

# The ASeA-AUA group

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The group formed by the students who were the promoters of ASeA and the founders of AUA, was among the most active promoters of the first student occupation of the Faculty of Architecture in Rome after the initial post-war years: it occurred in 1956 and certainly today it would be considered a demonstration of a “corporate” nature. In that year, the elections for the formation of the Faculty Student Council composed of three members had been won by the list of the UGI – Unione Goliardica Romana – towards which the votes of the left-wing students had also been directed, after the direct agreement between Palmiro Togliatti and the very young Marco Pannella (elected president of the UGI in 1952). After the elections, Lucio Barbera, Massimo La Perna – both members of our group – and Claudio Tombini, representative of the students of the FGCI (Italian Communist Youth Federation) in the Faculty were elected to the Faculty Student Council.

The demonstration, organized by the Student Council and which culminated with the occupation of the premises of the Faculty in Valle Giulia, involved all the other national university locations because it was aimed at contesting a national law (n. 1378, 8 December 1956) which, by reintroducing the State Exams for the practice of the profession, opened up to engineers the possibility of enrolling in the Order of Architects without allowing – in fact – reciprocity. The demonstration of a national nature did not achieve anything, but for the architecture students of Rome it was a training ground for collective action and an important experience of collaboration with students active in other Italian Faculties of Architecture. In those years in Italy the Faculties of Architecture were still those established between the two world wars at the Polytechnics of Milan and Turin, the Universities of Florence, Naples, Palermo and the IUAV of Venice, on the model of the Royal School of Architecture of Rome, founded by the group of designers and artists led by Gustavo Giovannoni and Marcello Piacentini. To give greater meaning to the demonstrations against the law establishing the State Exams, student representatives of all the other Faculties met in Rome where a joint conference was held; it was the occasion to establish political, cultural and personal relationships with peers and colleagues from other Italian cities with whom a generational network embryo was naturally formed that in the following years developed at every level with great naturalness. Despite the democratic courtesy with which this first occupation was conducted, Dean Vincenzo Fasolo assumed an authoritarian and paternalistically aggressive posture, which however allowed the rest of the Professors' Council (only seven full professors were part of it) not to expose themselves against the student initiative.

That demonstration successfully involved a large part – the most active – of the students, both male and female – very few – of the Faculty and seemed to express a concrete leadership capacity of our group. By consciously adopting the usual and anthropologically tested model of climbing to hegemony – even if only cultural – through the identification of an adversary to beat – better if institutional and ideological – our group elected itself the main protagonist of the opposition to the cultural backwardness of the Faculty – evident especially in the years of the two-year preparatory course. We founded the ASeA (Students and Architects Association) and, within it, a Freshmen Information Center, with which we addressed especially the very young with a sort of real counter-school. During the hours of official teaching breaks, we organized supplementary lessons for the first-year students to introduce them to the principles, works and ideals of the Masters of Modern Architecture of the years between the two World Wars, from which, in our opinion, it was necessary to start again to design the contemporary city.

We suggested reading three classics: *Walter Gropius and the Bauhaus*, by Giulio Carlo Argan, published in 1951, *History of Modern Architecture* by Bruno Zevi, published in 1950, of which we suggested, however, a “critical” reading and the famous book by Sigfried Giedion *Space, Time and Architecture*, published in Italian in 1954, as well as a series of agile books published after 1950 by the Politecnica Tamburini, in Milan. Among the latter, we considered fundamental for young students, that of Giulia Veronesi entitled *Political difficulties of architecture in Italy: 1920-1940* and those of Mario Roggero on Erich Mendelsohn and Bruno Zevi on Neoplastic Architecture. Naturally, these were the same texts on which we ourselves had wanted to build the first foundations of our common intellectual identity.

Today all this may seem obvious and conventional, but then it was not so; despite the temporal distance, more than ten years, that separated us from the dramatic transition from the fascist regime to the democratic Republic, a significant part of the teaching staff of the Faculty seemed to still fear the diffusion among the students of the texts of the new criticism, even the most classic ones, and of the international architectural magazines, even the most read in Europe. The older professors appeared suspiciously closed in a gruff, sometimes snarling fear with respect to the positions or cultural claims of the students, often interpreted as the result of a preconceived “political” opposition to their “fascist” history as teachers and architects, however brave. Furthermore, the quiet acceptance, by the students, of the academic authority of the old holders was not helped at all by the didactic recipe devised by them, which envisaged granting full linguistic license to all the young people who attended the design courses from the first to the third year.

For us students who wanted to be “leading”, that license not preceded by any critical knowledge, by any public debate, meant wanting to consciously debase the entire revolutionary event that had led to the affirmation of modernity, thus emptying it of any moral and cultural meaning. In fact, that is, in our public debates, in our internal discussions and in the elaboration of our exam projects, we “leading” students were not looking for an arbitrary, low-cost, and therefore irresponsible linguistic freedom; on the contrary, we felt strongly committed to the “literary” attempt – therefore conscious because cultured – to relive, in our time, the heroic epic that the young people of Rational Architecture – Terragni, Pagano, Persico, Libera – had lived

twenty years earlier in the footsteps of the great masters – Gropius, Mies, Le Corbusier – according to what the most advanced critical literature of the post-war period narrated with great rhetorical intensity. In the meantime, our self-education continued intensely, proposing ourselves as followers of the most important art and architecture critics, among whom, especially in the late 1950s, Giulio Carlo Argan stood out. When in 1959, at the Galleria Nazionale d'Arte Moderna, a stone's throw from the Faculty building, a large exhibition entitled *Forms and Techniques of Contemporary Architecture* was inaugurated, the executive committee of which included Argan, Bruno Zevi, Palma Bucarelli and Luigi Moretti, almost all the students of the Faculty visited the exhibition, so close to our classrooms – we in the front row next to Argan.

Even the youngest or less conservative professors flocked; it really seemed, therefore, that the cultural line of our group of students – even the “oldest” among us were still students – had received the “public and official” seal of belonging to the most advanced school of innovative and, at the same time, realistic thought on architecture. Realistic, yes; because that exhibition, desired by the steel industry of Cornigliano, included a “solo” of Le Corbusier – the large wooden model of the Campidoglio of Chandigarh is memorable – but also the exhibition *Steel sheets in architecture, building in our time*, curated by Konrad Wachsmann and the works of art in fire-treated iron by Eugenio Carmi and Emilio Scanavino. Architecture and art together again, to elaborate the language that the use of new technologies demanded, finally, also in Italy!

Meanwhile, even in the Faculty, things seemed to be moving. In the same year, 1959, not far from the Valle Giulia headquarters, the Olympic Village for the 1960 Olympics was under construction. Pier Luigi Nervi, our fourth-year professor of Building Materials Technology, was the designer of three fundamental works: the Palazzetto dello Sport, the new Flaminio Stadium and, above all, the Corso Francia viaduct, agreed upon with the group of modern Roman architects who had been entrusted by INCIS (Istituto Nazionale Case Impiegati dello Stato) with the task of designing the residential part of the Village. But the group of designers did not include any professor architect from our Faculty apart from Pier Luigi Nervi who, however, emerged as a designer of specialized works of great structural commitment, not as a designer of the current fabric of the city, which was what interested our group most. The architects who designed the residential fabric of the Olympic Village were in fact led by Luigi Moretti – a highly controversial figure politically, but certainly considered by all, including Bruno Zevi, to be one of the masters of modernity before and after the Second World War for his works, early in the Foro Mussolini and mature in the bourgeois neighborhoods of Rome.

Alongside Moretti, the Olympic Village was designed by Ugo Luccichenti and Edoardo Monaco, a very famous double professional signature of the elite of Roman “palazzinari” architects, Vittorio Cafiero, designer of imposing public works during and after the fascist regime, and Adalberto Libera, the only academic among them all, but full professor at the Faculty of Architecture in Florence, not Rome. We, who attended Professor Pier Luigi Nervi's course in Rome in those years, were taken by his assistants – guided by the professor himself – to visit the very active construction sites of the Olympic Village.

The aim was certainly to illustrate live the structural prefabrication systems

of Nervi's works, but we couldn't help but also go through all the construction sites where the residences were taking shape. We understood that an era was passing, or rather, had already passed; but what replaced it was not what we would have wanted, even if it seemed to speak precisely the language for which we fought in the classrooms of the Faculty. Two years later, Manfredo Tafuri, with his already deliberately austere writing, vividly depicted in his youthful text entitled *La storia architettonica romana, 1945-1961*<sup>1</sup>, our opposition to the affirmation of modernity that was on display in the Olympic Village, which we perceived as the result of usurpation and betrayal. It seemed to us that the time had come for a more decisive active presence in our school.

The second occupation of the Sapienza Faculty (December 1960), better known and documented, marked a more significant turning point in the life of the ASeA-AUA group and of the entire Faculty of Rome; it opened a new phase in Rome and in Italy, in which the cultural debate between the young generations of students and architects, as well as between them, their teachers and public institutions became the constant dynamic, protagonist of the political and cultural debate around the future of the city and of Italian architecture. Of a decidedly "ideological" nature – architectural ideology, that is – the 1960 occupation was promoted and organized by the ASeA-AUA group with the aim of rejecting the teaching considered "anti-modern", by Saverio Muratori – who had nevertheless been a student of Enrico Calandra and academic heir of Arnaldo Foschini, perhaps the most open to modernism among the first generation professors of our Faculty.

Around this event the ASeA-AUA group expressed a sure capacity for cultural leadership among the Roman students of that time, also expressed by organizing polemical conferences, programmatic manifestos and architecture exhibitions, gaining the support of IN/ARCH (Bruno Zevi) and part of the progressive press of Rome; *Paese Sera*, a popular left-wing newspaper, was among the most attentive to the initiatives of our group. Only today is it understood – from the official documents of the Faculty, such as the minutes of the Professors' Council – that the success of these initiatives of the ASeA-AUA was in no small part due to the de facto – but absolutely not overt – support expressed towards the student unrest by the majority of the Faculty Council. In it, a large group of professors led by the new dean – Vittorio Ballio Morpurgo – was already independently committed to finding a way to offer students a decisive alternative to the fourth and fifth year courses in Composition taught by Saverio Muratori, considered didactically too authoritarian and deliberately too distant from the formative principles on which the faculty was founded in 1919 (letter from 1962 published in this volume). Thus, the spontaneous and strong protest of the young people of ASeA-AUA, enthusiastically supported by the majority of students, pushed the undecided part of the Faculty Council to accept as an unpostponable necessity the duplication – then called "doubling" – of the Composition courses of the fourth and fifth year to propose, as an alternative to the teaching of Professor Saverio Muratori, two other courses in succession, of a decidedly more open nature and in line with the ancient teaching principles of the Faculty.

These new Courses – after a year of transition – were in fact entrusted to Adalberto Libera (Academic Year 1962-63), a great modern architect, protagonist

1. Manfredo Tafuri, *La vicenda architettonica romana, 1945-1961*, "Superfici: problemi di architettura e tecnologie edili", n. 5 Aprile 1962, pp. 20-42.

of the young Italian rational architecture since 1928, a bridge between the Roman school and the national and international modern architects. Adalberto Libera, in the immediate post-war period, had already been called by Arnaldo Foschini, then Dean of the Faculty of Rome and national manager of the INA Casa program, to study and propose to the Italian architects involved in the INA Casa projects, typologies and design methods that were wisely innovative, suited to the real and new social and productive needs of our country. The choice to call Libera to cover the role of professor of Architectural Composition as an alternative to Saverio Muratori seemed the most appropriate. Unfortunately, however, Libera died suddenly in March 1963, before completing his first year of teaching, while the autonomous agitation of the students resumed with the aim of extending the reform of the study courses to the entire faculty. In this context, the members of the ASeA-AUA, now almost all graduates, moved on to carry out only the work of guiding the younger students, having themselves assumed, for the most part, initial teaching roles in the vast group of assistants of the courses established as an alternative to those of Saverio Muratori. Urged by the student push, the Council of Professors of the Faculty of Architecture of Rome, decisively overcame the moment of crisis due to the sudden death of Libera; indeed, it made it an opportunity for the more decisive renewal expected not only by the majority of the students, but also by the less senior professors.

During the summer and early autumn of 1963, with a brief but effective sequence of resolutions, the Faculty Council, chaired by Vittorio Ballio Morpurgo, called to the Faculty of Architecture in Rome three very significant academics who had trained as architects and teachers in the Faculty: Luigi Piccinato, Ludovico Quaroni and Bruno Zevi. With the “call” of the first two – both fundamental students of Marcello Piacentini – the Faculty Council attempted to regain, at the same time, the authority of the Piacentinian tradition – already represented in the Faculty by the professor of Urban Planning, Plinio Marconi – and the modernist vision of which the two illustrious teachers, Piccinato and Quaroni, had deserved to be considered leaders with their works, created during the phase of post-war reconstruction and the international affirmation of Italian architecture and urban planning in the Mediterranean countries<sup>2</sup>.

Bruno Zevi’s “call”, on the other hand, was intended to attract to the university institution founded by Giovannoni and Piacentini, his most polemical and brilliant student who, in the immediate post-war period, after a period of study and political and cultural commitment in the United States, had organized outside of it, in Rome, a counter-school of great innovative value – the teaching arm of the APAO (Association for Organic Architecture) – with which Zevi himself intended to propose a new cultural model, sensitive to American modernity, for the training of the Italian architect.

During these events, the group of young people from ASeA-AUA who, as mentioned, had already assumed teaching roles with Adalberto Libera, passed into the teaching team of Ludovico Quaroni who, from the Academic Year 1963-64, had replaced Libera as head of the Composition courses alternative to Saverio Muratori’s teaching. The first graduates of the AUA, Manfredo Tafuri and Giorgio Piccinato,

2. Anna Irene Del Monaco, *1947-1991 Architetti italiani nel Mediterraneo. Istituzioni e Autori*, Nuova Cultura 2021.

were joined in the group of Quaroni assistants by other young people from the ASeA-AUA who, in the meantime, had graduated – Vieri Quilici, Claudio Maroni, Lucio Barbera – thus giving their group, for a few years, a numerically dominant presence, but not always cohesive, in the group of young teachers gathered around the master. In the meantime, Manfredo Tafuri, fundamental among the founders of our group, despite having begun his academic career as an assistant in the Composition Courses, first of Libera, then of Quaroni, in 1963 decided to build his academic future in the field of History of Architecture rather than in the field of Architectural and Urban Design. The crisis – or enlightenment – had occurred in March 1963, when, fatally coinciding with the death of Adalberto Libera, Ludovico Quaroni and Giancarlo De Carlo, supported by the Olivetti Foundation, opened an experimental Course in Urban Planning in Arezzo to attempt the path to a disciplinary training, in the field of City Planning, more adequate to the foreseeable development of the Italian territory. It was an event attended by the most active architects and students in the Italian Faculties, personally selected by Quaroni and De Carlo.

It was, therefore, a moment of comparison between the emerging young people in the various Schools among whom stood out some who would then decisively establish themselves in the academy and in the profession. Among them, in particular, Aldo Rossi imposed himself on the attention of all those gathered in Arezzo as a possible leader of an unexpected formal and symbolic renewal of modern Italian architecture.

In this context, Manfredo Tafuri understood that the role of indispensable historical-critical conscience of the new national trends that from Milan and Venice were preparing to find an echo in Naples, skipping Rome, was opening up to him. Here, our group continued its research in continuity with the modern tradition of rationalism, enriched by the ethical-social attitude inherited from the masters of neorealism - Ridolfi and Quaroni himself - and by the dynamic and multidimensional vision of the city, affirmed, albeit with different tones and arguments, by Bruno Zevi, by Luigi Piccinato and, above all, by Quaroni himself.

But also Tafuri, with his choice, was naturally led to intensify the relationship with Bruno Zevi, a dominant Roman figure in the discipline of History and Criticism of Architecture, while our entire ASeA-AUA group participated, like many young and less young Roman architects, in the cultural and “political” liveliness of the IN/ARCH (National Institute of Architecture), also a creation of Bruno Zevi.

In other words, after the Arezzo Seminar, each group of young “selected” Italian teachers, or future teachers, although having established even stronger generational ties among themselves, concentrated in their own environment, actively participating in the most lively academic and institutional realities “on site” through In other words, after the Arezzo Seminar, each group of young “selected” Italian teachers, or future teachers, although they had established even stronger generational ties among themselves, concentrated on their own environment, actively participating in the most lively academic and institutional realities “on site” through teaching activities and design experimentation – manifested above all in national architectural competitions, in which they attempted to express, sometimes successfully, their own line of research.

Meanwhile in Rome, in the autumn of 1963, at the beginning of the new academic year, the complex and ultimately lightning-fast story of the renewal of the Faculty, begun by our group with the occupation of the Faculty against Saverio Muratori's teaching model, ended with the well-known Roxy Programmatic Conference, where, in the large hall of that modern cinema, a debate, sometimes not without harshness, took place in front of the audience of students, led by Bruno Zevi, between the teachers representing the new course and the few tied to the more conservative positions. Saverio Muratori himself also took part in it – but it was the last time – in comparison with the new and yet already established innovative professors of the Faculty. Apparently winners.

In 1964 our group, which under the name AUA, had tried since 1961 to approach professional life as a projection, in social practice, of the ideological and political elaboration on the role of architecture in our time, began to dissolve. Smaller professional groups were temporarily formed, but at the end of the 1960s, the group found itself almost complete to experiment with a new form of collective profession of a purely social and political nature. Together we founded a design cooperative – CoPER – aimed at promoting building cooperatives with which to experiment with a “participatory” design activity by the same “cooperating clients”. But this could be the subject of a later publication.