

A Journal for Ideas and
Criticism in Architecture

Published for The Institute
for Architecture and Urban Studies

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Winter 1977: 11

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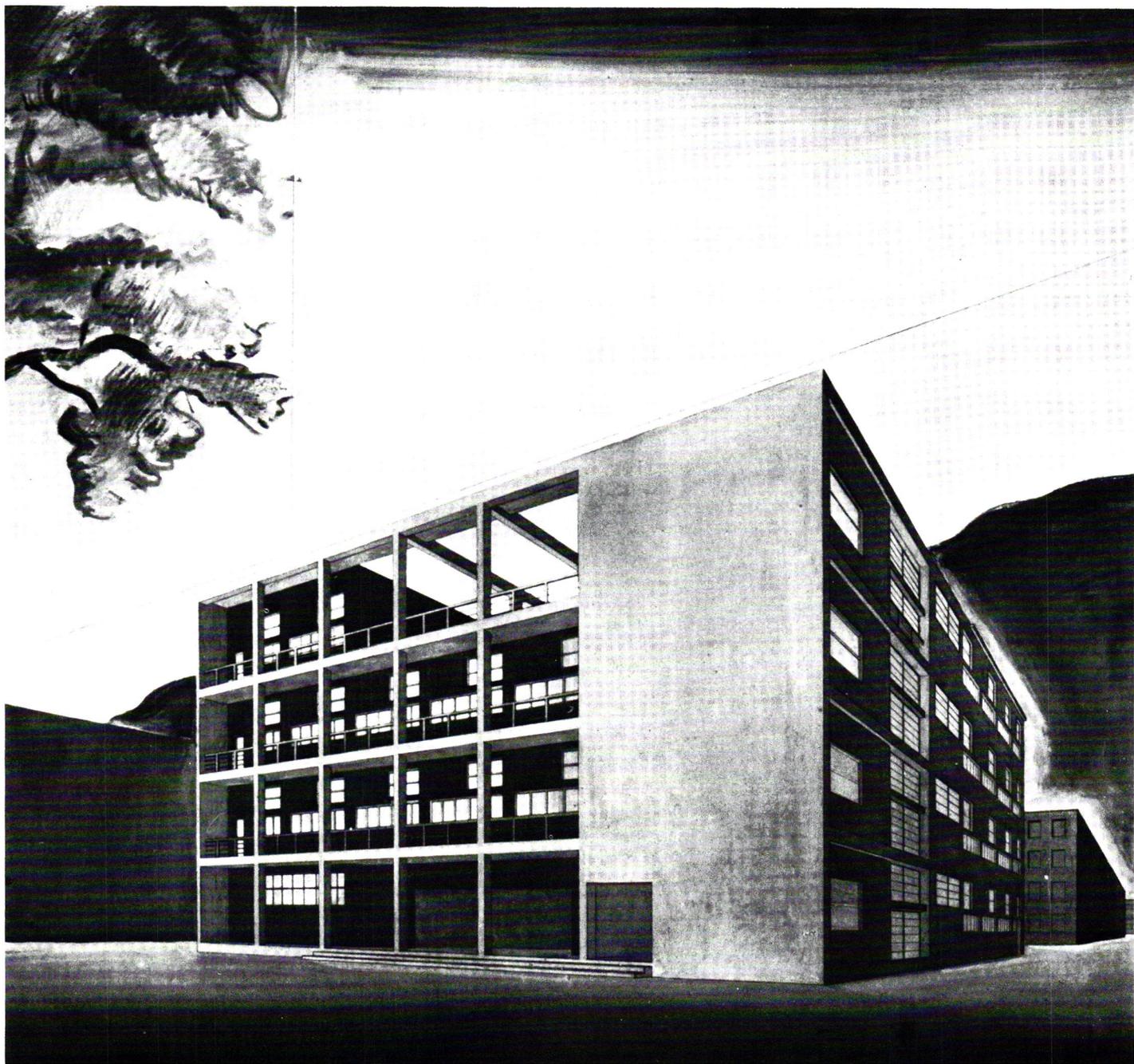
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Giuseppe Terragni: Subject and "Mask"

Manfredo Tafuri

Translation by Diane Ghirardo



1 (frontispiece) Casa del Fascio, Como. G. Terragni, architect, 1932-1936.

2 Palazzo del Littorio, Rome. G. Terragni with A. Carminati, P. Lingeri, M. Nizzoli, E. Saliva, M. Sironi, L. Vietti, architects, 1934. Model, Solution A, First Level.

3 "Sala del '22," Exhibition of the Fascist Revolution, Rome. G. Terragni, architect, 1932.

4 Villa Saibene, Como. G. Terragni, architect, 1926. Project.

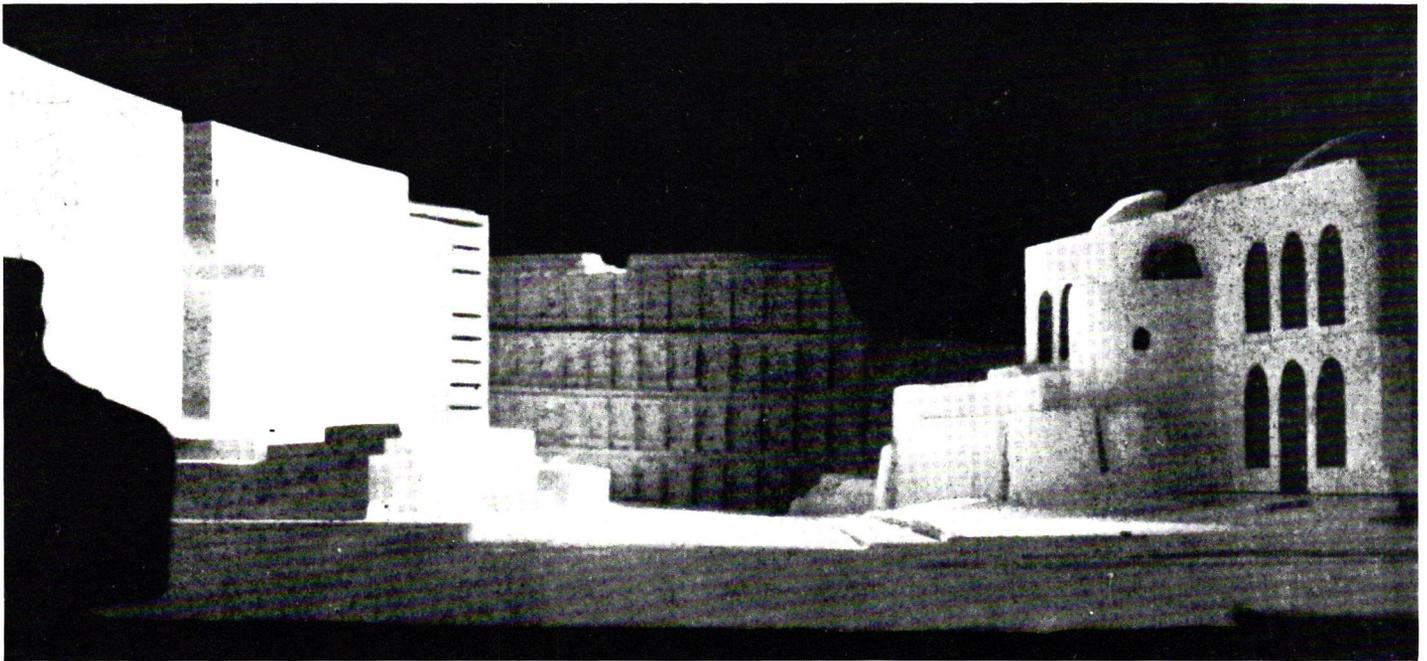
5 Palazzo del Littorio, Rome. G. Terragni with A. Carminati, P. Lingeri, M. Nizzoli, E. Saliva,

M. Sironi, L. Vietti, architects, 1934. Site plan, Solution A, First Level.

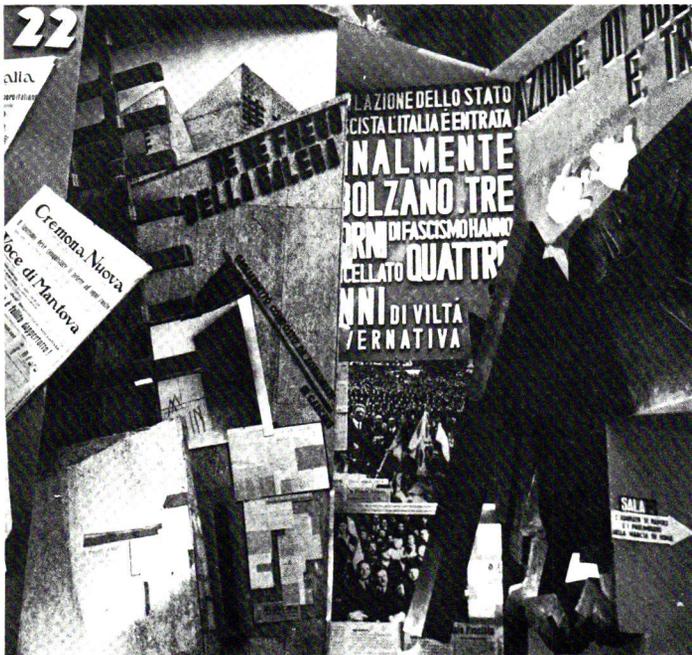
6 Detail of model, showing the "dam," the "cleavage," and Mussolini's platform.

7 "Tattooed" wall showing isostatic lines.

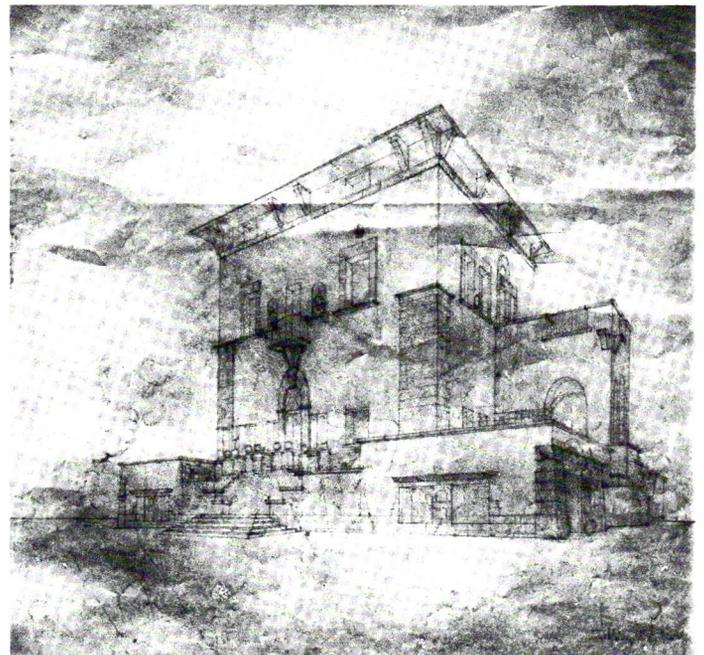
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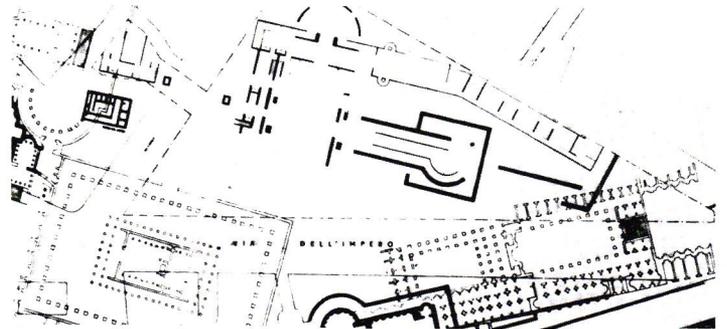


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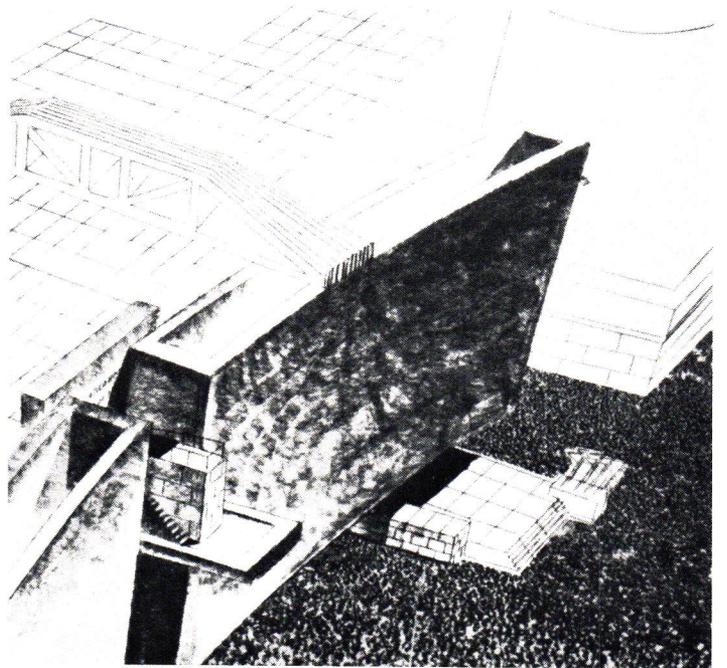
With his Solution A (1934) submitted for the Palazzo del Littorio competition in Rome (figs. 2, 5–7), Terragni seems to hurl a challenge at the transparency of language. This effort to reveal the power of the “word”—as he had already attempted in his “Sala del '22” (fig. 3) at the Exhibition of the Fascist Revolution (1932)—is an attempt to force a division, a laceration, a profound fracture, in discourse; having acquired power, the “word” shatters language, designs its dissipation, and constrains it to become the locus of a confrontation. When did language ever constitute a problem for Terragni? Beginning with the design for the Villa Saibene (fig. 4) in 1926, “written” in the manner of the “Novecento,” or with the Novocomum, a masterpiece of reticent ambiguity, language appears *already given*. There is room for nothing but an internal process of resolution, even if it must divide, separate, and dissolve connections.

For Terragni there is nothing beyond such *analytical work*, no “discourse,” no message, no “sound.” The dialogue occurs entirely within architectural writing, never emerges from it and never becomes polemical with respect to “the world as it is.” Pagano’s profound antipathy for Terragni originates here. The moralism of the director of *Casabella* clashes head on with the atonal, wholly amoral aphorisms of the architect from Como. It is hardly surprising that Italian criticism so often finds itself in difficulty with respect to Terragni. On the one hand it repeats Pagano’s intolerant value judgments in somewhat more sophisticated tones, while on the other it desperately attempts to bring his work back within the reassuring fold of the Modern Movement.

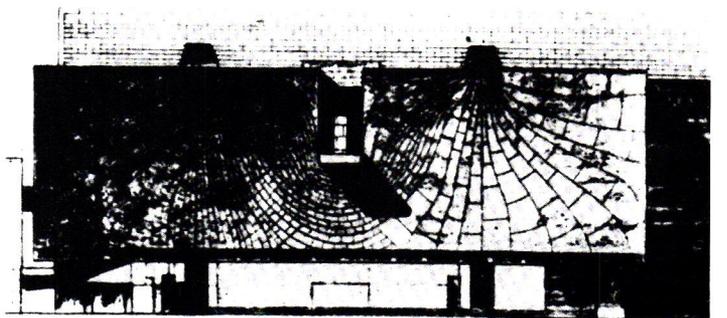
But faced with Solution A, these critical postions find themselves more than metaphorically up against a “wall,” an eighty meter long curved mass of porphyry: a limit, an embankment, a dam. In siting the building with respect to the axis of Via dell’Impero (fig. 5), on an angle similar to that of the Basilica of Maxentius, the design of Terragni, Carminati, Lingeri, Vietti, Saliva, Nizzoli, and Sironi seeks a confrontation with that Roman monument. Although the curvature of the “dam” of the Palazzo del Littorio responds to the projection of the apse from the pierced solid of the Basilica, it principally responds to its “cleavage” (fig. 6).



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