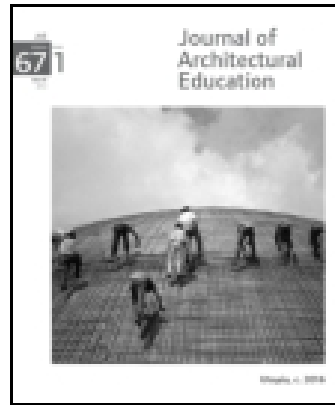


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Thomas L. Schumacher

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# Terragni and Classicism: Fence Sitting at the Barricades

**Thomas L. Schumacher** was born in the Bronx, NY in 1941. He received his Bachelor of Architecture (1963) and Master of Architecture (1966) degrees from Cornell University, where he studied with Colin Rowe. In 1967 he received the Rome Prize Fellowship and studied at the American Academy in Rome for two years. He has received grants from Princeton University, the University of Maryland, The Graham Foundation, twice from the National Endowment for the Arts, and was the 1986 recipient of the Brunner Grant from the New York Chapter of the American Institute of Architects. He is a former member of the JAE editorial board.

Schumacher is a registered architect and has worked in the offices of Manfredi Nicoletti in Rome, Brown/Daltas in Rome, and I.M. Pei and Partners in New York. He was a Research Associate at the Institute for Architecture and Urban Studies in New York.

Schumacher has taught at several universities, including Princeton, the University of Virginia, and the Catholic University of America, and is currently Associate Professor of Architecture at the University of Maryland. He has been a visiting professor at Carnegie-Mellon University, the Istituto Universitario dell'Architettura di Venezia, the University of Illinois at Chicago and Temple University. He has lectured at Universities in the U.S., Canada, Italy and West Germany.

Thomas Schumacher's articles have appeared in various magazines and journals including *Architectural Design*, the *Harvard Architecture Review*, *The Architectural Review*, *Casabella*, and *Oppositions*. He is the author of *The Danteum, A Study in the Architecture of Literature* (1985), published by the Princeton Architectural Press. He is presently working on a book and a video tape on facade composition, entitled *The Palladio Variations*, and on a monograph on the Italian Rationalist architect, Giuseppe Terragni.

*Virtually all the architects of the Modern Movement began their careers with one or another version of the Classical vocabulary. But unlike other Modernists, Terragni continued to use specifically classical forms and details during much of his career, rather than abandoning them to the more abstract modern idiom.*

*Terragni's involvement with Classicism comes from a variety of sources: the heightened nationalism of both the Risorgimento and Fascism, the concept of Mediterraneanism—common to much of the Modern Movement—and the myth of the 'Masters of Como.' This Classicism manifests itself in a number of ways: in proportion, figure, parti-forms, compositional regularity, cubic stereometry; but most importantly in the use of classical detail-forms. But his sense of the "well-built" building, in the tradition of the great Lombard builders of the Romanesque period and later, is present in all his buildings and projects, in the International-Style works as well as in those designed in a Classical language.*

*Terragni's buildings in "literal" Classical style each represent a variation on the work of a different major architect of the Italian Classical tradition. But it was in his less archeologically classical buildings that Terragni succeeded in combining all these influences and adaptations to produce a truly independent and original expression of his own. They are the Casa del Fascio in Como, the Danteum project and the Pal. Littorio Competition, solution "A." In these buildings the underlying substratum of Classicism that was Le Corbusier's, Mies's and Wright's shows Terragni to be yet another crypto-Classicalist in Modern-Movement dress.*

*"We find ourselves in between classicism, in the sense of a return to order, and neoclassicism, intended as a language inherent to the new order that Fascism wants to represent. Terragni's rationalism is a 'true' classicism, based on purity, the absolute, proportion, mathematics, and the 'Greek spirit.' "*

Giorgio Ciucci<sup>1</sup>

*"The 'classical' for Terragni was vital knowledge, not servile imitation. He admired the organization of certain Egyptian and Greek buildings, certain*

*plans organized with rectilinear walls of great thickness, in large blocks of stone. . . . As much as possible he used granite, with which he was fascinated, inserting it in vast blocks."*

Luigi Zucconi<sup>2</sup>

*Virtually all the architects of the Modern Movement began their careers with one or another version of the Classical vocabulary.<sup>3</sup> Wright's Blossom House (1893) and Hardy House (1902) are good examples. Le Corbusier's Villa Schwob (1916, the chef d'oeuvre of his Chaux de Fonds period), Mies' Kroller House, and Aalto's Jyväskylä Workers' Club (1924) show attachments to the Classical language that were to reemerge at later stages in their careers as significant substrata.<sup>4</sup> But unlike these other Modernists, Terragni continued to use specifically Classical forms and details during much of his career, rather than abandoning them to the more abstract modern idiom. Perhaps this is attributable to the fact that Terragni died at the tender age of 39, an age that Le Corbusier had not yet passed when he designed the Villa at Garches. Possibly Terragni did not live long enough to outlive his early influences. But when Le Corbusier and others of his generation abandoned traditional vocabularies they never went back. Terragni tended to hedge; he designed buildings in the classical vocabulary (Fig. 1) after he had designed buildings in the International Style. Daniele Vitale has noted this influence, arguing that it was the Novecento strain of Classicism that influenced Terragni, an influence that ". . . permeated his entire career, often delicately poised in a metaphysical atmosphere."<sup>5</sup>*

*Terragni's involvement with Classicism comes from a variety of sources: the heightened nationalism of both the Risorgimento and Fascism, the concept of Mediterraneanism—common to much of the Modern Movement—and the myth of the "Masters of Como." This Classicism manifests itself in a number of ways: in proportion, figure, parti-forms, compositional regularity, cubic stereometry; but most importantly for our purposes here, in the use of Classical detail-forms. But his sense of the "well-built" building, in the tradition of the great Lombard builders of the Romanesque period and later, is present in all his buildings and*

projects, in the International-Style works as well as in those designed in a Classical language.

Throughout his artistic career Terragni depended on images of various kinds, to the point where he was accused of plagiarism more than once.<sup>6</sup> While I would not reduce Terragni's works to such simple terms as plagiarism, it is true that from his very first professional projects (like The Monumento Ai Caduti, 1926, in Como, designed in collaboration with Pietro Lingeri, Fig. 2) to his last works he collected architectural themes upon which to make variations, using several sources for a number of distinct transformations.

Terragni was influenced specifically by the history of Italy and Italian architecture over the two centuries preceding his own work, and he might be placed comfortably in an "Apostolic Succession" of Italian architecture that runs through such important figures as Boito, Basile, d'Aronco, and Sant'Elia.

During late-eighteenth and nineteenth centuries a dialectic between the new (i.e., foreign) ideas of [then] modern architecture, and the traditional values of Classicism, can be discerned in Italian architectural theory and practice. Questions about the "imitative" nature of architecture versus a "natural" architecture separated such theorists as Lodoli and Algarotti as much as Blondel and Perrault. Foreign architects, after 1750, came to Italy to view old buildings, not the latest work of contemporary masters. The seminal socio-architectural ideas of the late-eighteenth century also affected Italy. Even such elements as the Orders were given new significance, widening their meanings from iconographic and anthropomorphic associations to include thematic content, the invocation of mood, and psychological conditioning.<sup>7</sup>

Another factor for Terragni was the myth of the *Magistri Comacini*. Terragni and his sometimes partner Lingeri, like all the architects from Como (including Sant'Elia), came under the spell of this myth. The *Magistri* (Latin), or *Maestri* (Italian)—"Masters"—were the legendary builders of the Como region, who were believed by some to all come from



1 Terragni, Stecchini Tomb, 1930

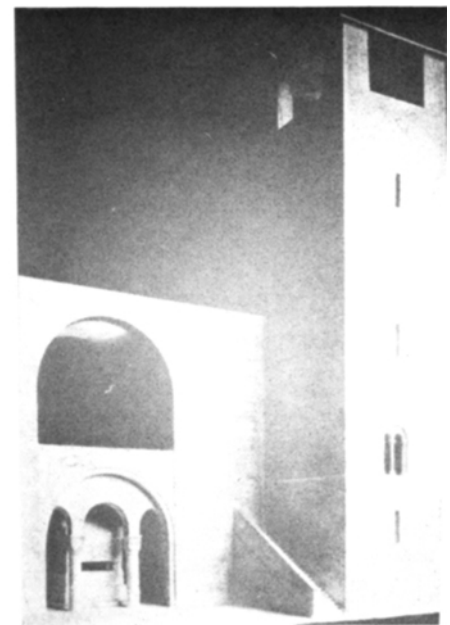
the *Isola Comacina* (Como Island) in Lake Como, and who were reputed to have dominated the building professions during the Romanesque period and into the Lombard Gothic. Cesare de Seta, for instance, introduced a discussion of Terragni by referring to the *Maestri*:

"In the land from where the ancient medieval *maestri* emerged to spread the seeds of the lombard language (of form) into Europe . . . Giuseppe Terragni worked and died. . . ."<sup>8</sup>

Twentieth-century scholarship has placed the myth of the *Magistri Comacini* into a somewhat narrower perspective.<sup>9</sup>

To this day the builders of the region have continued to enjoy an immense reputation. The *Comaschi* in general are considered the most *bravo* and competent of all Lombards, who themselves have the best reputation in Italy for quality of workmanship and the capacity for hard work.<sup>10</sup> Terragni, ultimately, was placed—even caught—between Mediterraneanism and the *Maestri Comacini* myth, the one Italian and the other Gallic, the one representational, the other constructive, the one nationalistic, the other international.

As Alberto Sartoris perceived it, the struggle also involved Modernism in its relation to the classical world. According to Sartoris, Terragni believed he ". . . could connect the valid achievements of Latinism to the Mediterranean and European avant garde. . . His position was therefore that of a premeditated rationalism capable of enriching, identifying with the international currents of constructive art, through the systematic metamorphosis of our styles."<sup>11</sup>



2 Terragni and Lingeri, Monumento ai Caduti, Como, 1926, Competition Project

Terragni himself recognized this in print when he wrote

"There is a clear and serene rationalism, most *mediterranean*, of certain Hellenized buildings, and a barbaric rationalism, irritating, of certain typically northern architects: there is a rationalism that gives rise to houses and villas [built] for a life under the sun, amongst the trees and with flowers, overlooking the waters; and a rationalism that gives an inhuman vision of squalor and nightmares (*italics mine*)."<sup>12</sup>

This question of a distinction between the potentially disruptive rationalism of the Modern Movement and an easily recognized tradition was to surface from time to time in Terragni's work. In the project for the Palazzo Littorio in Rome, of 1934 Terragni and his collaborators recognized the problem and attempted to mediate between "building" and "culture" by placing a hyperbolically modern structure over an archeologically derived groundplan. Likewise the problem surfaced periodically in the tombs and monuments. And in the Danteum project it is given perhaps its most sophisticated solution: a balanced composition that adhered to neither side of the architectural/political debate, but was able to rise above it.<sup>13</sup>

The revival of Lombard Gothic architecture in the late-nineteenth century, and the theoretical underpinning to support it, was largely the work of Camillo Boito. Boito's book of 1880, *L'Architettura del Medioevo in Italia*, strongly influenced Italian architectural theory for the last two decades of the century.<sup>14</sup> Boito, like many architects in England and the USA, and Viollet-le-duc in France, was fascinated by the middle ages, but he coupled this interest with a heightened sense



3 Terragni, University Project—Romanesque church facade



5 Terragni, Sketch, "Palatino" and the temple of Antoninus Pius, Forum Romanum, Rome

of the Italian (read Classical) tradition fostered by the *Risorgimento*. In a typical nineteenth-century manner Boito made distinctions amongst the various types of architectural elements of medieval architecture. He argued for a division of the "organic" and the "symbolic" parts of buildings. The first element was the "logical structural skeleton, more rational than artistic," its complement resided in "allegorical abstract analogies."<sup>15</sup> The architecture of the *trecento* was Boito's model, a time of varied needs and styles, but with a unity of purpose, like the unity of purpose of the *Risorgimento* itself. Boito was also a writer of fiction<sup>16</sup> and his interest in natural language carried over into an interest in the language of architecture; this notion of *linguaggio* was to be carried forth into the twentieth century as one of the most consistently held paradigms for modern architecture in Italy.

At the Milan Politecnico Terragni drew many buildings in various styles, from Medieval to the Classical modes<sup>17</sup> (Figs. 3 & 4), and in 1925 he made his first trip to Rome to see antiquity first hand. His sketches from this trip are revealing. One sheet of sketches of the Forum and Palatine shows an interest in detail, but more important, these sketches show Terragni's sense of solid/void and the plasticity of Roman architecture. The Sketch labelled "Palatino" and dated 26 November (Fig. 5) abstracts the forms of the ancient palace into dark shadows and strong horizontal bands of Roman brickwork. And the drawing of the Temple of Antoninus Pius displays Terragni's capacity for simplification and his ability to portray volume and plasticity with a



4 Terragni, University Project—interior of a bath

simple line. The hexastyle portico looms above the viewer in extraordinary majesty, with the single "scale figure" acting like a Steinberg character, pulling the viewer back from the image into his own world, a world separate from the subject matter of the drawing. Thus, as early as 1925 we see the inklings of a sensibility that will create the enigmatic project for the Palazzo Littorio and the "metaphysical" project for the Danteum.

The "worried" line of the Terragni sketch of an ancient ruin (Fig. 6), possibly part of the Basilica of Maxentius, possibly a detail from Hadrian's Villa, imparts the sensation that the massive walls support lightweight coverings: an accurate interpretation of the Roman way of building in masonry and concrete.

Somewhat later, probably around 1928, Terragni made a sketch of the Torre di Porta Vittoria in Como (Fig. 7), one of the many gates in the city wall of the ancient castrum. His rendering of this gate is very accurate despite its lack of detail. The massive quality of the wall and the deep shadows of the tower are beautifully examined, even exaggerated. But the "metaphysical" quality of the drawing is what is most interesting here. The sketch resembles a Sironi or a de Chirico, even though it depicts real place, real time and real building.

In one of Terragni's first projects after graduation, the 1926 Monument to the War dead (his first collaboration with Pietro Lingeri) we see a direct adaptation of medieval style in response to the competition brief (Fig. 8). As Vitale has written,

"Terragni, who was a local historian of his home town, always maintained a strong and unique relationship in his projects with these monuments which were patiently studied and scrutinized."<sup>18</sup>

The architects' sensitivity to the urban context of the Piazza del Duomo is



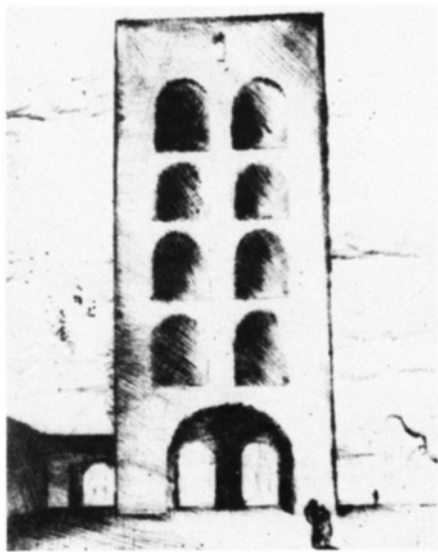
6 Terragni, sketch of ancient ruins, Rome

immediately apparent. Were their scheme executed, the Piazza would have been contained geometrically but not cordoned off (Fig. 9); the axes of the new project were allowed to influence the piazza, the axis of the small church of S. Giacomo was aligned through the axis of the scheme, and the entire project was carefully knitted into the context. The same sensitivity would be shown in one of Terragni's last projects, an urban design for the district just north of the Piazza del Duomo, the Cortesella project of 1940.

Further historical sources for the Monumento ai Caduti are of interest here, beyond the adjacent S. Giacomo source noted by Vitale.<sup>19</sup> One of the most important is the church of Sant'Abbondio. (Fig. 10) From this Church, one of Como's most beautiful and magnificent medieval monuments, Terragni and Lingeri adapted the nave columns. (Fig. 11) Argan has described the Monumento ai Caduti project as neither "... Neo-Romanesque nor Novecentesco... (but) ... between Metaphysical and *Valori Plastici*."<sup>20</sup> The resemblance of this project to paintings of the Metaphysical school of de Chirico and other painters of the time—with their highly ambiguous historical/stylistic qualities—confirms that part of Argan's judgment. The power of de Chirico's and Sironi's paintings is that they portray a *genius loci* without having to choose between Graeco-Roman details on the one hand, and a vernacular Mediterraneanism on the other. Terragni and Lingeri's project does just that, too. Vitale also noted that their project was

"... not neo-Romanesque as a straight imitation or as eclecticism; it is a reference to an archaic, massive, primitive structure..."<sup>21</sup>

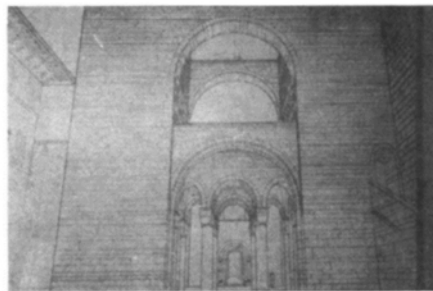
The project is, however, very much a neo-Romanesque work.



7 Terragni, sketch of the Torre di Porta Vittoria, Como

The motif of a large arch dominating a smaller arch or a trabeated opening (Fig. 8) is typical of *Risorgimento* architecture in Rome, Florence and Milan in the late-nineteenth and early-twentieth centuries. Recalling antiquity more than the Renaissance, the motif was also popular throughout Europe and America in the Classical architecture of the period. Projects as wide-ranging in style and detail as Calderini's Palazzo di Giustizia in Rome, 1904, and Antonio Sant'Elia's facade project for the Cassa di Risparmio in Verona, 1913, have the same motif. (Figs. 12 & 13) Sant'Elia's project was created in the florid Secessionist style related to Italian Neo-Baroque<sup>22</sup> (Fig. 14) and is reminiscent of the work of Boito and d'Aronco. But for Terragni and Lingeri's stripped-down competition entry there existed another and more immediate inspiration. It was the twelfth-century Torre di Porta Vittoria mentioned above. While the specific parti of the Monumento ai Caduti differs markedly from that of the Torre, its character and concept are similar. Both Lingeri and Terragni were to return to such compositions in later projects, and were influenced by similar sources for projects that bear little detail resemblance to the Monumento ai Caduti. Lingeri would design his very last project, a Tomb in a small churchyard above Lake Como, in the same Romanesque-derived style.

Terragni's sketches in his last year at the Milan Politecnico—Michelangelesque studies (Fig. 15)—also show a marked similarity to Sant'Elia's sketches of his pre-Futurist period, such as those for the Cassa di Risparmio in Verona in 1913–14. (Figs. 13 & 14) Sant'Elia and Terragni shared a common sensibility in this regard, and Michelangelo was a perfect model for both architects. Monumental scale irrespective of size, robust plasticity, and a sensitive play of rotund and flat, were hallmarks of the influence of Michelangelo on both Sant'Elia and Terragni.



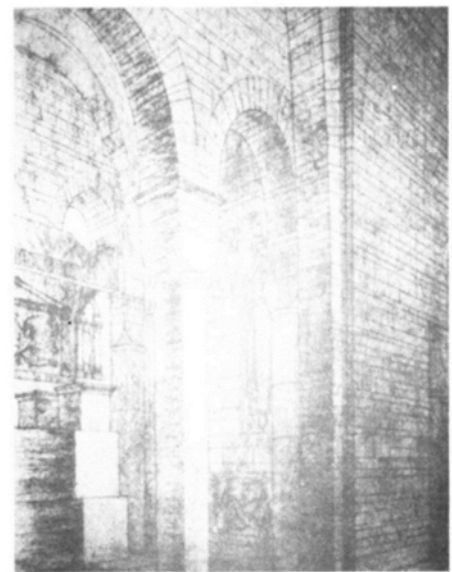
8 Terragni and Lingeri, Monumento ai Caduti, Como, 1926, competition entry perspective



9 Terragni and Lingeri, Monumento ai Caduti, plan competition entry perspective



10 Sant'Abbondia, Como, 11c, painting by Terragni

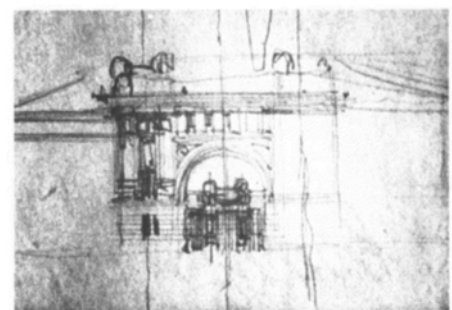


11 Terragni and Lingeri, Monumento ai Caduti, detail of column

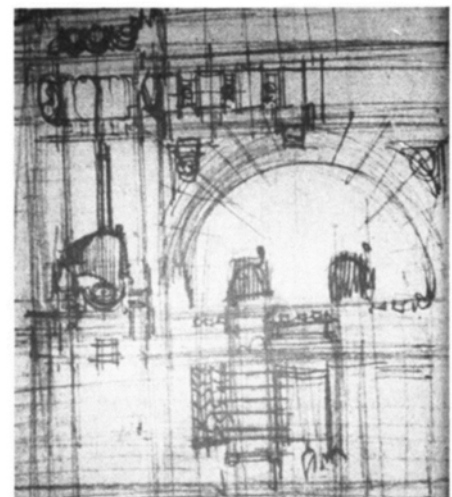


12 Calderini, Palace of Justice, Rome, 1904, detail

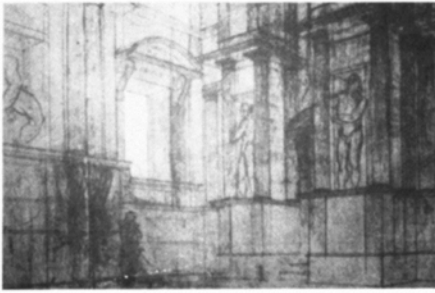
Terragni was well acquainted with Sant'Elia's work, whose drawings are kept in the Villa Olmo in Como. Terragni had need to consult Sant'Elia's sketches when he designed the Monumento ai Caduti on the lake-front (1930–32), and many of Sant'Elia's favorite motifs, particularly those of his pre-Futurist period, are probably inspirations for Terragni's work, especially for the tombs and monuments. (Fig. 16) He sketched in the manner of Sant'Elia when at the Politecnico. Various versions and sketches of Sant'Elia's Caprotti Tomb in Monza dis-



13 Sant'Elia, Cassa di Risparmio di Verona, 1913, sketch



14 Sant'Elia (p. 82, #49)



15 Terragni, Michelangelesque sketch—"Veduta Prospettiva delle Parete"

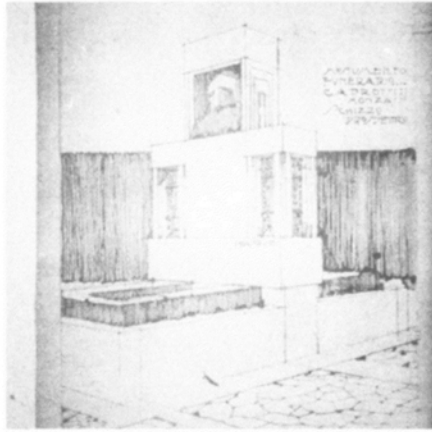


16 Terragni, statue on a pedestal

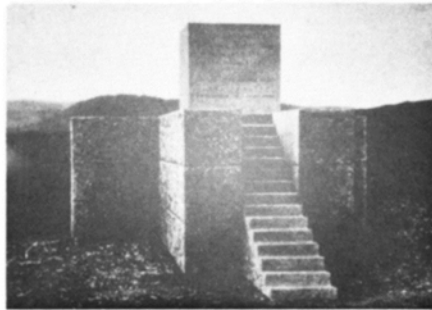
play the same cubic stereometry we find in Terragni's Sarfatti Tomb of 1936. (Figs. 17 & 18) There is a curious Michelangelesque quality to the 1913 Caprotti sketch. The block has been carved and the figure is "liberated" from the stone like a Michelangelo captive.

"He [Terragni] studied Michelangelo," wrote Bottoni, "perhaps for a spatial and plastic affinity,"<sup>23</sup> but he studied him closely, and well. (Fig. 19) As in many of Terragni's studies, he combined diverse elements of the models he was drawing from, combining the Julius II tomb with the Laurentian Library vestibule with the entry stair from the Pal. Senatore on the Campidoglio. (Fig. 20) Here the three-point perspective imparts an enormous grandeur, and recalls the worm's-eye drawings of Sant'Elia. These motifs would return in the Tomba Stecchini and Tomba Pirovano, and they "go underground" in Terragni's more modern-looking buildings, but they remain.

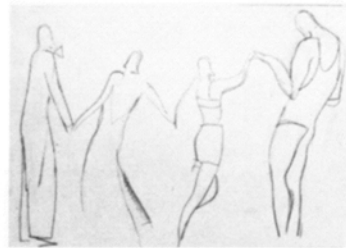
In Terragni's very first professional commission, the Villa Saibene near Como of 1926 (Fig. 21), he displayed the hand of a well-schooled academic architect, as well as a budding talent. The building is



17 Sant'Elia, sketch for the Caprotti Tomb, Manza Cat.#34



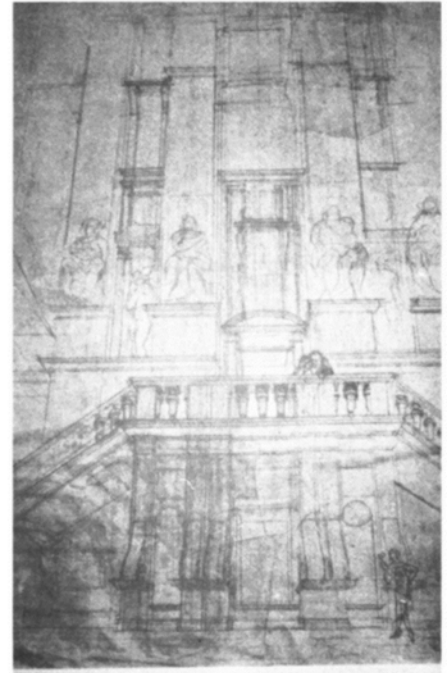
18 Terragni, Sarfatti Tomb and Monument, 1936



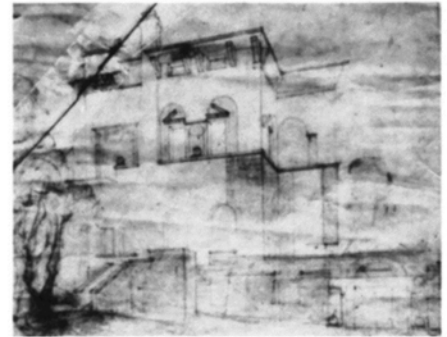
19 Terragni, figure studies

a perfectly symmetrical cubic block in one direction, asymmetrical in the other, with a plinth cut by an elaborate stair crowned by bollards, leading to an oversized arcuated entry portal, itself crowned by a small balcony flanked by niches. Rusticated corners are added as if indeed they were made of paper-thin revetments, possibly an unconscious prelude to Terragni's later interest in the layering of thin planes. The entire composition is crowned by an overhanging roof supported by oversized brackets. While sources for the composition may be found in many architectures, the motif of the side-facade windows comes directly from Vincenzo Scamozzi's house in Vicenza. There is an overblown quality to this composition, a caricature that more than reflects its origins in the late *ottocento* architecture of Lombardy and in the Michelangelo studies, but also portends a future sensibility to materials and composition that Terragni was to retain throughout his career.

Terragni's first professional commission to bear fruit was the renovation of the facade of the Hotel Metropole-Suisse in Como's Piazza Cavour. (Fig. 22) This piazza faces Lake Como, with the hotel



20 Terragni, Michelangelesque sketch, with "Campidoglio" Stair



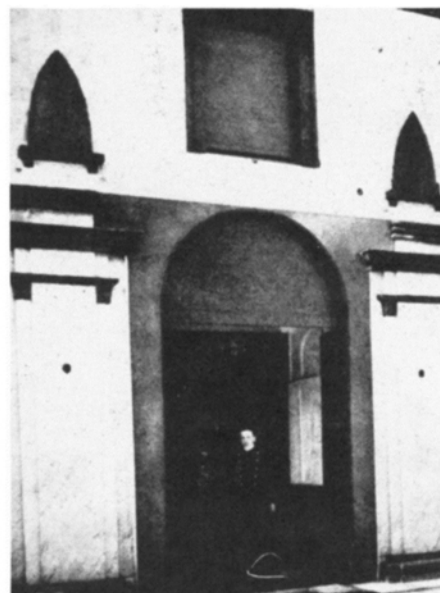
21 Terragni, Villa Saibene, perspective

occupying the most prominent position, facing both the piazza and the lake. Terragni gave the lower two floors a facelift in a decidedly *Novecento* style, using green and white marbles. There are no extant drawings (or are there?) for this ground-floor renovation, but early photographs, one of which was made before the canopy was installed, are available. (Fig. 23)

The project appears at first glance to be a standard renovation in the *Novecento* style, but upon further inspection a number of particularities appear. Perhaps the most subtle of these is the use of a triple torus moulding for the string course. (Fig. 24) Another torus is used for the bases of the pilasters (Fig. 25) and for the base of the building itself (this is partially obscured by a later raising of the piazza, and is now visible only on the lakefront facade), a condition described by Pedio as offending the sensibility of the local Fine Arts Commission (*Commissione d'Ornato*). Terragni immediately defended himself in a letter to the local newspaper to the effect that the Commission needed only look to the Como Cathedral to find such a moulding.<sup>24</sup> This sort of attack and defense



22 Terragni, Hotel Metropole-Suisse, Como, 1927



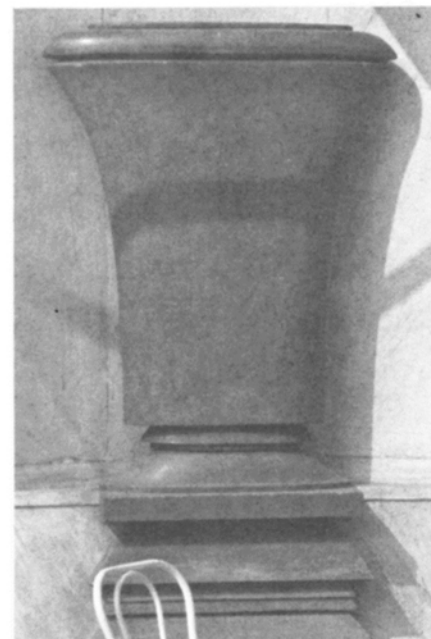
23 Terragni, Hotel Metropole-Suisse, renovation of the ground floor, detail of facade before the canopy was installed



26 Terragni, Hotel Metropole-Suisse, detail of pilaster capitals



24 Terragni, Metropole-Suisse, detail of string course



27 Terragni, Metropole-Suisse, urns

25 Terragni, Metropole-Suisse, detail of pilaster bases would become chronic in Terragni's career.

The building is a pre-vision of what was to come, however, in terms other than Terragni's willingness to fight for his aesthetic rights. The project is a subtle exercise in surface, mass and detail, as shown in the design of the pilasters and the niches containing urns. The design may be described as truly eclectic, deriving much of its inspiration from Brunelleschi, Michelangelo, Vignola, and Borromini. From Brunelleschi (and from the local traditions of Como) come the contrasting charcoal-gray and light-green marbles, detailed in a particularly Brunelleschian fashion.

The continuities and discontinuities, the relationship of "known" elements to the context, and the reversals of architectonic "roles" are all interesting here. Terragni took what seems like a simple pair of telescoped pilasters and, in the manner of Michelangelo, imbedded them—conceptually and literally—in the wall. (Fig. 26) First, he carved out the wall to receive the telescoped pilasters. Then he crowned the entire ensemble, including the recess, with a capital, and

further reasserted the dominance of the front pilaster via another moulding which drops down to the rear pilaster to become a capital of almost the same dimension as the uppermost capital. The manipulation does not end here, however, because Terragni then projected the frontmost pilaster upward to engage the horizontal string course moulding that divides the ground floor from the piano nobile. Finally, the pilaster continues upward to support a "Greek" *ante-fixe terminus*. This sense of interweaving and overlap was to return in the idiom of the Modern Movement, but with a remembrance of Mannerism always veiled and in the background. The flatness of the composition, however, recalls not Michelangelo, but Vignola, an architect that Terragni was to emulate in other contexts.

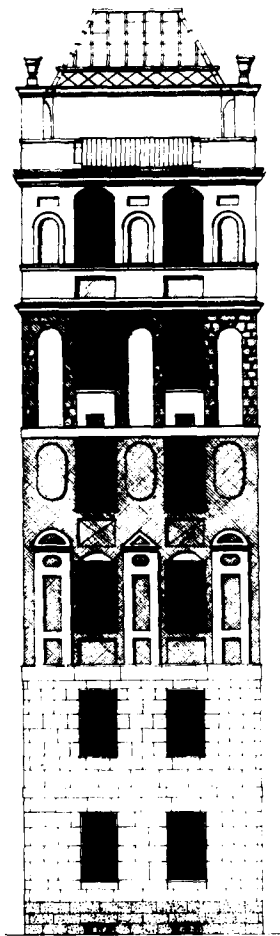
Borromini, also a Lombard architect (and one who surely must qualify as a *Maestro Comacino*), provided the inspiration for the niches and urns, flattened into purely decorative motifs, and with no small measure of irony. (Fig. 27) The ultimate effect of the modelling of the wall in the Metropole Hotel is ambiguity of the datum plane. We are left won-

dering where is the pilaster and where is the wall.

The Metropole is indeed an ironic commentary on Muzio's *Ca' Brutta*. The urns, flattened like equivalent elements in Muzio, are given profiles that are much more subtle and directly archeological, "classier" than Muzio's. (Fig. 28) Was Terragni thumbing his nose at the slightly older architect? The Metropole-Suisse reflects the attitude expressed by Terragni et al in the *Gruppo 7* articles, where they inveighed against the excesses of overly decorated buildings and condemned the architects of the immediately preceding period.<sup>25</sup>

After the Hotel Metropole-Suisse Terragni began his search into modern forms, and while the classical vocabulary informed his every project at some stage or another, his style was forever changed by the influence from north of the Alps.

But it is necessary to address Ciucci's comment at the head of this paper to the effect that Terragni's was a "true Classicism" as compared to Muzio's "Neo-Classicism." A brief discussion of the

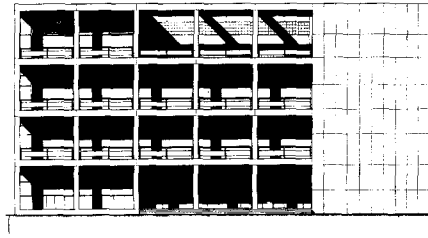


28 Giovanni Muzio, Ca'Brutta, Milan, 1919–23, detail

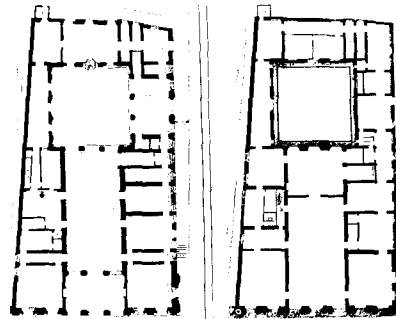
Casa del Fascio in Como may elucidate Ciucci's comment.

The Casa del Fascio in Como, 1932–36, is the most celebrated of Terragni's buildings, and one that derives from a variety of sources. Franco Purini has explained the origins of the Casa del Fascio, as "... metaphor of the Roman compound, metaphor of its own isolation, metaphor of the Como courtyard house."<sup>26</sup> The Como courtyard house paradigm is a particularly acute observation, in my opinion, since so many of the courtyard houses in Como, unlike the palazzi of Rome, display an entrance along the edge of the court and therefore present a "C"-shaped block against a bar, like the Casa del Fascio. (Fig. 29)

The Casa was first recognized (in print) as a Renaissance Palace by Rocchi.<sup>27</sup> Cesare de Seta also saw the plan this way.<sup>28</sup> But the building is more than a simple Florentine-Roman palace. The Casa displays characteristics of both the Florentine-Roman and the Venetian palace types. On the ground floor, we enter into a highly stratified set of spaces where a cross-axis uniting the Sacratio and the major stair recalls the loggias of Renaissance Palaces, as Eisenman's delicate diagrams have shown.<sup>29</sup> The piano nobile and second floor show the typical Florentine palace format, with the stair dis-



29, 32 Terragni, Casa del Fascio, Como, Front Facade (Wm. Hendrix)



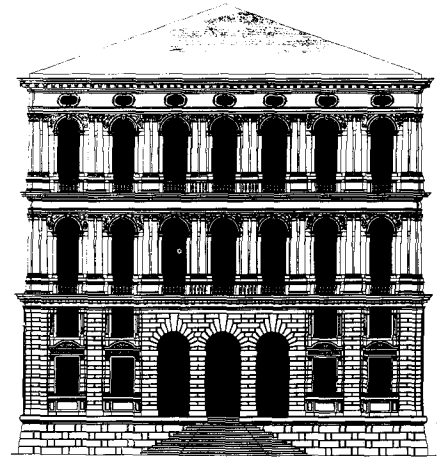
30 Sansovino, Palazzo Corner a San Maurizio, 1553

posed on the cross-axis of the loggia, and the grand room placed in direct relationship to the stair. The "square-doughnut" parti is evident on these two floors and indeed pervades the entire scheme, but on the ground and top floors another reading appears, as Vitale's elegant diagrams portray.<sup>30</sup> The central space occupies a zone similar to the portego of the typical Venetian palace, complete with the stair that gives off immediately onto the portego with no transition.

The similarity of Terragni's Casa to the Venetian palace type may be more than coincidental. The similarities come to light if we compare the Casa del Fascio to a typical Venetian Baroque palace, like the Ca' Corner a San Maurizio, by Sansovino. (Fig. 30) While the proportions of the groundplans vary considerably between the two buildings, the similarity in the location of certain elements is uncanny.

The central portego space of the Venetian prototype has been adapted, with its opening front and back, "shotgun" style, allowing light and air to move through the plan. In the Venetian palace, as in the Casa del Fascio, the portego was a reception hall.

In both cases a few steps lead to a shallow portico which allows for the transition into the building and permits entry into a small room facing the street. Immediately upon entry we are shown the important stair that rises from the portego, or we may also move through the space to use the quotidian stair at the rear. In the side zones, rooms run back in a row in both buildings (but not *enfilade* in Terragni's building).



31 Sansovino, Palazzo Corner, facade

Finally, the facades of these two buildings show compositional similarities, requiring a detailed explanation. (Fig. 31) The four-storey facade of the Casa is more typical of the Venetian palace type, while the Florentine type is most often expressed as a three-storey facade.

The Venetian palace type itself is often cited by contemporary teachers of architecture as one of the best examples of the close relationship of inside and outside. The portego is typically projected onto the facade as a screen wall while the side bays are considerably less porous, a condition often assumed by contemporary architects to be an expression of the serial nature of the rooms in the outer bay. But there is no evidence to indicate that Venetian architects, particularly in the Renaissance and Baroque periods, ever saw the portego this way. Rather, they tried to make their facades resemble the multi-tiered loggias of antiquity, as if the Palace were a public building in private hands. The Casa del Fascio also displays this trait, here in the asymmetrical manner typical of many late-medieval Venetian palaces (and like many of Terragni's compositions). (Fig. 32) The gridded screen of the facade has been stretched across all five of the left-hand bays like an ancient loggia. Indeed, the lack of hierarchy in this front facade is fully explicable, in my view, only when interpreted as such an "ancient" gesture, as is the Venetian palace facade of the seventeenth century.

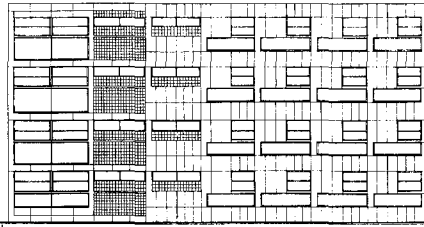
The projection of the innards onto the external wall is, however, a valid interpretation for the other three facades of the Casa del Fascio. Each of the different four facades is telling a different "story" about the inside of the building.<sup>31</sup> The south facade on Via Bianchi is the most solid and the most continuous in its planarity, yet it is subdivided into groupings of windows that express the spaces directly behind. (Fig. 33) On this facade

the existence of toilets is announced by high panels of glass block. This panel was used on all four floors. On the top-most floor the toilet is replaced by an office, yet the glass block is retained for continuity, rather than changed for functional expression.<sup>32</sup>

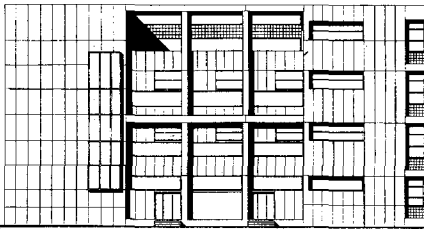
The rear facade tells another story about the building. Its tale is of the tri-partite Venetian palace plan and of the division of the building into two zones vertically: the lower two storeys below the glass-brick roof of the courtyard, and an upper zone. The vertical distinction is made rather subtly via the coplanar frame elements that divide the facade in half. (Fig. 34)

The north facade (Via Pessina) is the most interesting. (Fig. 35) It contains the most varied divisions yet it is highly unified; it expresses the most number of different readings about the interior, yet even here Terragni made choices that favored the continuity of the surface over the simplistic "exploded cube" reading of internal expression. Figure 36, an intervention onto Terragni's facade, shows how the rooms directly behind the facade would be best expressed. This intervention destroys the simplicity and directness of the structural idea, to say nothing of the most important reading of the inside in relation to the outside: the courtyard. Here Terragni was the most Vignollesque, with the layers stripped away like pieces of Strathmore board, and with the horizontal continuities brought off in the receding planes.

These traditional qualities of this building are partially masked by a composition of complex and intricate facades perhaps unparalleled in the Modern Movement, where a variety of fenestration is integrated within a frame system in the image of modern construction. The scheme of stripping away at the surface of the facade recalls the Mannerist architecture of the second half of the sixteenth century: the architecture of Vignola, Palladio, Giulio Romano, Sammiceli, and of course, Michelangelo. (Fig. 37)



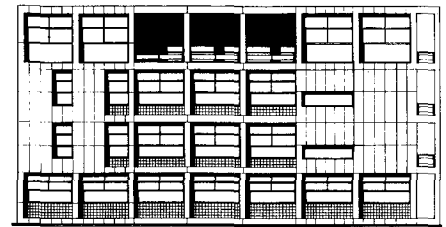
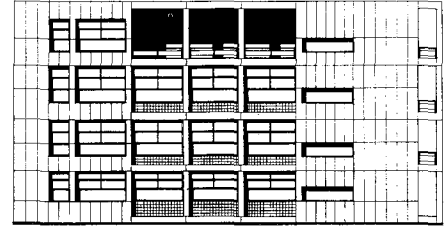
33 Terragni, Casa del Fascio, south facade drawing (Hendrix)



34 Terragni, Casa del Fascio, rear facade, drawing (Hendrix)

Terragni's adherence to Classical ideals, in the sense that Summerson argued for Le Corbusier's own classicism, takes many forms. Proportion, figure, stereometry, massing, and the careful distribution of the elements of the facade are among these ideas. The Erba Monument and the Sarfatti Tomb represent the extremes of the idea of the Classical in Terragni's oeuvre. (Fig. 38) The Erba monument is in a straightforward Novecento Neo-Classical style, while the Sarfatti Tomb is stripped of all elements, and, like some of Palladio's villas, remains true to the Albertian principles of classic art, while eschewing the detail of the Graeco-Roman system of ornament.

Terragni's buildings in literal Classical style each represent a variation on the work of a different major architect of the Italian Classical tradition. The Stecchini tomb is Michelangelesque, the Hotel Metropole-Suisse is Borrominian. The Sarfatti Monument is Palladian (it is not by chance that this work is in Palladio's own back yard), while the Monument at Erba combines Palladian planning, with Bramantesque passages in the exedra, and Michelangelo's imbedded columns from the *Ricetto Laurenziana* and the Campidoglio. But it was in his less



35,36 Terragni, Casa del Fascio, north facade, intervention showing how the rooms would be more completely expressed

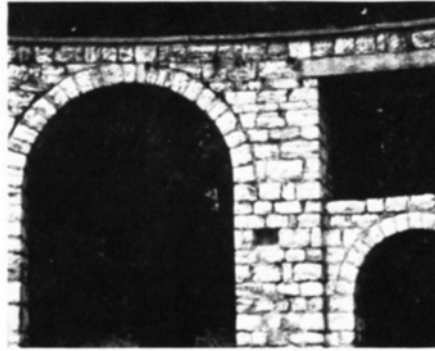
archeologically Classical buildings that Terragni succeeded in combining all these influences and adaptations to produce a truly independent and original expression of his own. They are, of course, the Casa del Fascio in Como, the Danteum project and the Pal. Littorio Competition, solution 'A'. In these buildings the underlying substratum of Classicism that was Le Corbusier's, Mies's and Wright's shows Terragni to be yet another crypto-Classicalist in Modern-Movement dress.

#### Notes

- 1 Ciucci, Giorgio "Introduction" to Schumacher, Thomas L. *The Danteum* Princeton Architectural Press (Princeton) 1985, p. 8
- 2 Zuccoli, Luigi "Ricordi e testimonianze su Terragni," in *L'Architettura* 153 (July 1968) p. 11
- 3 While I use the term "Classical" here, I would prefer to use a term like, "Graeco-Roman Detail System" to describe buildings that have identifiable elements like the orders and the mouldings. Classical has become, since the advent of Modernism, a term too often misused. But, like all linguistic misuse, it becomes (and rightfully so) correct usage through sheer inertia. I therefore succumb to use Classical for both meanings: kits-of-parts and abstract formal configurations.
- 4 See Summerson, John *The Classical Language of Architecture* MIT Press (Cambridge, MA) 1963 for an explanation of Corbusier's Classicism. Le Corbusier also said, "I do not have to use the Modules of Vignola to be a Classicist" (see Arch. Forum, Oct. 1965).



37 Casa del Fascio, Como, Via Pessina facade, detail



38 Terragni, Monumento ai Caduti, Erba Incina, 1928–32

- 5 Vitale, D. "An Analytic Excavation: Ancient and Modern, Abstraction and Formalism in the Architecture of Giuseppe Terragni", *9H*, No. 7(1985) p. 12
- 6 For documentation of the plagiarism controversy over the Casa del Fascio in Como, see Mantero, Enrico *Giuseppe Terragni e la Città del Razionalismo in Italia* Dedalo (Roma) 1969. In 1940 Piacentini published Terragni's Casa del Floricoltore along with a house by Antonin Raymond in Tokyo and the Schöoder-Schrader House by Rietveld in *Architettura*. The caption was "Strani Avvicinamenti," implying plagiarism. See *Architettura* (Dec. 1940).
- 7 Meeks, Carroll *Italian Architecture, 1785–1914* Yale University Press (New Haven) 1966, pp. 31–33
- 8 de Seta, Cesare *La Cultura Architettonica in Italia tra le Due Guerre* Laterza (Bari) 1972?, p. 242 (translation Schumacher)
- 9 "... several fantastic theories, founded principally upon conjecture, have led to the belief that the district of Como was the centre from which radiated architectural influences during the Romanesque period... it was conjectured that there [on the Isola Comacina] all the masons from the entire Roman world had taken refuge from the Lombards... they soon formed themselves into a secret corporation, and for long centuries Como continued to be the centre from which all Italy, nay all Europe, derived its builders and masons. All this is founded solely upon the exceedingly doubtful etymology of the word *comacini*." Porter, Arthur Kingsley *Lombard Architecture* reprinted by Hacker Art Books (New York) 1967 (originally published in 1917), pp. 9–10
- 10 Ethnically, the Lombards often refer to themselves as Gallic.
- 11 Sartoris, A. "Terragni, Architetto Europeo" in *Terragni, Poesia della Razionalità* (F. Moriano, ed.) Istituto Mides (Roma) 1983, p. 15 (translation Schumacher)
- 12 Terragni, G., "L'appassionata polemica degli architetti italiani su le Nuove Forme dell' Architettura Contemporanea, *Il Giornale d'Italia* (Dec. 5, 1931)
- 13 See Schumacher, Thomas L. *The Danteum* Princeton Architectural Press (Princeton), 1985.
- 14 Boito was, incidentally, the brother of opera librettist and composer, Arrigo Boito, author of *Mefistofele*.
- 15 Boito, Camillo *L'Architettura del Medioevo in Italia* (Milano) 1880, pp. ix–x, quoted in Nicoletti, Manfredi *L'Architettura Liberty in Italia* Laterza (Roma) 1978, p. 9
- 16 His novel *Senso* (1886) was a romance of the *Risorgimento*, the story of an Italian noblewoman who falls in love with an Austrian soldier during the occupation of Venice. This novel, considered banal by Italian intellectuals, nevertheless formed the basis for a brilliant film by Lucchino Visconti in the early 1950's.
- 17 According to Franco Albini, the course of study that he and Terragni pursued in the Politecnico required a Medieval project in third year, a Renaissance project in fourth year, and a Neo-Classical project in fifth year. This fact was learned during an interview with Emilio Terragni, 1987.
- 18 Vitale, op. cit.
- 19 *ibid.*, p. 12
- 20 Argan, G.C. "La Figura e L'Opera di Terragni" *L'Architettura* 163, p. 6. Why Argan felt compelled to avoid the Neo-Romanesque appellation is probably attributable to his generational *deformation professionelle* more than to Terragni's intentions.
- 21 *ibid.*, p. 13
- 22 See Ashton, D. and G. Ballo *Antonio Sant'Elia* (Catalogue to the Exhibition) The Cooper Union (New York) 1986
- 23 Bottoni, Piero quoted in Zevi, Bruno "Omaggio a Terragni," *L'Architettura* 158, p. 146
- 24 Pedio, R. in Zevi, op. cit., p. 10
- 25 "They, however, have fallen into pure decoration, into the insincerity of an architecture which varies its effects by means of expediences, alternating broken facades, candelabra, cupolas, and crowning obelisks." Gruppo 7, reprinted in *Oppositions*, 6 (Fall 1976) p. 90
- 26 Purini, Franco *L'Architettura Didattica* (Reggio Calabria) 1981, reprinted in Ferrario and Pastore, *Giuseppe Terragni: Casa del Fascio* Istituto Mides (Roma) 1982, p. 11
- 27 Rocchi, G., in Zevi, op. cit., p. 13
- 28 de Seta, op. cit., p. 206, "Il suo è un palazzotto rinascimentale costruita col cemento e col vetro."
- 29 Eisenman, P. "Dall'Oggetto alla Relazionalità: La Casa del Fascio di Terragni", *Casabella* 344, reprinted in Ferrario and Pastore, op. cit.
- 30 see Vitale, op. cit. It is ironic and odd, however, that Vitale denies any validity to his own diagrams, arguing that the reading of a Renaissance is "... false and inappropriate, apart from the level of a purely superficial analogy." p. 9
- 31 For an excellent analysis of these facades see Vitale, D., op. cit.
- 32 Perception of architect Gabriele Milelli, from an interview, 1978