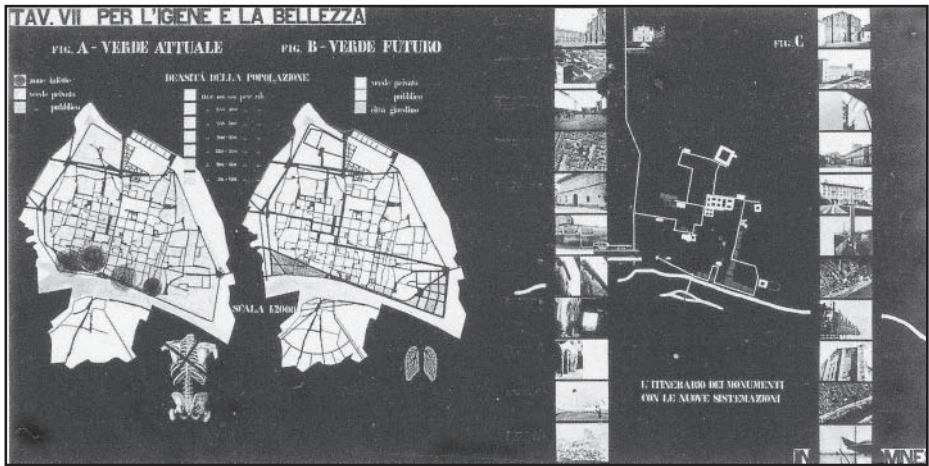


▲ Fig. 7. BBPR, photomontage panel V (*Traffic*), Galleria del Milione show on the Ciocca/BBPR city plan for Pavia, February 1934; source: Ciocca Archive, Museo di Arte Moderna di Rovereto/Trento (MART).

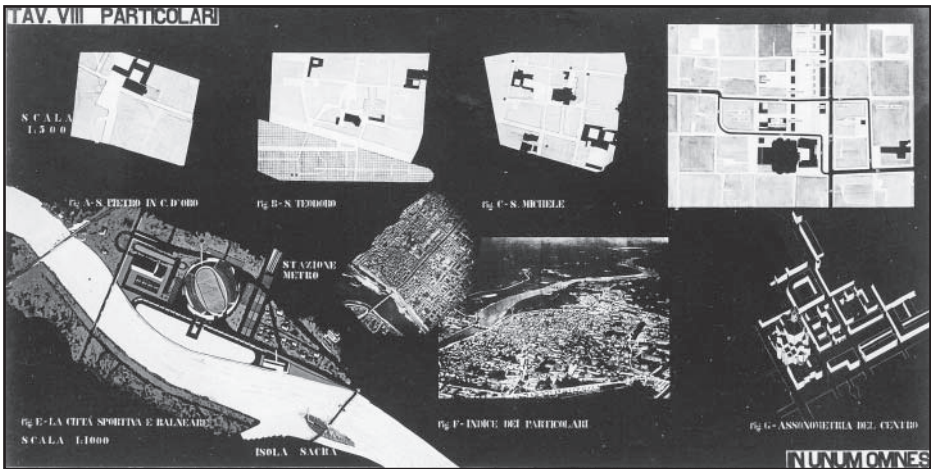
IX. *Alignments* (a mapping of the overall geometry of the cityscape with special reference to that 50 percent of old houses that need to be demolished in order to modernize circulation, insure hygienic living conditions for all, and restore a sense of spaciousness, hierarchy, and order).

X. *Hydraulics* (an overall diagramming of the city's major water courses, drainage links, canals, and sewage systems as built up over the centuries, and a plan for their rationalization).

Each panel juxtaposed maps, photographs from the ground and from the air, technical schematics, drawings, decorative elements, and signage, accompanied by cinematic bands of images tracing ideal trajectories among the city's public spaces and monuments. Ample coverage of the show was provided by *Quadrante*. Gallery lectures were



▲ Fig. 8. BBPR, photomontage panel VII (*In the name of health and beauty*), Galleria del Milione show on the Ciocca/BBPR city plan for Pavia, February 1934; source: Ciocca Archive, Museo di Arte Moderna di Rovereto/Trento (MART).



▲ Fig. 9. BBPR, photomontage panel VIII (*Details*), Galleria del Milione show on the Ciocca/BBPR city plan for Pavia, February 1934; source: Ciocca Archive, Museo di Arte Moderna di Rovereto/Trento (MART).

given by the principals in the project, among them Ciocca who authored a manifesto entitled “For the Corporative City” in which he issued a warning that there existed a dark spot in the otherwise radiant Italy of Mussolini: “the danger that the small-minded and backward views of many individuals will obscure the wide and far-sighted vision of the Chief.”<sup>9</sup>

Such fears were prompted by a wave of attacks launched by antimodernists in newspapers like the daily *Il Lavoro Fascista*, whose commentator suggested that the Ciocca/BBPR global conception of the “corporative city” was fundamentally at odds with the demographic, environmental, and historical specificity of each and every “fascist city.”<sup>10</sup>

102 Banfi and Belgioioso fired back that the distinction was pure bunk: “the fascist city must be the functional political and aesthetic expression of corporativist theory.”<sup>11</sup> Other critics objected to the particulars of the city plan. But only five years after the noise stirred up by the Pavia competition had died down, Ciocca’s dark spot had grown into a blot the size of the Italian peninsula. Though its survivors would go on to become major protagonists on the postwar architectural scene, BBPR found itself virtually disbanded starting in 1938. Ernesto Rogers was forced into hiding due to the promulgation of Nazi-inspired racial laws and in 1944 Banfi and Belgioioso were shipped off to the concentration camp Mathausen-Gusen, where Banfi died within days of the war’s end. Though still prominent, Bardi too was forced into anonymity by the end of the 1930s and in 1947 abandoned Italy for Brazil, where he became the founder and director of the Museu de Arte de São Paulo, one of South America’s leading venues for the diffusion of modernist art, design, and architecture.

Ciocca’s fortunes ebbed and flowed with the political tides. Mussolini’s rave review of *Judgment on Bolshevism* had brought him relative prominence, but despite his access to high government circles, he never succeeded in persuading the regime to embrace fully his fast house designs, guided roadway systems, or mass theaters, not to mention more eccentric projects such as Rationalist Grand Hotels for pigs (fig. 10). By wartime the theorist of the fascist third way had drifted out of the fascist fold, spying for the Italo-British regional command and taking on a leading role in the Italian Resistance between September 1944 and April 1945.

But the moral of the story that I have attempted to recount in these modest reflections on a forgotten episode of the fascist culture wars is decidedly *not* that fascist avant-gardists such as Ciocca, Bardi, and BBPR found themselves pushed to one side as the bad *romanitas* of the rear guard triumphed over a forward-looking Rationalist *romanitas* in the wake of the battle of Pavia. On the contrary, Italian state patronage practices remained varied throughout the 1930s and the early 1940s, with major commissions being awarded to a wide array of beneficiaries on the cultural left, center, and right. The moral of the story, rather, has to do with a cluster of other issues: the complexity of actual modernist practice versus theory, the eclecticism that often lurks within or underneath otherwise purist discourses, the battle between old historicisms and new more oblique ones during the first half of the twentieth century, and the key role performed by archaeology as a distinctly modern, sometimes even modernist form of urban planning and construction. Archaeology is not, as was often assumed until the important work of scholars such as Nikolaus Himmelmann, Alain Schnapp, and Bruce Trigger, reducible to the art or science of recovering the past.<sup>12</sup> For the past is always a realm of contention, a realm where retrospection and the elaboration of prospective social fantasy are destined to meet and merge, a realm in which not everything can be recovered and in which recovery itself often presupposes demolition of surface structures. Archaeology thus has little choice but to be founded upon *selection* from among a vast array of potentially recoverable pasts as a function of present values. Certain pasts are privileged, others merely documented for study, others eliminated in the pursuit of deeper beds of data. The process admits a diversity of models of discovery,

# IL GIUDIZIO DI M U S S O L I N I

«... ne ho pubblicato io stesso un resoconto sulla nostra stampa. L'opera si legge d'un fiato. Io ne ho cominciata la lettura alle 3 del pomeriggio e alle 8 ne avevo terminata l'ultima pagina... L'autore? Un ingegnere italiano, che ha passato 2 anni in Russia, non come turista, ma come tecnico, impiegato alla costruzione e all'avviamento di uno dei più grandi stabilimenti sovietici. È un uomo che conosce il paese, di una conoscenza non teorica, ma reale. Egli ci mostra la realtà bolscevica quale essa è. Le sue conclusioni sono obiettivamente negative.»

(Da un'intervista con Mussolini pubblicata nel settimanale francese "1933")



SONO IN CORSO  
LE EDIZIONI:

FRANCESE  
INGLESE  
TEDESCA  
AMERICANA

G A E T A N O C I O C C A

## GIUDIZIO SUL BOLSCEVISMO

Lire 12.-

*"Questo libro è per i Sovieti un colpo più grave  
di una battaglia perduta."*

JE SUIS PARTOUT

3<sup>a</sup> E D I Z I O N E

**B O M P I A N I**



Fig. 10. Advertisement for Ciocca's *Judgment on Bolshevism* with Mussolini's review cited in upper third and editions in translation listed to the left; source: *Almanacco letterario Bompiani*, 1935.

104 recovery, and reconstruction, and a diversity of stagings of that which is recovered within the prevailing narratives of an era, whether corporativist or liberal democratic. So the Italian peninsula, with its particularly dense stratification of eras of human habitation, is not the exception but an intensification of the rule. The archaeological record always belongs to the future.

## Notes

1. The Ciocca archive at the Archivio del '900 of the Museo di Arte Moderna di Rovereto/Trento (MART) includes extensive documentation regarding Ciocca's collaboration with BBPR, as well as key documents such as the *Relazione*, whose full title reads: "Concorso del piano regolatore di Pavia—Relazione" (Ciocca Archive, Scritti 2); hereafter abbreviated as *R*. All English translations, unless otherwise noted, are my own. As noted elsewhere in this essay, portions of the *Relazione* reappeared in print in Ciocca and Ernesto Roger's "La città corporativa," *Quadrante* 10 (February 1934): 25 and Ciocca's "Per la città corporativa," *Quadrante* 11 (March 1934): 10–2. Both texts have been reprinted in Schnapp, *Gaetano Ciocca, costruttore, inventore, agricoltore, scrittore*, Quaderni di architettura 3 (Milan: Skira, 2000), 133–5.

2. Le Corbusier, *Towards a New Architecture*, trans. Frederick Etchells (London: J. Rodker, 1931), 156–7; hereafter abbreviated as *TNA*.

3. Livy, *Rome and the Mediterranean* (bks. 31–45), trans. Henry Bettenson (Baltimore: Penguin, 1976), 151; italics added. The Latin original reads: "tertium genus romani coloni ab divo Caesare post devictos Pompei liberos adiecti. Nunc in corpus unum confuse omnes Hispanis prius, postremo et Graecis in civitatem Romanam adscitis. . . ." Cited from *Ab urbe condita. Libri XXXI-XL*, ed. John Briscoe (Stuttgart: Teubner, 1991).

4. Schnapp, *Building Fascism/Communism/Democracy* (Stanford, Calif.: Stanford University Press, forthcoming 2004). An early sketch for this book appeared as "Between Fascism and Democracy: Gaetano Ciocca—Builder, Inventor, Farmer, Engineer," *Modernism/modernity* 2, no. 3 (September 1995): 117–57.

5. A full bibliography of Ciocca's writings, as well as a description of the contents of the Ciocca archive at the MART, can be found in Schnapp, *Gaetano Ciocca*, 187–91.

6. "La tecnica del teatro di massa," Reale Accademia D'Italia, *Atti—Convegno di Lettere: Tema—Il teatro drammatico*, 179.

7. *TNA*, 158–9. Earlier Le Corbusier writes, "Rome's business was to conquer the world and govern it. Strategy, recruiting, legislation: the spirit of order. In order to manage a large business house, it is essential to adopt some fundamental, simple and unexceptionable principles. The Roman order was simple and direct. If it was brutal, so much the worse—or so much the better" (155–6).

8. Walter Gropius, *The New Architecture and the Bauhaus*, trans. P. Morton Shand (Boston: Charles T. Branford, 1935), 19. Compare the similarly moralizing stance adopted in the opening of Le Corbusier's *Towards a New Architecture*: "The Engineer's Aesthetic and Architecture—two things that march together and follow one from the other—the one at its full height, the other in an unhappy state of retrogression. A question of morality; lack of truth is intolerable, we perish in untruth" (*TNA*, 13).

9. Ciocca, "Per la città corporativa," 13.

10. Quoted from Gian Luigi Banfi and Lodovico Belgioioso, "Urbanistica corporativa," *Quadrante* 16/17 (August/September 1934): 40.

11. Banfi and Belgioioso, "Urbanistica corporativa," 40.

12. I have in mind a wide array of works extending from Himmelmann's *Utopische Vergangenheit: Archaeologie und moderne Kultur* (Berlin: Mann Verlag, 1976) to Trigger's *A History of Archaeological Thought* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 1989) to Schnapp's *The Discovery of the Past: The Origins of Archaeology* (London: British Museum Press, 1996), though a number of multiple author volumes might also be cited.