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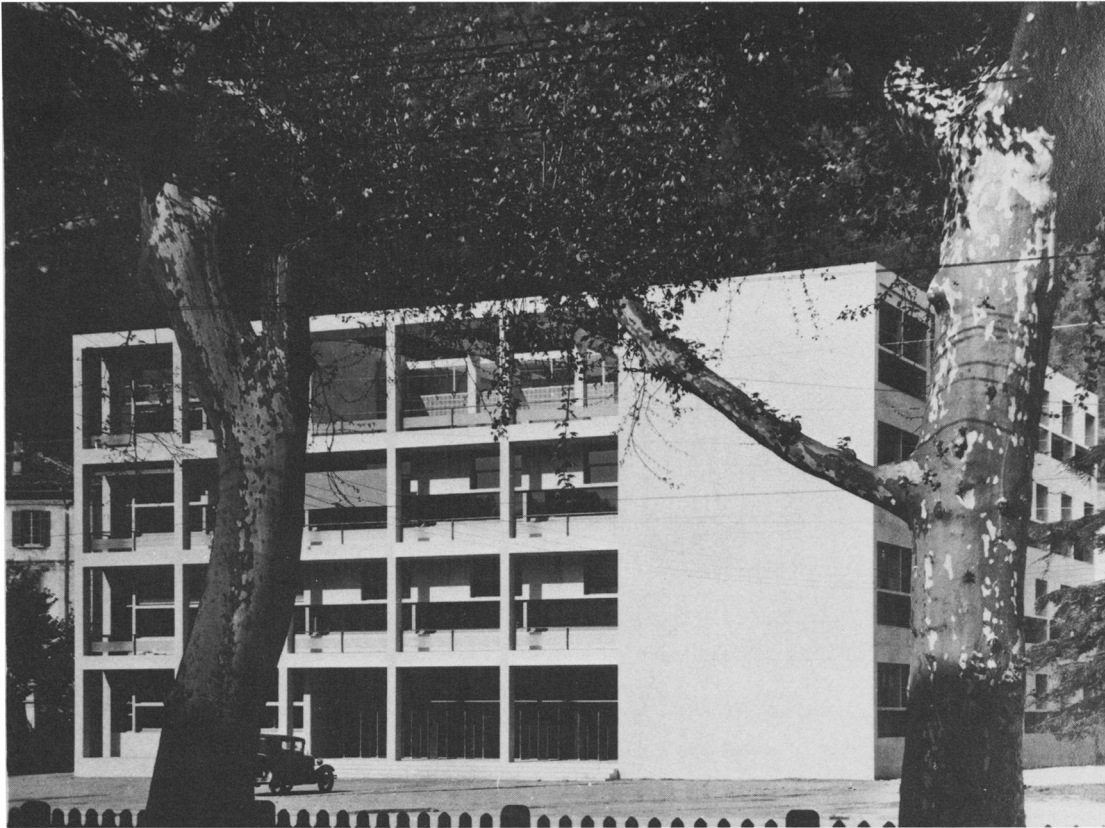
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1 Giuseppe Terragni, Casa del Fascio, Como, 1932-36, façade (photo: Collection author)

Politics of a Masterpiece: The *Vicenda* of the Decoration of the Façade of the Casa del Fascio, Como, 1936-39*

Diane Ghirardo

The fact that an architect has to alter some aspect of a design to accommodate the wishes of his patron is quite common. But it does not happen too often that an architect sticks to his guns and even scores a partial victory. It is all the more remarkable if he is contending not with just any patron but with the main administrative organ of a new

totalitarian state, in this case with the Italian Fascist Party. This is the one aspect of the history of Giuseppe Terragni's Casa del Fascio, Como, that historians have persistently ignored, and yet it constitutes an important aspect of the building's history (Fig. 1).¹

The story is not a complicated one. When *Quadrante*

*Research for this article was made possible by a Fulbright-Hayes Fellowship in 1976-77, and the always helpful Cipriana Scelba and Luigi Filadoro of the Rome Fulbright office. I am grateful to Thomas Schumacher, University of Virginia, for lending me photographs of some of Terragni's projects; to Lois Thornhill of the Stanford Art Department and to Henry Bowles for special photographic work; to Dott. Mario Misori and the staff of the Archivio Centrale dello Stato, Rome, for their invaluable assistance; to Cesare de' Seta, University of Naples, for lively talks and correspondence; and especially to Kurt Forster, Stanford University, for constantly stimulating assistance and discussions, and for reading this manuscript several times and offering invaluable suggestions.

¹ Giuseppe Terragni's building has received little discussion in American publications. P. Eisenman's forthcoming study on Giuseppe Terragni should redress this need with respect to technical and aesthetic aspects. Eisenman also published two earlier articles on the Casa del Fascio, "From Object to Relationship: Giuseppe Terragni," *Casabella*, No. 344, 1970, 344, and "From Object to Relationship II: Giuseppe Terragni," *Perspecta: The Yale Architectural Journal*, XIII/IV, 1971, 36-65. The chief Italian sources on Terragni and his work are B. Zevi, ed., "Omaggio a Terragni," *Architettura, cronache e storia*, 1968, 153; E. Mantero, ed., *Giuseppe Terragni e la città del razionalismo italiano*, Bari, 1969; G. Veronesi, *Difficoltà politiche dell'architettura in Italia 1920-40*, Milan, 1953; and C. de' Seta, *La cultura architettonica in Italia tra le due guerre*, Bari, 1972, 205-10.



2 Adalberto Libera, Palazzo dei Ricevimenti e Congressi, E'42, Rome, 1937-38, detail of rear entrance (photo: author)

published a special issue on the Casa del Fascio in 1936, the Nizzoli-Terragni-Arrigotti photomontage design for a façade decoration appeared on one of the pages. Just a month earlier, the designers had sent the project to Party Headquarters in Rome for approval. Although initially willing to approve the design, the Technical Office in Rome finally rejected it in the face of the Como party secretary's heated opposition. Two years later, the Como office re-opened the matter by complaining that visitors mistook the Casa for a simple office building instead of the representative structure it really was. Terragni and Nizzoli submitted a new design; an engineer from headquarters in Rome submitted another; Terragni argued again for the photomontage; and finally the local party leaders, the engineer from Rome, Tullio Nicoli, and Party Headquarters agreed on a design, practically enjoining Terragni to see that it was carried out as ordered. Terragni and Nizzoli stalled in presenting a design and the War broke out. The last word on the façade decoration came in 1942, when a memorandum at Party Headquarters noted

that the project was being deferred until the War ended. Needless to say, the Casa del Fascio remained without decoration.

The outlines of this story are relatively simple, but the actual dispute touched on many issues that were sensitive then, and others that are sensitive to historians now. The standard explanation of the official rejection of the two designs by Terragni and Nizzoli is that the regime switched from support of modern architecture after 1934-36, especially with the promptings of Marcello Piacentini, the most powerful architect in Italy during the 1920's and 1930's.² Although in the scholarly literature this remains an assertion that has not been subjected to critical evaluation, it seems that the argument hinges on a reduced number of official commissions in the hands of Rationalists after 1935-36, upon the monumental grandeur of the plans for E'42 (on a scale rivalling that of Albert Speer's Berlin), on an apparent shift visible in the architecture and plans of, for example, the New Towns, and on the increasing debate over "Internationalism" in architecture.

This is not the place to debate the prevailing opinion, but it certainly merits far more rigorous analysis than it has received to date. My own research indicates that Rationalists and other architects suffered from the low priority the Government gave building after the onset of War in October, 1935, and the policy of autarchy also placed severe constraints on modern constructions. To be sure, Rationalists fielded charges of "Internationalism" — a bad word in the post-1935 nationalist hysteria — by arguing that their buildings derived from Roman prototypes; but this debate was not new, and there is no evidence that it either limited their commissions or that it slowed the process whereby hack offices adopted many of the formal elements of Modernism.³ No great shift is apparent in the architecture or urban design of the New Towns.⁴ However monumental and un-modern E'42 turned out to be, we cannot forget that leading Rationalists participated in it at Piacentini's invitation (Fig. 2), and that as late as 1939, Terragni and Pietro Lingeri received Mussolini's approval for a Danteum on the via dell'Im-

² Adumbrations of this argument can be found in B. Zevi, *Storia dell'architettura moderna*, Turin, 1975, 185-87; E. Shapiro, "Introduction to the Gruppo Sette," *Oppositions* 6, Fall, 1976, 86-88; H.-R. Hitchcock, *Architecture: Nineteenth and Twentieth Centuries*, Baltimore, 1971, 511; R. Banham, *Theory and Design in the First Machine Age*, London, 1960, 342. Cesare de' Seta has offered some modifications of this argument in "Cultura e architettura in Italia fra le due guerre: Continuità e discontinuità," in S. Danesi and L. Patetta, eds., *Il Razionalismo e l'architettura in Italia durante il Fascismo*, Venice, 1976, 10.

³ S. Danesi outlines some of these arguments in "Aporie dell'architettura italiana in periodo fascista — mediterraneità e purismo," in Danesi and Patetta, 21-28. The defense against charges of internationalism appeared early in the writings of the Gruppo Sette (of which Terragni was a mem-

ber); see E. Shapiro's translations "Architecture," and "Architecture II: The Foreigners," *Oppositions* 6, Fall, 1976, 89-102; and "Architecture III: Unpreparedness — Incomprehension — Prejudice," and "Architecture IV: A New Archaic Era," *Oppositions* 12, Spring 1978, 91-105. The articles originally appeared in *Rassegna italiana* from December, 1926, to May, 1927. In the last part of this paper I comment upon the adoption of the formal elements of modern architecture (Fig. 16).

⁴ On this subject, see K. W. Forster and D. Ghirardo, "I modelli delle città di nuova fondazione in età fascista," in C. de' Seta, ed., *Annali storia d'Italia: Strutture mentali e materiali*, Turin, 1980. For a somewhat different perspective, see H. Millon, "Some New Towns in Italy in the 1930's," in Millon and L. Nochlin, eds., *Art and Architecture in the Service of Politics*, Cambridge, Mass., 1978, 326-341.

pero (via dei Fori Imperiali).⁵ The evidence is contradictory, for clearly Mussolini and to some degree Piacentini fell under the spell of Nazi grandeur after 1938-39, but whether this constituted a wholesale rejection of Modernism remains to be proved.

Historians are reluctant to admit one stunning fact: the Fascist state in Italy patronized modern architecture far more than did Nazi Germany, Soviet Russia (where indeed it was censured by the late 1920's), or the United States during a period when all were heavily involved in Government-subsidized building of all types. To clarify the difference, it need only be noted that at the same time Terragni was erecting the Casa del Fascio, John Russell Pope was finishing the National Archives and beginning the National Gallery of Art in Washington, D.C. By comparison with even the most pedestrian Fascist constructions, Pope's seem monumentally heavy and regressive, and the Archives at least is only minimally functional. For rhetorical flourishes, Pope and Speer knew no peer in Italy.

Modern architecture seems to have been viewed as a suitable State architecture in Italy and not elsewhere during the 1930's, but to say this is not to credit the Fascist State with an unusual appreciation for modern architecture or a keen prescience with respect to its future developments. Because Fascism offered itself as an entirely new and modern phenomenon, it could readily align itself with modern architecture, amply buttressed by references to the "romanità" and "mediterraneità" that these constructions presumably projected.⁶ In practice, this meant that architects such as Terragni, Adalberto Libera, Mario de Renzi, and Giuseppe Pagano could design solely within their own aesthetic restraints, confident of no official interference and, occasionally, as with Sabaudia and the Stazione S. Maria Novella in Florence, with polemically active support from the regime.⁷ The very vagueness and improvised nature of an elusive Fascist "doctrine" at once allowed a wide variety of interpretations and expressions, including Modern architecture. Italian architects were compromised by their association

with Fascism, a fact that has less to do with their being deceived, Bruno Zevi's protestations to the contrary, than with their historical perception of Fascism and the social and revolutionary pretensions of Rationalist architecture.⁸ In fact, it is appropriate to argue that the Modern Movement in Italy depended upon and received State support as it did in none of the other major powers between 1930 and 1940. A detailed study of the disputes surrounding the façade decoration for what is perhaps the most famous building constructed in Italy during the interwar period also casts light on a hitherto shadowy subject, the relationship between the artist and the Fascist government as patron.

The Casa del Fascio, or Party Headquarters, constructed by the Partito Nazionale Fascista (PNF) after 1922, served as local arms of the PNF headquarters in Rome. The various Fascist organizations — OMNI, OND, ONB, ONC — linked together a variety of constituencies with others throughout Italy and in the capital, and normally had their local offices in the Casa del Fascio.⁹ As PNF headquarters, the Casa was the locus of Fascist authority in every village and city, the center of propaganda, and the unit charged with the implementation of Fascist policy on the local level. Sometimes the Casa contained the only theater, cinema, or radio in town, as well as a reading room with books and the latest newspapers from all over Italy. Particularly in the smallest centers, the Casa del Fascio served as the only link not just with the world, or even Italy, but with the rest of the local province. The Casa del Fascio, then, served two pragmatic political ends. On the one hand, they gave testimony to a new national organization attempting to complete Italian unification, so precariously acquired a half-century earlier, by establishing outposts of the central authority in every hamlet and town. In this sense the lines of communication were from the center to the periphery of the province, but the Casa del Fascio, with its town hall configuration, also symbolically gathered the fragmented village and provincial loyalties under the umbrella of a supreme power, each

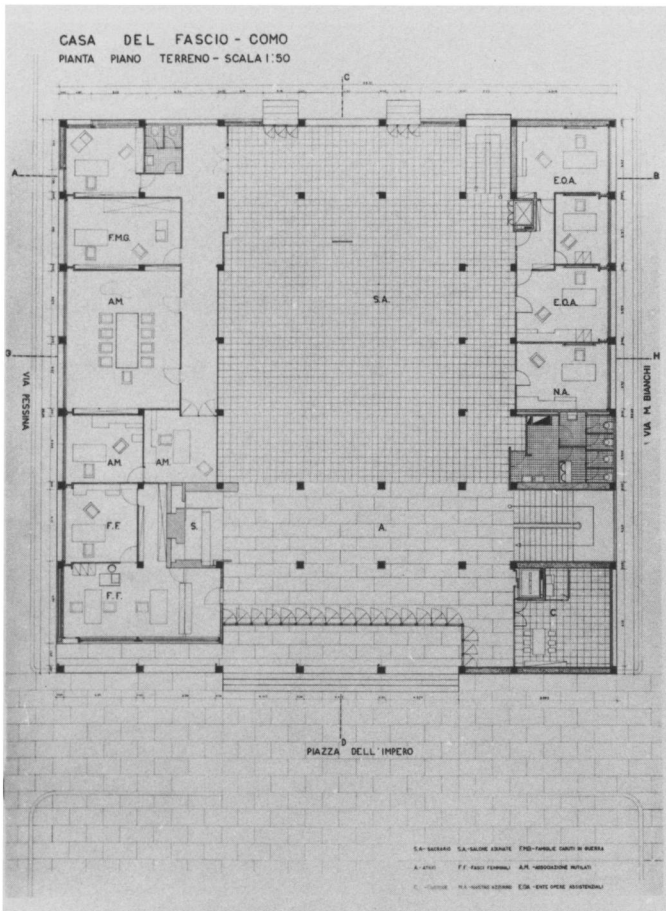
⁵ Thomas Schumacher documents the Danteum project in "From Gruppo Sette to the Danteum: A Critical Introduction to Terragni's Relazione sul Danteum," *Oppositions* 9, Summer 1977, 90-93, and *Il Danteum di Terragni e Lingeri*, Rome, 1979. From the very earliest phases, Rationalists seemed to be preoccupied with issues that were remote from the central premises of the Modern Movement elsewhere in Europe. For example, when Rationalists participated in the Stuttgart Werkbund in 1927, their entries were entirely industrial building prototypes, while other participants emphasized housing. Leo Adler, "Modernistisches in Italien, Stuttgart und so weiter," *Wasmuths Monatshefte für Baukunst* 11, 1927, 402-06.

⁶ Danesi offers a concise discussion of the role of these two concepts in Italian interwar architectural polemics in "Aporie dell'architettura," in Danesi and Patetta, 21-28. A. Lyttleton, *The Seizure of Power: Fascism in Italy 1919-1929*, London, 1973, discusses Fascist doctrine at length, and a reading of B. Mussolini, *Dottrina politica e sociale del Fascismo*, Milan, 1932, gives a clear picture of the vague and improvised nature of much of Fascist doctrine.

⁷ The Florence Railway Station became a *cause célèbre* because of its forthright modernity, and although it was attacked at considerable length in the press, Mussolini decided in favor of the Michelucci team design. G. Pagano, "Mussolini salva l'architettura," *Casabella*, June, 1934, now in Edoardo Persico, *Oltre l'architettura*, ed. R. Mariani, Milan, 1977, 75-76. The same polemics erupted over the Master Plan for the New Town of Sabaudia; see R. Mariani, *Fascismo e città nuove*, Milan, 1976, 254-58.

⁸ Zevi argues that Rationalist architects — ingenuous, blind, and young — were led astray, which is an excuse, perhaps, but hardly an explanation. Why this same excuse does not apply to the rest of the populace, and how to understand the ardent adherence of so many Rationalist architects to Fascism are not clear in Zevi's text. B. Zevi, *Storia dell'architettura moderna*, Turin, 1975, 185-87.

⁹ These organizations were, respectively, Opera Nazionale Maternità e Infanzia; Opera Nazionale Dopolavoro for adult recreation and education; Opera Nazionale Balilla for young people from ages 6 through 18, analogous to the Boy and Girl Scouts; and Opera Nazionale Combattenti for military veterans.



3 Giuseppe Terragni, Casa del Fascio, Como, 1932-36, plan of ground floor (photo: Collection author)

small community having direct if not always immediate access to the national state through the offices of the Casa del Fascio.¹⁰ As often the sole physical manifestation of the presence of the Fascist state in a community, the Casa occupied a position of symbolic significance. Sometimes the PNF had to settle for makeshift quarters or rooms lent by the Commune, but wherever possible the PNF attempted to build new and suitably impressive structures.

Giuseppe Terragni's Casa del Fascio in Como is the best known of the PNF headquarters buildings (Fig. 3). Erected between 1933 and 1936, it is a palatial structure in both

plan and materials, extensively clad with marble on external and some internal walls. Highly differentiated façades and a vestigial tower in the corner block of the front façade enclose a covered interior courtyard. The structure is sited directly across from the Duomo of Como, one of the major historical monuments of the region. The austere restraint of the building itself would seem to argue for restraint in the application of decorative elements, if indeed any should be added at all. The photomontage proposed by the Terragni group (Fig. 4) presents a striking contrast to the otherwise reserved and unadorned structure: it has the appearance of a political billboard, a schematized presentation of selected aspects of the history of Fascism.

By the time the decoration of the façade became an issue, Terragni and the Segretario Federale (Party Secretary) in Como, Ernesto Carugati, had already had their difficulties.¹¹ In late 1935 Carugati complained to Giovanni Marinelli, Administrative Secretary of the Fascist Party in Rome, that in spite of fervent remonstrances, Terragni had dragged out the construction for over three years, and did not seem to recognize the fiscal realities of the project.¹² Originally estimated at L. 1,200,000, it ended up costing nearly L. 3,000,000, and it was Carugati, not Terragni, who had to see to obtaining the needed funds.¹³ Carugati's exasperation soared when Terragni demanded that he be allowed to use gold donated by Italians for the Patria and the War effort as fill for the names of fallen Fascists to be engraved in the sanctuary of the Casa del Fascio. Only at Terragni's insistence did Carugati transmit this request to Marinelli, with the remark that he had already told the architect that this was not possible, but that only explicit orders from Party Headquarters would convince Terragni.¹⁴

To Carugati, charged as administrator for the entire province, Terragni was little more than a colossal headache who had cost the provincial headquarters enormous sums of money and would not even pursue his task with reasonable alacrity. Carugati's irritation with the project spilled over to the *Quadrante* publication, which he found too *reclamista*, and to his assessment of Terragni, whom he considered intransigent.¹⁵ When Terragni, Nizzoli, and Arrigotti proposed the photomontage, Carugati dug in his heels and prepared to fight.

¹⁰ For a discussion of the typology of the Casa del Fascio, see the forthcoming study by K. W. Forster and D. Ghirardo, "I modelli della città di nuova fondazione in età fascista," in de' Seta (as cited in n. 4).

¹¹ All of the archival material cited in this article is from the files of the Partito Nazionale Fascista, Direttorio, Federazioni Federali, Archivio Centrale dello Stato, Rome, Busta 168, unless otherwise cited. Henceforth I will note only the dates and names in the correspondence.

¹² Carugati to Marinelli, July 26, 1935.

¹³ Complaints from an Italian glass manufacturer that Terragni had used French glass during a period of sanctions and in spite of the official policy of autarchy did nothing to endear the architect to Carugati. Correspondence between PNF, Rome, and PNF, Como, from November 18, 1936, to December 31, 1936. Terragni's exhaustive response of December 16, 1936, clears him of the charges leveled by the firm of Felice

Quentin of Florence, and also testifies to his intransigence. The letter is full of words and phrases emphasized by underlining, capitalizing, special spacing; he calls them "subdole, cretine, false argomentazioni," and insists that "quando il poco fortunato calunniatore è colto con le mani nel sacco non dovrebbe tardare nei suoi confronti una giusta e severa punizione." Equally trying for Carugati was the breaking and cracking of the supposedly unbreakable glass, particularly since the extensive use of glass was a hotly debated item in Italy that divided moderates from the Rationalist *avanguardia*.

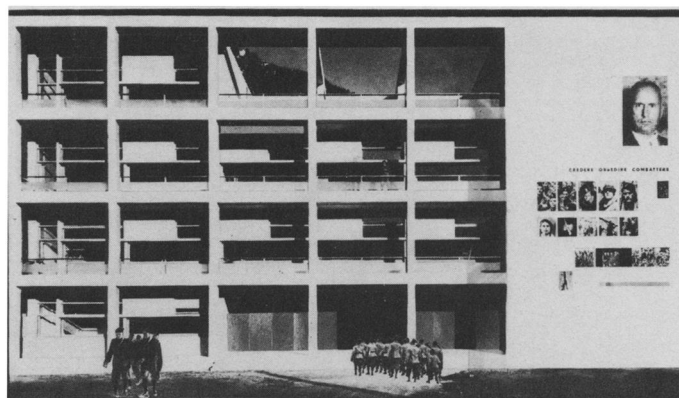
¹⁴ Carugati to Marinelli, October 27, 1936, and Marinelli to Carugati, November 6, 1936.

¹⁵ Carugati to Marinelli, December 31, 1936. "La costruzione della Casa del Fascio, Como," *Quadrante*, Nos. 35-36, October, 1936.

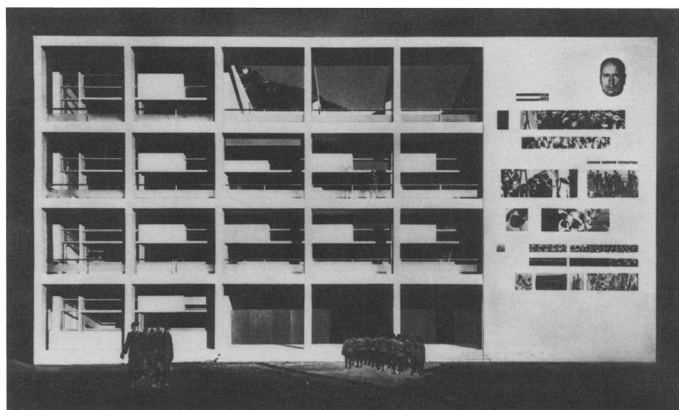
Carugati received the first design in October, 1935, but not until February of 1936 did he refer the matter to Marinelli in Rome. No written record documents the exact events in Como during these months, but the offer engineered by Terragni's brother, Attilio, in his capacity as *Podestà* of Como, of a donation from the Commune to the Como Party Headquarters for the façade decoration suggests that positions had already hardened by January, 1936.¹⁶ Such a move must have seemed the only way to assure the successful completion of the design as it was originally presented. Carugati duly notified Marinelli of the gift, irked at being outflanked and grumbling that he would have preferred an offering not tied to a specific use, and he also asked whether the decoration "had to be done as Terragni offered it, as had been done with the rest of the Casa." The Vigilance Committee, he reported to Marinelli, after considerable discussion had deferred the execution to a later time.¹⁷ Marinelli's response was testy, asking who this Vigilance Committee was, and he asked for clarification, noting that Terragni was the designer of both the Casa and the proposed façade decoration, and that normally there was no interference in such things. Marinelli indicated that he was aware of the photomontage design, but neither at this time nor any other did he voice an objection to the photomontage.¹⁸ Intervention by a "vigilance committee" perturbed him more than the façade decoration, until he learned from Carugati that the Committee consisted of Carugati and others appointed by the Como office to keep an eye on the construction of the Casa del Fascio, and that it had a notable lack of success in keeping the cost down. Carugati advised Marinelli that the Committee judged that the design boasted only of being "a novelty as to the material used."¹⁹

By now several things were clear. The Party Headquarters had no objection to the Terragni-Nizzoli-Arrigotti design, but the local office did, for aesthetic reasons that never became clear but that were surely in large measure attributable to the strained relations between Carugati and Terragni. Attilio Terragni drew the lines of battle with greater precision in his letter to Carugati in May of 1936, reminding him that the Commune's offering testified to the desires of the citizens of Como, and that he was sending the money on the basis of the design provided by the architect. He also tactfully but pointedly remarked that he was not qualified to offer aesthetic judgments, and by implication, neither was Carugati.²⁰

Finally in September, 1936, Terragni, Nizzoli and Arrigotti submitted their proposal for the façade decoration again to Carugati to be forwarded to Marinelli.²¹ They included the photograph of the design as published in *Quadrante* the following month, a photomontage consisting



4 Giuseppe Terragni, Marcello Nizzoli, Enrico Arrigotti, design for façade decoration, Casa del Fascio, Como, from *Quadrante*, 35-36, 1936



5 Giuseppe Terragni, Marcello Nizzoli, Enrico Arrigotti, second design for façade decoration, Casa del Fascio, Como (photo: Collection author)

of several panels drawn from the most historically significant moments of Fascism (Fig. 4). The panels were nostalgic and patriotic rather than radical, summoning up an interest in the past historic moments of Fascism, recalling triumphs, lives touched, and the role of the Duce above that of all others. The design explicitly projected the most salient feature of Fascism: the gigantic head of Mussolini hovered above the smaller figures in the other panels much as the marble head of Constantine on the Capitoline Hill symbolically loomed over the city of Rome. The artists submitted a second photomontage in 1937, and although both bore the significant visual message of the relationship between Mussolini and the masses, there were important differences (Fig. 5). The first design corresponds to a rough draft, so that the second can be seen as the definitive version. The first had fewer panels, arranged with more rigorous geometric regularity than those of the later design, and covered less of the total wall

¹⁶ Attilio Terragni to Carugati, January 10, 1936.

¹⁷ Carugati to Marinelli, February 19, 1936.

¹⁸ Marinelli to Carugati, March 12, 1936.

¹⁹ "... [Il disegno] ha il solo pregio di essere una novità per il materiale

impiegato." Carugati to Marinelli, March 20, 1936.

²⁰ Attilio Terragni to Carugati, May 14, 1936, and November 20, 1936.

²¹ Giuseppe Terragni, Marcello Nizzoli, Enrico Arrigotti, *Relazione* for the façade decoration for Como Casa del Fascio, September 9, 1936.

area. The first design combined photographs of individual faces with crowd views, whereas in the later version the people were depicted as a mass rather than as individuals. The later design also contained symbols of specific social themes of Fascism, grain to represent the Battle of Grain and agricultural productivity, a mother and child to represent maternal care and population growth.

As a documentary form, the photomontage captured the full immediacy of the participation of the masses and the historical moments of Fascism, and simultaneously froze them as past, historical moments. Terragni and his collaborators labeled their project explicitly propagandistic, and indeed it followed in the path of the propagandistic exhibitions so frequently mounted by the Fascist State to celebrate everything from youth organizations to industry. Like the panels of temporary exhibitions, the photomontages for the façade of the Casa del Fascio aimed at delivering a rapidly understandable, clear message, uncrowded and easily legible. In their *relazione*, the designers made repeated reference to the fact that their project followed in the tradition of the decorations used at the tenth anniversary exhibition of the Fascist Revolution ("Mostra della Rivoluzione Fascista") in 1932. They were at pains to point out that they had all participated in the famous exhibition of which Mussolini had so heartily approved. If Fascism itself was a new phenomenon, as the Party maintained, then the novel technique of the photomontage was the most appropriate means of expressing the novelty and originality of Fascism. Moreover, they argued that the Casa del Fascio had two fundamental aims: to be the Party seat, that is, the physical setting of the totally new propaganda, and the locus of the diffusion of the revolutionary idea. The modern rational architecture of the Como Casa del Fascio satisfied the first requirement, in particular as a contemporary art form favored by Mussolini, while the photomontage helped satisfy the second.²²

As the designers asserted, the photomontage was indeed a highly political device, abbreviating and compressing and at once distancing and freezing. It has precedents both

within Terragni's oeuvre and Nizzoli's, and in the larger historical tradition. Such decorative treatment of external walls for political purposes can be found at least as far back as the Renaissance, but a closer connection is with Russian propaganda exhibitions. Throughout the 1920's, Russian artists such as El Lissitzky and others mounted exhibitions and published designs in Russia and Germany that received a wide press in the foreign art and architecture magazines that northern Italian architects so eagerly read. Russian artists saw their photomontage designs as non-objective and revolutionary, breaking traditional visual sequences and renouncing "l'art pour l'art" in favor of an art that specifically aimed at enhancing the political consciousness of the viewer. In their dynamic conception, these "frozen moments of motion" delivered an intense message to the viewer precisely to promote his interest in the content of the exhibition, but also to spur his active participation in the revolutionary society being celebrated. Within Russia, the photomontage became a major instrument of political propaganda in a country where there were few radios, no television, and enough illiteracy to render newspapers inadequate for the purpose.²³

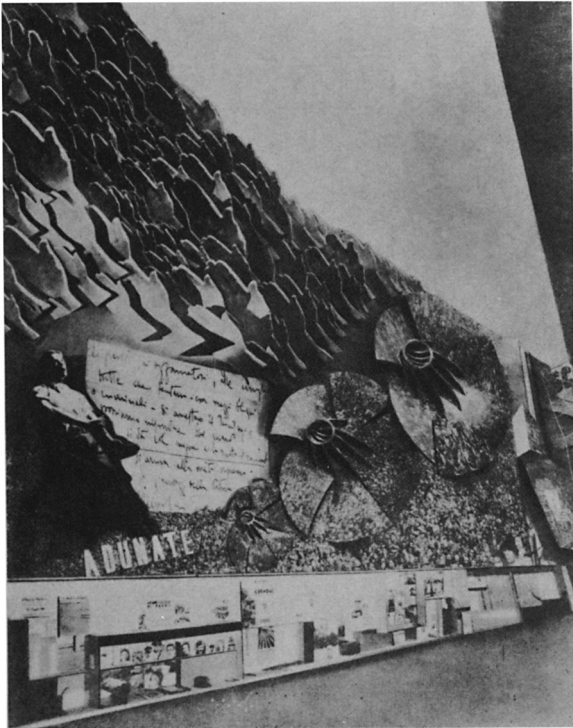
Terragni and Nizzoli certainly knew of this vital tradition from architectural magazines of the time. Terragni's decoration of the Sala del '22 at the "Mostra della Rivoluzione Fascista" betrays a lively consciousness of the possibilities offered by the photomontage (Fig. 6). Similarly, the presentation drawings for the competition for the Fascist Party National Headquarters (Palazzo del Littorio) in Rome by the Terragni group profitably used the photomontage to demonstrate the ways in which their design conformed to its historical surroundings (Fig. 7). Several years later Terragni and Pietro Lingeri presented drawings for their Danteum for the same site on the via dell'Impero, once again using the photomontage to illustrate how they situated the building with respect to the history of its surroundings (Fig. 8).

At least two earlier works by Nizzoli in collaboration with Edoardo Persico offered significant precedents for the Como façade decoration. Both date from 1934; the first

²² "L'idea rivoluzionaria e propagandistica deve essere chiaramente manifestata all'esterno ed all'interno del fabbricato con una DECORAZIONE che sia ad un tempo DOCUMENTARIA = SUCCESSIVA = PEDAGOGICA ... D'altra parte la fotografia è una forma modernissima di arte, tanto è vero che se i romani avessero conosciuto i segreti di un obiettivo fotografico ci avrebbero tramandato di Cesare non solo le interpretazioni di scultura, ma le documentate immagini delle sue guerre, delle sue conquiste, dei suoi trionfi. Perché dunque dimenticare volutamente questa prodigiosa invenzione — fattore di civiltà — che è in pari tempo un potente mezzo di documentazione e di propaganda e che, in determinati casi, può rappresentare la più efficace forma d'arte?"; *Relazione*, 2, 4 (see n. 21).

²³ De' Seta (as cited in n. 1), 176-78, discusses some of the foreign magazines read in Italy at the time; see also the photographs and citations from foreign journals that appeared regularly in the "Dalle Riviste" sec-

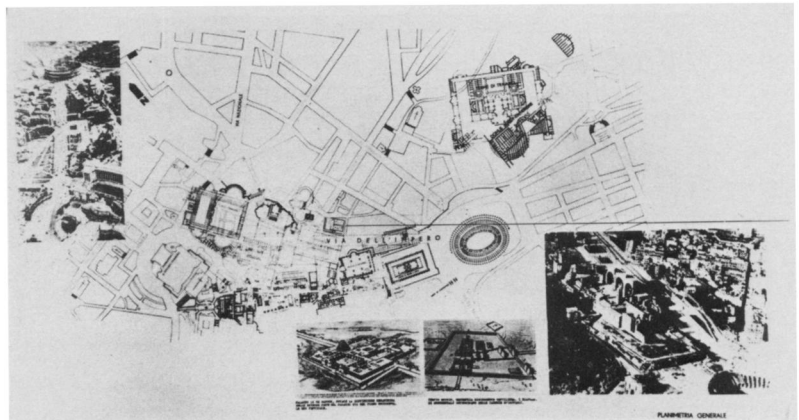
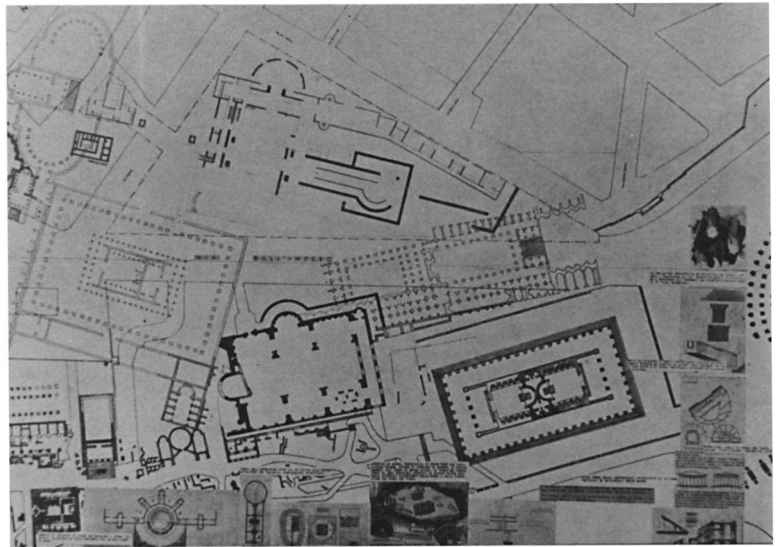
tion of *Architettura*, 1928-1943. For Lissitzky, see especially El Lissitzky, *Life, Letters and Texts*, London, 1968. Both the Lenin Podium and the Terragni group design for the Palazzo del Littorio competition of 1934 celebrate a revolutionary political order, but in their very design, they offer images of two very different revolutionary conceptions. The sharp angle of the Lenin Podium is an engineering feat, using the properties of the latest technology and materials almost in defiance of natural law and historical conditions. The 72° inclination of the podium corresponds to that of the earth's axis, and, with Lenin's defiant gesture, suggests that the Russian Revolution is the direction the rest of the world will follow. Terragni's Palazzo del Littorio *arengario* juts out from a wall cobwebbed with the tensions and uncertainties of reality; it juts out, but is firmly anchored in the wall and the reality that wall represents. It suggests an awareness of a historical reality that is far more conditioned than that presented by Lissitzky's project.



6 Giuseppe Terragni, Sala del '22, 1932, for the Exhibition of the Fascist Revolution, from *Guida alla mostra della rivoluzione fascista*, 1933

7 Giuseppe Terragni, A. Carminati, P. Lingeri, M. Nizzoli, E. Saliva, M. Sironi, L. Vietti, photomontage for competition entry Solution A for the Palazzo del Littorio, 1934, Rome (photo: Thomas Schumacher)

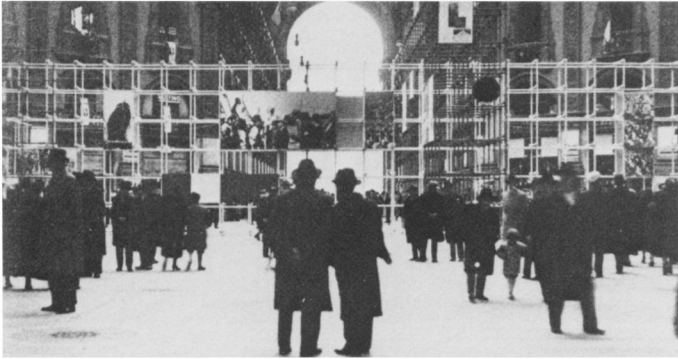
8 Giuseppe Terragni and Pietro Lingeri, photomontage for the Danteum project, 1938, Rome (photo: Thomas Schumacher)



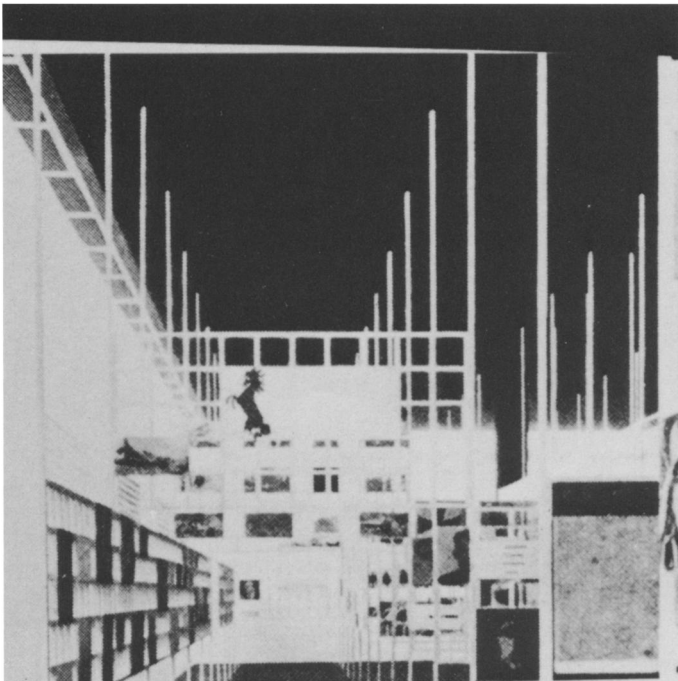
was a metal structure and photomontage in the Galleria Vittorio Emanuele in Milan (Fig. 9). For this construction Nizzoli and Persico used photographic panels to a quite different effect from that of Terragni's Sala del '22: in the Galleria geometrically regular panels were sparsely distributed on a metal grid. The second precedent was the Sala delle Medaglie d'Oro at the "Mostra dell'Aeronautica Italiana," once again a lean and highly refined panel and grid construction honoring Italian heroes (Fig. 10). The Como photomontage is substantially indebted to these efforts by Nizzoli and Persico. Like the skeletal metal constructions, the Casa del Fascio façade is a simple grid stripped of all readable imagery, but to which propaganda panels were to be added; the metal skeletons, on the other hand, though rich with architectural symbol, lacked the architectural logic of the Casa del Fascio. The final effect of the Como design depended less on the excited overlapping and repetition found in Terragni's Sala del '22 than on

an arhythmic, asymmetrical, but rigidly regular geometrical order.

The architectural configuration and materials of the Casa del Fascio preserved those of traditional Italian institutions (in this case, the town hall with tower and loggia), but the photomontage anchored it firmly in the political reality of the period: after all, it was the head of Mussolini, and not just any soldiers but Fascist soldiers, in the design. In the photographs presented by the team, the out-of-scale soldiers, the panels, and the relatively new medium of photography vividly expressed the institutional and human reality of the building. Terragni and Nizzoli attempted to bridge the gap between the insubstantial material of a photograph and the durable materials — glass, cement, metal, and marble — of the Casa. By choosing baked enamel for the panels (*ferro smaltato*), they deliberately sought to endow the political reality the panels were to express with the same per-



9 E. Persico and M. Nizzoli, publicity construction for the Plebescite, Galleria Vittorio Emanuele, 1934, Milan (photo: Feltrinelli)



10 E. Persico and M. Nizzoli, Sala delle Medaglie d'Oro at the "Mostra dell'Aeronautica Italiana" (1934) (photo: Feltrinelli)

²⁴ "La scelta del mezzo tecnico rappresentativo del metallo smaltato piuttosto che della pittura all'affresco o dei bassorilievi scolpiti ha una ragione intrinseca di proprietà per l'avvicinamento al materiale cemento, al vetro, al marmo, dai quali è prevalentemente formata la costruzione architettonica..."; Nizzoli to A. Terragni, February 5, 1936. When Tullio Nicoli, the engineer at Party Headquarters, presented an opinion on the design to Marinelli, it was precisely the similarity with temporary exhibitions that he noted: "Si osserva innanzi tutto che, pur tenute presenti le caratteristiche estetiche esterne della Casa Littoria di Como, semplici e nude, con evidente messa in valore delle strutture portanti, con grandi superfici in cristallo, la distribuzione delle decorazioni, così come sono concepite a pannelli staccati, pur riuscendo ad attirare indubbiamente l'attenzione dell'osservatore, ha caratteristiche più prossime a quelle che si usano in padiglioni di esposizioni che non in edifici stabili, nei quali invece esse normalmente sono distribuite in ritmi armonici, sia fra loro che con l'architettura d'insieme degli edifici stessi." Nicoli memorandum for Marinelli, June 17, 1937.

²⁵ "... Materiali adoperati negli edifici di dubbio gusto dell'ottocento, giustamente banditi dalla raffinatezza degli architetti razionalisti." Nicoli

manence that inhered in the materials and institutional traditions expressed by the building itself.²⁴ But the materials were one of the major objections to the design. Originally the designers intended to complete each of the panels in baked enamel, but Nicoli did not consider this material sufficiently noble for a representation of Mussolini, "materials used in buildings of dubious taste during the nineteenth century, correctly banished by the refinement of Rationalist architects."²⁵ For their second photomontage presentation, Terragni and Nizzoli altered the materials for the effigy of the Duce to marble and mosaic.

Marinelli's initial response to the project, based upon Nicoli's evaluation, was negative. In June, 1936, he wrote to Carugati that he objected to the materials on the grounds that there were no assurances that they would weather well. Additionally, he commented that "photo-mechanical images, however beautiful and however much they respond to reality, demonstrate mechanical progress, but not creative artistic capacity, surely not lacking in Italy."²⁶ The designers' forceful *relazione*, submitted in September, 1936, apparently eliminated the latter objection, since it was not voiced again. Marinelli only rejected the project after he solicited Carugati's response in September, and in neither case did they offer an explanation for the rejection. The subsequent evidence indicates that the materials continued to be the problem, but there is no evidence that Party Headquarters told Terragni that the idea itself was not suitable.²⁷

In any event, Terragni proceeded with the second design, despite Carugati's disapproval. Attilio Terragni wrote to Carugati in November, 1936, that it was unfortunately not possible to think of a different solution since work had progressed so far on the photomontage, and that it was proceeding as originally designed.²⁸ Attilio wrote to Marinelli in May, 1937, telling him that his brother proceeded because he was sure that the go-ahead would be forthcoming from Rome.²⁹ Obviously Terragni calculated that if he went ahead with the work, they would simply have to accept a *fait accompli*. In fact, in March of the

memorandum for Marinelli; also, see Marinelli to Carugati, June 22, 1936.

²⁶ "Immagini fotomeccaniche, per quanto belle e rispondenti al vero, manifestano il progresso meccanico, ma non la capacità artistica creativa, che in Italia certo non manca." Marinelli to Carugati, June 22, 1936.

²⁷ Marinelli to Carugati, September 22, 1936; Carugati to Marinelli, October 23, 1936. "... Convegno nel suo parere che alle decorazioni della Casa Littoria di Como, che è tra quelle degne ed esemplari del Partito, non convenga dar seguito come progettato dal Camerata Architetto Terragni." Marinelli to Carugati, November 3, 1936.

²⁸ A. Terragni to Carugati, November 20, 1936.

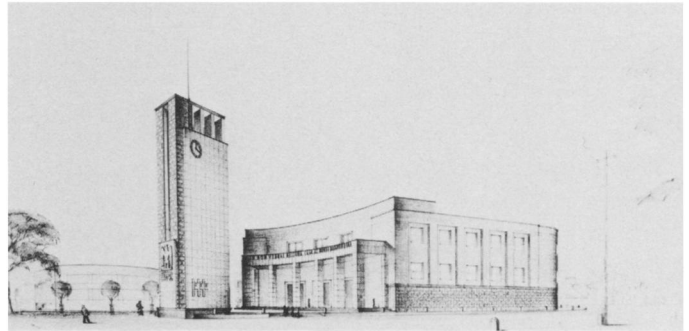
²⁹ "Il Segretario Federale in seguito ci informava che la S.V.On. aveva espresso parere sfavorevole per la decorazione della facciata, ma i lavori si sono fatti proseguire perchè l'Architetto era fiducioso che dopo le spiegazioni inviate direttamente alla S.V. On., avrebbe ottenuto l'atteso nulla osta. Da rilevare anche che, conformemente alle osservazioni della S.V.On., il progetto è stato modificato per modo che le parti principali risultano in marmo e mosaico anzichè in smalto." A. Terragni to Marinelli, May 19, 1937.

same year, Marinelli had notified Carugati that since the new design would use marble and mosaic, he thought that the decoration could be accepted.³⁰

By now in 1937 the issue of the façade decoration had dragged on for over a year. One would not expect such audacity on the part of an architect, nor such indulgence from the PNF, but Terragni had been an early recruit and an enthusiastic member of the Party. His freedom in the design of the Casa rested on his unimpeachable political standing as well as on the political power of his brother. Without these two critical factors, Carugati would have found it far easier to dismiss or override the architect's decisions. Indeed, Terragni's older brother Attilio, *Podestà* of Como, originally received the commission in late 1932 or 1933. By December, 1933, Attilio was Technical Director and Giuseppe was the designer of the Casa; and by 1935, Giuseppe was both Technical Director and designer. In order to gain control over the actual construction, the brothers refused to accept a fee in exchange for the freedom to subcontract the work themselves. Although in 1933 Terragni was just beginning to make a name for himself, he was obviously an architect of such talent and unquestionable devotion to the Party that the PNF was disposed to permit him almost total aesthetic freedom, which was not always the case for other architects of Case.³¹

After more letters, telephone calls, and the intervention of Party Secretary Achille Starace on his behalf, Carugati finally succeeded in obtaining the rejection of the photomontage project; Marinelli decided that the Casa could remain without special decoration.³² Round one went to Carugati, but only after more than a year and a half of extraordinary pressure and appeals.

In October, 1938, after all of the forces had had time to regroup, the Administrative Secretary of the Como Federation reopened the matter in a letter to Marinelli. Although he did not object to the appearance of the building from an architectural standpoint, Agrippino



11 G. Malinverno, design for Casa del Fascio, Ponte Chiasso, 1943 (photo: ACS)

Porlezza remarked that visitors mistook it for any modern building, and not the special structure that it was. He suggested that a stylized *fascio*, a Fascist phrase, or words from the Duce would be sufficient to identify the Casa.³³

The engineer Tullio Nicoli once again received the assignment. His suggestion was a panel with a map of the new Italian empire, of the sort found along the via dell'Impero to the rear of the Basilica of Maxentius. He also suggested the addition of an *altana a giorno*, or open roof-tower, which "in harmony with the rest of the structure would serve as the Torre Littoria."³⁴ The *altana* traditionally had been attached to the towers of private residences but also to some public towers in Italy, so that the addition of the *altana* to the Casa del Fascio, coupled with the closed wall and loggia-like openings on the façade, would be sufficient to suggest a tower. Nicoli betrayed a literal cast of mind, an attachment to the configurational elements of a building type and little else. In fact, Terragni initially designed an *altana* for the Casa del Fascio, but eliminated it because of the cost rather than for aesthetic reasons (Fig. 12).³⁵

³⁰ "... Se così è, penso che si potrebbe accettare tale decorazione." Marinelli to Carugati, March 29, 1937.

³¹ "Contratto d'appalto dei lavori di costruzione della 'Casa del Fascio,'" May 20, 1933; Egidio Proserpio to Marinelli, December 8, 1933. The PNF received the land for the Casa on October 2, 1933, and the first designs presented to the PNF in Rome for the Casa were dated March 5, 1933. Other architects for Case del Fascio had more problems with their projects. The design for the Casa del Fascio at Ponte Chiasso (Fig. 11), for example, underwent the most minute examination by Party Headquarters and the Como Secretary. In fact the project dragged on for over four years, even though Mussolini himself had ordered the building in 1939. The PNF rejected the first design by Ing. Giuseppe Malinverno because it was too "funereal," and the second nearly met the same fate because of the detached tower. Erberto Casagrandi to Luigi Mancini, PNF Direttorio, Federazioni Provinciali, ACS, Rome, Busta 166. On the other hand, after over ten years of seeking help from the Party and the Ministry of

Public Education, the *fascio* at Sabbioneta was unable to obtain funds for the restoration of the Palazzo Giardino, the 16th-century building that served as the Casa del Fascio. Their efforts spanned the years from 1930 to 1940. PNF Direttorio, Federazioni Provinciali, ACS, Rome, Busta 305.

³² Marinelli to Carugati, June 20, 1937.

³³ "... Nulla ci sarebbe da obiettare dal lato puramente architettonico; ma non si può tacere che, se tutti a Como sanno che quella è la Casa Littoria, essa appare invece ai numerosi turisti e stranieri, che visitano la città, come un qualunque fabbricato di gusto moderno e nulla più, in quanto manca di un qualsiasi simbolo o richiamo atto ad identificarne immediatamente la funzione." A. Porlezza to Marinelli, October 14, 1938.

³⁴ "... In armonia al rimanente delle strutture potesse servire da Torre Littoria." Nicoli memorandum to Marinelli, October 31, 1938.

³⁵ "L'altana a giorno era nel progetto Terragni e abolita per il costo." Carugati to Marinelli, November 7, 1938.

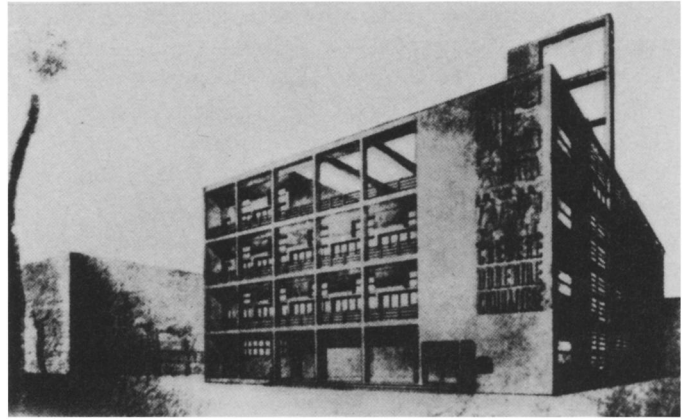
Since Terragni had already registered a complaint with the Fascist union of architects regarding modifications to the interior of the Casa, calling them “manomissioni,” the project for the façade decoration reverted to him and Nizzoli.³⁶ Not until late May, 1939, did the collaborators offer a new design, which Carugati suggested did not respond to Nicolí’s memorandum (Fig. 13). With this design, the team envisioned a solution that would include an *arengario* (a kind of podium), since they noted that they had been advised the earlier design was rejected because the Casa lacked one. They proposed a complementary detached structure, which would assume the aspect of “an altar, a prow,” jutting out toward the populace. The white wall of the Casa would form a backdrop for a sculptural group, a horse and attendant, and for the *gerarca* himself when he spoke to the people. The detached structure, with its austere base and dynamic sculptural group, would demonstrate that Fascism did not crystallize in certain forms, they argued, but followed instead a free evolution and gave concrete expression to the words of Mussolini: “La rivoluzione continua. . .”³⁷

With their selection of a horse with attendant or tamer, Terragni and Nizzoli chose a motif that allowed of only one interpretation manifestly associated with governmental power. The Quirinale in Rome, long the seat of central authority, was known as Monte Cavallo throughout medieval and Renaissance times because of the sculptural group of two horses with their tamers. The use of one such horse and tamer at Como referred directly to the Quirinale group; an equestrian statue would have been ambiguous in its symbolic reading, but the horse-tamer group is traditionally and exclusively associated with the statues on the Quirinale — not just with government in general, but with government in Rome. Indeed, Nizzoli and Persico had used a very similar sculptural group for the Salone d’Onore at the Sixth Triennial of Milan in 1936. Here two horses preceded by a separate female figure marked the terminus of a rectangular room with multiple entrances and photographic panels of five Roman emperors to one side. Although this sculptural group is more ambiguous than the Como design is in its relationship to the Quirinale group, certainly the faces of the emperors explicitly connected the room with Roman Imperial authority, as indeed they also referred to the head of Mussolini in the earlier photomontage design.

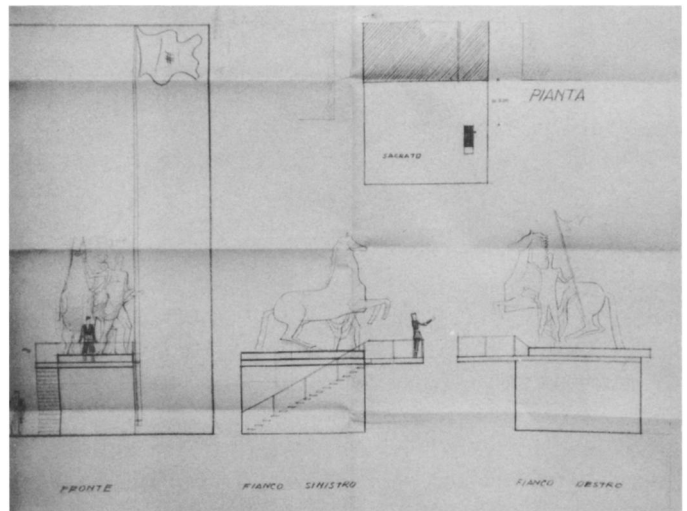
The placement of the podium in this project recalls the Terragni group design for the Palazzo del Littorio in Rome (Fig. 14), and El Lissitzky’s famous Lenin Podium where,

³⁶ Carugati to Marinelli, November 7, 1938.

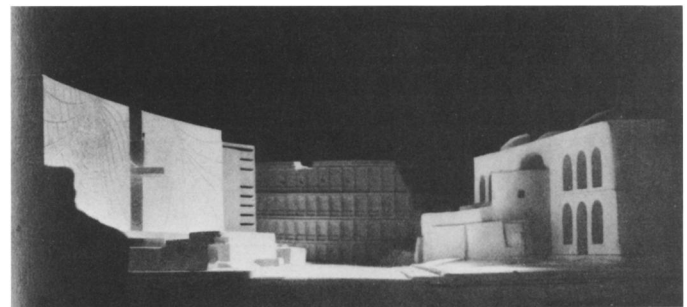
³⁷ Terragni, Nizzoli, Arrigotti, *Relazione* submitted to Marinelli, May 25, 1939. Taking the concepts of the photomontage one step further, the editors of *Quadrante* proposed that the wall be left blank so that it could be used as a screen for the projection of propaganda films and later, with the advent of television, to project the living figure of the Duce when he spoke to the populace. *Quadrante*, 32 (see n. 15).



12 Giuseppe Terragni, early drawing for the Casa del Fascio (photo: Thomas Schumacher)



13 Giuseppe Terragni and Marcello Nizzoli, third design for façade decoration, Casa del Fascio, Como. ACS (photo: author)



14 Giuseppe Terragni, A. Carminati, P. Lingeri, M. Nizzoli, E. Saliva, M. Sironi, L. Vietti, model for competition entry Solution A for the Palazzo del Littorio, 1934, Rome, from *Architettura*, XIII, 1934 (photo: author)

as Lissitzky commented, "the sweep of the structure emphasize[d] the gesture of the orator." The repeated references in Italian architectural publications and projects to Russian projects of the 1920's, particularly those of Lissitzky, reinforce the association Italian artists found between revolutionary political movements and revolutionary art forms. Hostility toward the Soviet experiment gave way, by the 1930's, to a feeling of superiority on the part of Italian architects that the revolutionary banner had passed to them, while Moscow represented "the Mecca for an architecture of a new formalism that by now must be denounced as one of the gravest dangers for architecture of this era."³⁸

The horse-tamer project also recalls certain other facets of Fascist architectural ideas. More than once, significant monuments of the past had been liberated from an accretion of houses and other buildings that had slowly obscured them over the centuries. Isolation — leaving a monument free to be seen in its entirety without competition from adjacent structures — rendered it symbolically more significant and demanded the undivided attention of the populace. The Como Casa del Fascio itself was isolated from surrounding structures; in the solution proposed by the Terragni group, the blank wall at the southeast corner of the building, in reality a vestigial tower, formed a backdrop for the sculptural group of the detached *arengario*.³⁹

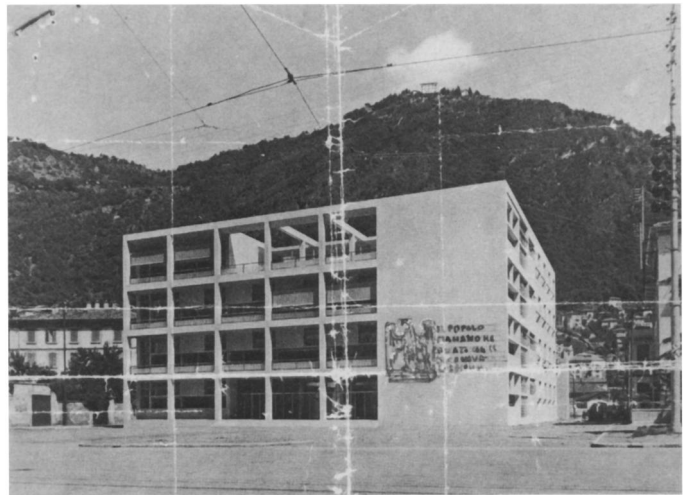
This solution met the same bad end as the earlier ones, less because of objections from Party Headquarters or for aesthetic reasons than because of local opposition to the cost of L. 200,000 on top of the L. 125,000 already spent on the aborted photomontage project. Nicoli concurred in the judgment that this solution would be too expensive, even though he appeared to like the design, finding it "audacious." Marinelli rejected it with the words "non va," with no further explanation, but it is clear from the rest of the documentation that the cost was the primary impediment.⁴⁰

³⁸ Edoardo Persico, "Architetti a Mosca," *La casa bella*, September, 1932.

³⁹ The *arengario* is the balcony upon which the speaker stood to address the crowds; the speaker was a representation of Mussolini on the balcony of the Palazzo Venezia in Rome. The term derives from the medieval *arengo* or assembly of all citizens, but here the meaning underwent an inversion; the power of the Commune was now vested in the one central authority, Mussolini and the Fascist State.

⁴⁰ Nicoli to Marinelli, May 31, 1939; Marinelli to Porlezza, June 2, 1939.

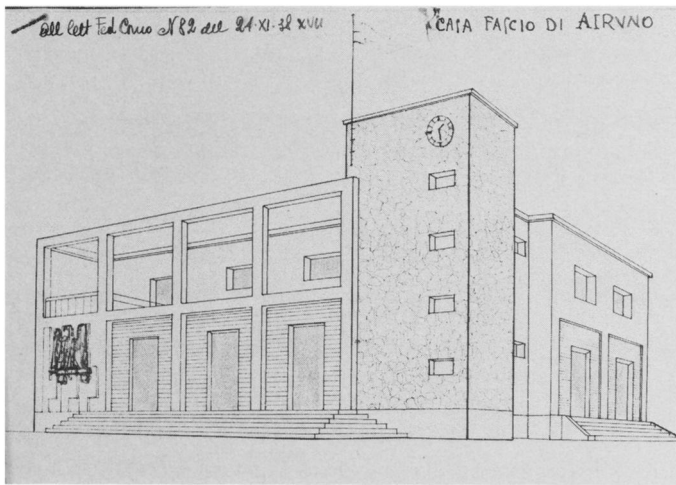
⁴¹ The timely intervention of the War also spared the Casa del Fascio itself from alteration. After his visit to Como to press the eagle design on Terragni, Nicoli submitted a lengthy report to Marinelli, primarily about the façade design, but he also offered gratuitous comments about the building itself: "L'arch. Terragni che inizialmente voleva insistere per i già proposti motivi in ferro smaltato, dopo lunga discussione è divenuto ad attenersi allo sviluppo del disposto motivo, che studierà insieme al pittore Nizzoli. All'architetto ho segnalato che dovrà sottoporre alla Vostra alta approvazione il disegno ... e che per mantenere la spesa in giusti limiti, il progetto dovrà essere studiato in modo preciso definitivo su bozzetti e modelli onde eliminare eventuali rifazioni, come è avvenuto per parecchi casi, durante la costruzione della Casa Littoria." Nicoli



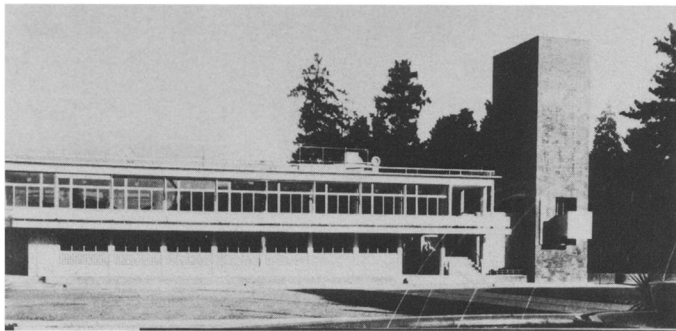
15 T. Nicoli, proposal for the façade decoration, Casa del Fascio, Como ACS (photo: author)

After more than three years of negotiations, Marinelli finally became exasperated, and at the request of Guido Bonato (Carugati's replacement in Como), he sent Nicoli to Como to discuss the façade decoration with Terragni and local Party officials in June, 1939. Nicoli reported in his *relazione* that he told Terragni that Marinelli and the Party Secretary wanted a simple imperial eagle, with the words "Il popolo italiano ha creato col suo sangue l'impero. Lo feconderà col suo lavoro e lo difenderà contro chiunque colle sue armi" (Fig. 15). Even in the face of these orders, during the heated and long session Terragni resurrected the old photomontage design, but he finally acceded to Nicoli's insistence and agreed to study the new motif for the façade. The outbreak of war clouded the fate of this design. In a summary of 1942 of the state of Party buildings, the comment about the Casa del Fascio in Como indicated that completion of the façade decoration would be deferred until after victory, a condition that kept the Casa free of decoration.⁴¹

memorandum to Marinelli, June 25, 1939. "La casa Littoria di Como ha forme estetiche che non si appropriano affatto alla speciale destinazione dell'edificio. Le distribuzioni e le dimensioni delle finestre sono assolutamente irrazionali. L'impianto di illuminazione è pure irrazionale ... L'eccessiva dimensione delle finestre porta gravi conseguenze per l'eccessiva visibilità esterna e durante l'inverno per le notevoli perdite di calore ... Le coperture sono state eseguite in modo irrazionale e non a regola d'arte ... Nel complesso la somma spesa per la costruzione è stata eccessiva e i risultati dal lato tecnico ed estetico non sono soddisfacenti." Nicoli to Marinelli, June 29, 1939. Since such comments were absent from Nicoli's earlier memoranda about the building, and indeed he appeared to appreciate its unusual qualities, this last memorandum probably reflected Carugati's hostility and Nicoli's own difficult session with Terragni. Nicoli's observations conflict with those of the members of the Ministry of Finance who now occupy the building. In addition to showing an aesthetic appreciation of the building, one of the officers made a point of telling me that the disposition of the windows was particularly felicitous for catching breezes during the hot summer months. September 9, 1977, visit to the Casa del Fascio, now the Casa del Popolo.



16 Design for the Casa del Fascio, Airuno, Como, 1938. ACS (photo: Bowles)



17 G. Terragni, Casa del Fascio, Lissone, 1938-39, from *Costruzioni-Casabella*, No. 162, 1941 (photo: author)

The difficulties Terragni experienced over the façade decoration cannot be explained simply in aesthetic or even political terms. He had a free hand to design the building as he chose, even without the standard tower and *arengario*. He exceeded his original expense estimates three times over, was dilatory in reporting expenses and in clearing accounts, and evidently took far more time to bring the Casa to a point at which the offices could be occupied than originally estimated. His unimpeachable position as an enthusiastic Party member and that of his

brother no doubt played a large part in enabling him to move freely with the building. Difficulties arose in part due to an honest disagreement over the use of the photomontage, but mainly because of the mutual hostility between the architect and the patron's local representative. No one doubted that the panels proposed by Terragni celebrated Fascism. The Party did not discourage artistic disputes as long as they concerned the best way to express Fascism, that is, as long as they were internal to Fascism, as the façade dispute clearly was. Carugati simply did not like the design, nor did he care much for Terragni; in the end he was unwilling to concede the architect anything. Terragni probably had little patience with Nicoli or Carugati; Nicoli's designs were insipid at best, and to Terragni, Carugati simply was not qualified to make aesthetic judgments. Elsewhere Terragni had forthrightly expressed his ideas about hierarchies and the necessity of permitting any specialist unhampered movement within his own specialization.⁴² Terragni was stubborn, as Carugati and others observed, but his aesthetic judgment was far superior to that of any of the other participants in the wranglings over the façade decoration. In this instance, the decision as to which design would be selected turned on personal factors and the history of the construction of the Casa, the relationship between Terragni and the local Party Secretary, rather than on an aesthetic dispute with Party Headquarters or political repression of any sort. Marinelli's early reservations about the materials for the photomontage were not entirely unwarranted; despite lengthy fights with the manufacturers and Terragni's repeated assurances that the excessive expenditures were all justified, the roof leaked, the marble revetment was cracking and falling off, and the basement flooded. Numerous other maintenance problems beset the building, and only extraordinary maintenance procedures could prevent even worse problems. Add to this the excessive expenses for heating, and it is not hard to see why particularly the local party leaders had a difficult relationship with Terragni.⁴³

Despite the protracted dispute over the façade decoration, Terragni's architecture in fact remained acceptable to the regime. Although Carlo Ferrario, the Como Party Secretary in 1940, lamented the cost, the "assolutismo architettonico," and Terragni's almost fanatic desire for originality in the building, he acknowledged that the

⁴² "Credetemi cari e buoni comaschi, che la sistemazione di un centro di città italiana equivale all'opera sapiente di un bravo chirurgo. Col vostro agitarvi senza una ragione, vi renderete simili a un paziente che intendesse guidare la mano del chirurgo mentre sta per eseguire una difficile operazione ... Comaschi, lasciate fare a chi per dovere di ufficio e per competenza di studi vi da la assoluta certezza di saper risolvere nel migliore dei modi, i problemi della vostra città ... Non dimenticate che nello Stato Fascista Corporativo ognuno nel proprio settore deve lavorare, voi tessitori a tessere, voi tintori a tingere, il Soprintendente a

soprintendere e tutelare i nostri monumenti, voi me avete costretto a fare eccezione alla regola perchè anzichè architettare mi avete inchiodato per una buona mezza giornata al tavolo del polemista." G. Terragni, "Discorso ai Comaschi," *L'Ambrosiano*, March 1, 1940.

⁴³ Ing. Comm. Tirrone, "Stralcio dalla relazione sulla ispezione amministrativa eseguita nei giorni 5 - 7 Aprile, 1938"; "Relazione: Como - Casa Littorio," Corpo Reale del Genio Civile, Ministero dei Lavori Pubblici, October 14, 1940.

building was "an architectural jewel for some, an architectural disaster for many others."⁴⁴ In the same year, an engineer from the Public Works Ministry was called in by PNF headquarters in Rome to assess the special maintenance requirements of the Casa. He certified that the choice of materials had led to serious long-term maintenance problems, but he also firmly asserted that the Casa was a valuable work that responded perfectly to its institutional demands.⁴⁵ In 1941, Luigi Mancini (Administrative Secretary of the PNF in Rome) sent a special request for selected photographs of the Casa from the *Quadrante* article. He wanted to use the photographs for a publication on PNF buildings, but no other Casa del Fascio was honored with a detailed special request for specific photographs; elsewhere he sent form letters.⁴⁶ Additionally, the most obvious and easily imitated features of the Casa found expression in other Party constructions in the Como region, however banal the adaptation (Fig. 16), and Terragni received the commission for the Casa del Fascio in Lissone, Como (Fig. 17).⁴⁷ The problems that arose with the Como Casa influenced the design of this building, for disagreement over the Como façade was well underway when the Lissone project commenced. This time

the tower and *arengario* were part of the building from the outset, obviating the need for arguments over yet another façade decoration. Terragni's design for the Torre Littoria set forth the components so dear to the literal-minded almost as a parody of the Casa Comunale typology adopted for the Casa del Fascio throughout Italy, sharply contrasting the rough stone of the tower with the smooth glass and ashlar exterior of the office wing.

As a case study of the artist-government patron relationship, the story of the Como façade decoration constitutes an important step toward dispelling the myth of the "persecution of Modernism" under Fascism; where persecution occurred, it was directed at an individual architect, not at an aesthetic. Terragni and Nizzoli's photomontage may have represented aspiration rather than reality, Modernism rather than classicism, but this does not explain why it was not erected. Far simpler and more universal forces were at work, since the kind of personality clash that erupted between Terragni and Carugati is hardly restricted to a twentieth-century totalitarian state.⁴⁸

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⁴⁴ Carlo Ferrario to Marinelli, August 23, 1940

⁴⁵ "Relazione: Como - Casa Littorio," 1, 4.

⁴⁶ Luigi Mancini to Como Administrative Officer C. Majorino, December 27, 1941; Majorino to Mancini, February 2, 1942; PNF Direttorio, ACS, Rome, Busta 347.

⁴⁷ For documentation of the construction of the Casa del Fascio, Airuno, see PNF Federazioni Provinciali, ACS, Rome, Busta 165.

⁴⁸ A more general adumbration of the work of Rationalist architects can be found in D. Ghirardo, "Italian Architects and Fascist Politics: An Evaluation of the Rationalists' Role in Regime Building," *Journal of the Society of Architectural Historians*, xxxix, 2, May, 1980.