

The design philosophy and works of gruppo

[Design](#)



“ The practice of architecture begins as a process of design, involving a wide range of aesthetic and cultural issues, and concludes as a process of construction intimately connected with economic and material concerns. The study of architectural history, therefore, offers a unique opportunity to gauge the relationship between the cultural and economic dimensions of modernization.”

One of the key movements that was found in Italy after WWI was the Rationalist movement which broadened the scope of modern architecture by formulating clear strategies for dealing with the industrialization and the urbanization of Italy. The movement illustrates different aspects of the response of Italian architects to the challenge of building in the twentieth century. In 1926 the Gruppo 7 emerged and was one of the main architectural groups during the Rationalist movement. The Gruppo 7 was made up of seven young architectural students at the Politecnico in Milan. The members of Gruppo 7 include - Sebastiano Larco, Guido Frette, Carlo Enrico Rava, Luigi Figini, Gino Pollini, Giuseppe Terragni, and Adalberto Libera.

This paper will focus specifically on three architectural designs of Gruppo 7 which include the Novocomum, Casa del Fascio, and Casa Elettrica. Through the design philosophy and works of Gruppo 7 its three designs demonstrate how the Gruppo 7 was affected by post WWI cultural, political and social issues and the designs show how they move from the neo-classical into their view of modernist architecture that had not been seen before. Gruppo 7's Architectural Views.

In order to understand how the three architectural designs of Gruppo 7 demonstrate the idea of modernization in Italy during the rationalist movement, it is important to understand Gruppo 7's personality and objectives. Since Gruppo 7 emerged from the rationalist movement the two share the same qualities and objectives. Gruppo 7 was looking to architects and places outside of Italy for new inspiration. Gruppo 7 was greatly influenced by the Swiss-French architect Le Corbusier.

They took aspects of Le Corbusier's designs such as the use of concrete slabs, steel, columns and integration between inside and outside of the building into their own architectural views. Gruppo 7 believed that architects should work with new materials and they should sensitize themselves with the style of the new architecture. They did not want to equate architecture with machines or to reduce the act of design to calculations and mechanical formulas. Instead they wanted to point out that type was not the same thing as formula. Type can always change because different functions and forms can be added to the same type. Also, Gruppo 7 addressed the issue of the relationship between historical and contemporary architectural languages by trying to move away from neo-classical to modernist architecture. Gruppo 7 was not trying to change or break tradition; instead they believed that tradition should change for the new and the present.

Tradition should change to satisfy current issues and to satisfy the needs of society. Gruppo 7 was not trying to change Italian traditions or the Italian identity but was trying to adapt the international style into Italy and Italian architecture. Gruppo 7 did not reject the idea of national spirit expressed through architectural style, they did however argue that a manipulation of a <https://assignbuster.com/the-design-philosophy-and-works-of-gruppo/>

set of forms derived from the architecture of the past would blind architects and the public to the true role of architecture, which is to give form to the spirit of the age. Gruppo 7 also believed that there was a set of universal devices that served as the basic elements of the new architecture. This included the development of form based on the clear expression of structure, strip and corner windows, continuous horizontal balconies or protruding slabs, and the use of exposed concrete and extensive glazing. These architectural views and beliefs are demonstrated in the three designs that will be discussed in this paper.

Design 1: The Novocomum

The first design of Gruppo 7 that demonstrates the idea of modernization and shows how Gruppo 7's designs were affected by cultural, political, and social issues is the Novocomum. The Novocomum apartment building in Como, Italy on the shore of Lake Como was built in 1929 and designed by Giuseppe Terragni. Figure 1: The Novocomum [6]

The Novocomum was one of the first examples of Rationalist architecture. The Novocomum is a long, low five story apartment building with a structural frame of reinforced concrete. Terragni dismissed the use of any ornamentation and emphasized smooth surfaces on the exterior of the building. From the lack of ornamentation, there are no distractions from the overall impression of the building as a composition of a few, simple interlocked volumes resting lightly on the ground. The original exterior of the building was cream colored stucco, which covered the surface of the building, the facades of the balconies were painted blue, and the metal

window sashes were orange. The Italian tradition seen in Terragni's Novocomum is seen in the classical symmetry of the lake front façade, following the " spirit, not the form".

The long horizontal bands of windows provided sweeping panoramas of Lake Como from each apartment, and this visual link with the environment acquired a corporeal form thanks to the balconies and the roof deck. This is one of the important characteristics in the Gruppo 7's architectural views. Through the use of windows providing a sense of transparency in the building it integrates the interior with the exterior of the building and shows the indications of the rationalist movement. Through the use of new materials such as concrete and steel and incorporating balconies in the apartments it also demonstrates Gruppo 7's influence from Le Corbusier. Le Corbusier used balconies in his architectural design, Unite d'Habitation. The apartment interiors, however, rely on old-fashioned corridor-type arrangements that reflect none of the revolutionary thinking of living space seen in Le Corbusier's designs [6]. There was much controversy in the design of the Novocomum because it was so radically different from the immediate architectural environment.

The city licensing board threatened to have it torn down [6]. This shows the cultural and social impact the building had on society due to its differences compared to past architecture. People did not know how to react to the new architecture and process its modern qualities and characteristics such as its transparency and smooth surfaces. The Novocomum was one of the major steps in the rationalist movement toward the modernization of Italian architecture. This was Gruppo 7's first installment in the rationalist

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movement and it demonstrated how they tried to incorporate Italian tradition, and tried to give form to the spirit of the age by using new materials such as glass and steel. Design 2: Casa del Fascio

Figure 2: Casa del Fascio The second design of Gruppo 7 that demonstrates the idea of modernization and shows how Gruppo 7's designs were affected by cultural, political, social issues is the Casa del Fascio. The Casa del Fascio was designed by Giuseppe Terragni in 1936 in Como, Italy. The Casa del Fascio housed the local headquarters of the Fascist party. The Casa del Fascio was the architectural expression of the party's presence in countless cities, towns and villages in Italy. Giuseppe Terragni used a political slogan as the inspiration for his final design: Here the Mussolinian concept that fascism is a glass house into which all can look gives rise to this interpretation: no encumbrance, no barrier, no obstacle between the political leaders and the people.

Terragni responded to this metaphor of a glass house by incorporating the use of transparency in his design. The open bays of the center section at the top of the façade allowed the view of the hill rising behind the city. A series of glass doors aligned at the center of the ground level of the main elevation raised no obstacle or views into or out of the building. Terragni exploited the transparent and reflective properties of his materials to create a complex layering of spaces and to establish a constantly shifting relationship within an orthogonal matrix. The west elevation consists of an opaque mural surface and an open gridded framework. The combination of the gridded frame and the mural surface demonstrates the traditional and modern conceptions of architectural form. Tradition and modernity were combined

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again in the design of a special “two element window” (see Figure 4 in Appendix 1). This feature consisted of a strip window below a window-wall configuration.

Like the gridded frame, the strip window was an example of incorporating modern ideas into the design. A one meter height remained above the horizontal window which split up into two elements: a traditional sash window and a section of blank wall. The windows provided natural daylight and the panel provided artificial light. Day or night, the wall remained the source of illumination, a light produced by the balance between modern and traditional elements. This shows how Gruppo 7 addresses the relationship between historical and contemporary architectural languages. This design shows how they try to modernize and change traditions for the new and present. Transparency was a metaphor for open and direct contact between political leadership and party military leaders and was the primary theme of the Casa del Fascio.

Other elements found in the building’s design include: trabeated and mural elements, strip and sash windows, natural and artificial light. For Terragni this represented the architectural equivalent of the political equation, of the strength of tradition and the vitality of modernization. The political issues occurring during this time obviously had a great impact on Terragni’s design. He extrapolated the political views of the fascist party and incorporated them into the modern and contemporary architectural views. Through the openness of the fascist party and connection between the political and military leadership he demonstrated this through transparency and openness in the building. Design 3: Cassa Elettrica

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Figure 3: Casa Elettrica

The third design of Gruppo 7 that demonstrates the idea of modernization and shows how Gruppo 7's designs were affected by cultural, political, and social issues is the Cassa Elettrica. Cassa Elettrica was built in Monza, Italy in 1930 and designed by Luigi Figini and Gino Pollini with Guido Frette, Adalberto Libera, and Piero Bottoni. Cassa Elettrica was a single story building measuring eight by sixteen meters. The building contained two small bedrooms, a bath, a dining area, a kitchen and a servant's area. Different colors were used such as shades of red, white, blue, green and ochre for wall surfaces, black and grey for floor surfaces, lemon yellow for the ceiling and reddish-orange for the interior columns.

The main living area contained a wall of windows providing a panoramic view into the garden. This wall consisted of two layers of glass separated by a planting box (see Figure 5 in Appendix 1). The planting box provided a sense of nature within the house despite the electrified environment of the interior. When sitting in the living room the planting box gives a sense that nature is migrating into the room. Once again the interaction with architecture and nature is seen in the design of Casa Elettrica. Gruppo 7 is not only allowing the view of nature from the interior but is now bringing nature into the house despite the houses industrialized environment. Despite Gruppo 7's modernist approach they try to adapt Italian tradition by incorporating nature into their design. Another important feature of Casa Elettrica that resembled the industrialization of Italy during this time was found in the kitchen. The kitchen was broken down into several activities: food storage, preparation,

serving and washing up and the amount of space each required was determined.

The layout of the kitchen was designed to minimize the amount of walking distance required to prepare, serve and clear the meals. For example, a rotating disk was implemented in the counter top to eliminate the need to carry dishes by hand from the kitchen to the dining area and then to the washing area. This increased efficiency inside the kitchen by minimizing time to cook and clean. This shows how greatly influenced Gruppo 7 was by the industrial movement occurring across Europe during this period and demonstrates how Gruppo 7 wanted to integrate industrial and architectural design procedures. Looking toward increasing efficiency inside the household was a new improvement in architecture and shows function over form.

In this design Gruppo 7 focused on the user and the users function within the house versus just the form of the house. This demonstrates how Gruppo 7 was influenced by the Industrial movement and how they move from the neo-classical to a modernist architecture. Conclusion

Through the design philosophy and works of Gruppo 7 its three designs demonstrate how the Gruppo 7 was affected by post WWI cultural, political and social issues and the designs show how they move from the neo-classical into their view of modernist architecture that had not been seen before. The first design by Gruppo 7, the Novocomum demonstrates a connection between architecture and nature. It shows how they incorporate Italian tradition and culture and modify it in their modernization of Italian

architecture. The second design by Gruppo 7, Casa del Fascio uses the connection between transparency and political ideology.

This shows how greatly influenced they were by the political issues occurring during the rationalist movement and how it affected their architecture. The third design by Gruppo 7, Casa Elettrica demonstrates the connection between the industrialization of Italy and architecture. This shows function over form while keeping the user in mind and shows how they still incorporate Italian tradition and culture. Each of these designs demonstrates the qualities of the Gruppo 7 and that of the Rationalist movement. Gruppo 7 was trying to give architecture a new spirit and a new meaning in order to coincide with society and Italian tradition.