9

Modern Architecture and Racial Eugenics at the Esposizione Universale di Roma

Brian L. McLaren

Two days before "Fascism and the Problems of Race," better known as the "Manifesto of the Racial Scientists," appeared in *Il Giornale d'Italia* on July 15, 1938, the powerfully placed state architect Marcello Piacentini published an essay in the same newspaper titled "Balance Sheet of Rationalism."[1] The publication of this essay at the same moment, and in the same venue, as the first public pronouncement of the Fascist racial campaign is a clear indication of the close connection between the emerging racial discourse in Italian politics and the discourse on architecture in the late Fascist period. With regard to this political debate, the "Provisions for the Defense of the Italian Race" was officially passed into law by the Fascist government, with the intention to defend Italy against racial impurities of all kinds.[2] This was the most comprehensive of a series of measures that were put in place between September 1938 and July 1939 that led to limitations on marriage as well as constraints in the fields of education, the national economy, the Italian military, and all sectors of the government. As a result, not only were so-called Aryan Italians prohibited from marrying other races, it was forbidden for Jews in particular to be in a position of authority over them or to teach them. The consequence of these and many other highly contentious political measures

was that Italian politics moved away from "Mediterraneanism" and in favor of asserting the Nordic and Aryan origins of the Italian people—thus conjoining Italian racial policies and those of German National Socialism.[3]

This racial discourse was closely tied to equally heated debates in the fields of art and architecture. In art, these disputes centered around what the most retrogressive critics of the time considered the impure and subjective qualities of modern art—and especially the danger of foreign influences. In light of the broader political discourse, which argued that Italian identity could be linked to biology, this general appeal to control the aesthetic principles of contemporary art can be understood as a call to purify its genetic code. In architecture, in addition to the state control of cultural matters, these disputes were tied to the issue of autarchy. This economic policy called on Italian industry to utilize materials from within the Kingdom of Italy following the invasion of Ethiopia in 1935 and related sanctions by the League of Nations. As a result, there were limitations on the use of steel and reinforced concrete that moved architecture away from modern systems and toward more traditional building methods—in what can be considered a direct attempt to define its genetic material.

This paper will trace the impact of this broader debate through the transformation of the Piazza e gli edifici delle Forze Armate (Piazza and buildings of the Armed Forces), designed by the architects Mario De Renzi and Gino Pollini. This project began in 1937 as two separate competition entries for one of the permanent buildings at the Esposizione Universale di Roma or E42—a world exhibition planned for 1942 but that did not take place due to Italy's entry into World War II. The evolution of the project, which included merging the two schemes and several changes to its program, ended somewhat silently during wartime as the abandoned construction site of the Edifici del Corporativismo, dell'Autarchia e dell'Assistenza e Previdenza Sociale (Buildings of Corporatism, Autarchy and Social Security). This essay frames the E42 project within the racialized architectural, and political, discourse of late 1930s and early '40s Italy, traced through prominent art and architectural publications of the era. Through exploring the historical trajectory of the E42, this essay argues that the aesthetic control exercised during the competition process met with the material limitations imposed by the wartime conditions to instantiate contemporary theories of racial eugenics within architecture.

Parallel research in other geographies and time periods includes architectural historian Charles L. Davis II's examination of the fusion of theories of race and style in the writings of Eugène-Emmanuel Viollet-le-Duc.[4] In particular, Davis's discussion of the metaphorical assimilation of race in Viollet-le-Duc's theory, found in the internal functioning of architecture rather than an external anthropomorphism, supports a conception of style as a form of eugenics that would

regulate architecture's internal principles—an argument similar to that found in this essay. Also relevant to this study of the architectural impact of Fascist racial policies is an understanding of what architectural historian Mabel O. Wilson contends took place in the United States during the period of immigrant assimilation immediately following World War I, which she describes as "paranoid efforts at 'racial containment,'" supported by a racist discourse of eugenics.[5] In the Italian context, these concerns were generated by the immediate circumstances following the Italian conquest in Ethiopia, where the threat of miscegenation intermingled with the militaristic logic of empire. Notably, Mussolini had already expressed his views ten years earlier in his speech to the people of Reggio Emilia, when he called for establishing policies and programs that would remake Italians along Fascist lines.[6] This mild form of eugenics, which encouraged a high birth rate, was paired with policies and programs aimed at shaping the Italian character externally to form Mussolini's racial strategy through the early part of the 1930s.[7] After the Ethiopian conquest, and with some frustration with the lack of progress of his campaign to remake Italians, Mussolini pursued a more aggressive approach that included his so-called "Reform of Customs" that attacked the Italian bourgeoisie.[8] As historian Aaron Gillette argues, by the late 1930s Mussolini increasingly believed that races could be "physically and psychologically" transformed through a combination of internal and external pressure.[9]

In response to this body of research, this essay contends that the most powerful political and cultural assertions—and particularly those in the realm of art and architecture—arose from a fearful and reactive need to assert a "pure" Italian identity against the threat of international, foreign, or Jewish influences. It further maintains that Fascism's racial ideologies were a product of fear and weakness rather than strength, and that the architecture of the period bears the mark of this combative stance. In so doing, this essay addresses a body of built work that has been either entirely ignored or inadequately theorized in the existing scholarship. Exceptions to this tendency include historian Emilio Gentile's *Fascismo di pietra*, which argues that Mussolini's efforts to create "modern Romans" through the regime's racial and anti-Semitic campaign was physically manifested in state-sponsored projects such as the Foro Mussolini and Esposizione Universale di Roma.[10] This essay aims to provide more substance to Gentile's arguments through a close look at precisely how these racial theories were operationalized in the review, decision making, and design refinement of a single project. Also relevant to this discussion is the theorization of race as a form of, after Michel Foucault, biopolitics. According to Foucault, biopolitics emerged at the moment when "the biological came under state control" in response, in part, to concerns about health, hygiene, and racial purity.[11] The concept of the biopolitical, in Foucault's theorization, reached its apotheosis in state racism and genocide during the twentieth

century. In reference to Nazi Germany, Foucault argues "once the State functions in the biopower mode, racism alone can justify the murderous function of the State."[12]

Art, Architecture, and Racial Eugenics

In the discourse on modern architecture during the Italian racial campaign, there was a grave suspicion about purportedly international or foreign sources of modern Italian architecture—with allusions to northern European, Bolshevik, and Jewish influences. The direct connection between the political discourse on race and the parallel debate within the arts is apparent in the racialization of art discourse. This is reflected clearly in the rhetoric of Sicilian architect Giuseppe Pensabene for example, who, through the course of the 1930s, began to espouse the racist ideology of the Fascist state.[13] Of particular note are a series of essays by Pensabene that appeared in the weekly *Quadrivio* in early 1938 that called for the creation of a national culture free of impure "modern" (that is, Jewish) influences.[14] He conveyed a similar message in *Difesa della Razza* through a pair of essays, "Our Art and Jewish Deformation," in October and November 1938—which was at the height of the Italian racial campaign. In this context, Pensabene made a distinction between the authentic traditions of Italian art, which were tied to realism, and "subjective painting," which he described as "a form [of art] that came from a psyche alien to us."[15] He goes on to argue that Italian artists who followed modern artistic movements, such as expressionism, cubism, and Dadaism, created a situation where "now arbitrary and entirely subjective, art is no longer resolved in works, but only in trends."[16]

The views of Pensabene were echoed by journalist Telesio Interlandi, who published "The Question of Art and Race" in the newspaper *Il Tevere* on November 14, 1938—just three days prior to the approval of the Italian racial laws.[17] His central argument was that the importation of foreign influences in the arts over the past decades had created a climate in which Italian artists were compelled to work in a way that was against their instincts. In reference to modern art, Interlandi bluntly states: "We believe that 'modern' is a trap set by Judaism and Jewish sympathizing intellectuals to continue to interfere with our artistic life."[18] Just ten days later, founder of the futurist movement Filippo Tommaso Marinetti responded to Interlandi in the pages of *Il Giornale d'Italia*, in an essay entitled "Italian-ness of Modern Art," where he argues that modern Italian art was initiated by artists who were neither Jewish nor Bolshevik.[19] After providing a detailed summary of the wide range of tendencies within modern Italian art, Marinetti concludes his essay by sarcastically stating: "The attempt of *Il Tevere* to attribute merits and defects to Jews is for them an undeserved praise, while it offends the Ministry of Popular Culture and the Confederation of Professional Artists who safeguard modern

Italian artists, and is especially insulting and destructive to the prestige of the Mussolinian Empire."[20]

The debate over race and modern Italian art culminated in the pages of the journal *Le Arti*, which began publication in October 1938 under the direction of the minister of National Education, Giuseppe Bottai, a powerful and complex figure within the Fascist regime.[21] In a note from February 1939, "Discussions on Modern Art," the editors assembled the various opinions on this issue including the essay by Interlandi and responses by Marinetti and others.[22] While the editorial position of *Le Arti* was said to follow a "rigorously objective attitude," this objectivity was premised on a search for artistic movements that, according to the editors, genuinely reflected contemporary Italian politics and culture. The assumption was that "only through judgment, which is knowledge, will it be possible to distinguish real originality, a new and historically justified reality, from fictitious reality."[23] This approach is clearly reflected in an essay by Bottai in the same issue of the journal entitled "Modernity and Tradition in Today's Italian Art." In directly referencing modern art and the contemporary political issue of race, he warns that "this relationship does not act so much between art and race, in its most current and accepted biological significance, as between the *concept* of art and the *concept* of race, which . . . enunciates the new consciousness that Italy has of itself, of its own traditions, its own civilian mission."[24] According to this view, modern art would express the concept of race to the extent that it was an integral part of Fascist culture. Thus, rather than residing in the nationality or racial origin of the artist, it was subsumed into the broader expression of the Italian (and modern) tradition of the artwork.

In reflecting on the problem of modern art as it was discussed during the Italian racial campaign, there emerged two distinct lines of critique in the writings of Pensabene, Interlandi, and others—one that focused on the artist, as bourgeois, Jewish, and decadent, and a second that concentrated on the artwork itself, on its *ebraizzazione*, that is, its racial impurity. It is in this second category, which deals with the internal rules of the artwork—in short, its style—that the relationship between art and race can be best understood. The goal of commentators like Pensabene was to invoke a eugenic process within the discipline of art—thereby eliminating the external influences whether they be Jewish, African, or otherwise foreign to the Italian peninsula. This critical debate was actualized through the state bureaucracies whose responsibility it was to control or otherwise judge artistic production through direct intervention in the educational system or through competitions. As historian Marla Susan Stone argues, there was a battle for culture in Italy that shaped the processes and outcomes of state patronage during what she identifies as the most restrictive phase of Fascist official culture, between 1937 and 1943.[25] Indeed, it was especially by means of institutional mechanisms, such

as the National Fascist Syndicate of Fine Arts (1927–1943), and art competitions, such as the Premio Cremona (1939–1941), that artistic taste in late 1930s Italy was shaped eugenically.

In architecture, there was a similar racialization of critical discourse, tied to the long history of condemnation of international influences by conservative critics like Marcello Piacentini, which dated back to the founding manifestoes of Italian rationalism of 1926–1927.[26] In his review of the First Italian Exhibition of Rationalist Architecture, which was held in Rome from March 29 to April 30, 1928, Piacentini made a not-so-subtle connection between the exhibition and the first Communist International.[27] He then rebuked the participating architects for their relation of the beautiful with the structural, as well as their use of foreign elements such as flat roofs and horizontal windows, which he called "the new international drugs of architecture." In commenting on the rationalist approach to architecture, he further scolded these architects, stating: "Let us leave these dry and metaphysical speculations to the men of the North."[28] The racial connotations of this line of criticism were explicitly stated in a separate essay by Piacentini from 1931, which argues that the search for a properly national expression for modern architecture was dependent upon "the questions of climate, of the temperament of the various races, and of the traditions of the civilizations."[29]

This racialized critique escalated through the course of the 1930s through a series of public competitions, such as the two-stage design competition for the Palace of the Fascist Party in Rome (1934–1937). In a morning session of the Chamber of Deputies on May 26, 1934, Alberto Calza Bini, secretary of the National Syndicate of Fascist Architects, took the floor in support of a bill to fund public improvements to the site of the competition. During the course of this rather animated session the work of the younger generation of Italian architects was openly disparaged by prominent members of the chamber, such as former party secretary Roberto Farinacci, who bellowed with unwavering conviction that "modernism is finished!"[30] Reporting on these events in the pages of *Casabella* in June 1934, editor Giuseppe Pagano admonished the members of the Chamber of Deputies for "the same old ridiculous and demagogic stone throwing against 'exoticism,' against 'architectural leveling,' against 'modernist abortions,'" while sarcastically thanking them for providing a "cold shower" to modern architects.[31] This wake-up call included numerous references to the danger of external influences that need to be considered for their racial overtones, such as a final speech by Francesco Giunta, who protested against "Teutonic architectural trends" while pleading, "We must not end by importing from other people too distant from us in spirit, in origins, in traditions."[32]

This line of critique was extended in the "Balance Sheet of Rationalism" of Piacentini, as the criticism of foreign influence in that essay was set against the

backdrop of the Italian racial campaign. In this context, he argues that the positive qualities of Italian rationalism—what he calls "the pursuit of simplicity, of clarity, and the predominance of the essentials of construction"—were offset by its errors and misjudgments, such as its employment of "large windows better suited to Nordic countries."[33] Beyond his continuing disparagement of international, and in particular northern, influences, it is important to note that Piacentini offers an operative reading of Italian rationalism through a racial lens. Indeed, there are unquestionably some broader motivations in his praise of rationalism's "return to rhythm" and "value of proportions"—something he believed would lead it to "the fundamentals of great ancient architecture."[34] These arguments were followed in a second essay in *Il Giornale d'Italia*, which describes an architectural renewal found in "the fundamental forms of our spirit and our race."[35] In this context, turning to the "divine harmony, the clarity, the nobility" associated with the best aspects of Italian rationalism ultimately meant a "return to the great Roman conceptions." Piacentini also advocated the use of material and products that, in his words, "our soil produces" instead of things from abroad, which was an argument that directly reflected the Mediterranean racial theories of the time.[36]

It is important to note, though, that accusations against Jews, northern Europeans, and the Bolsheviks were not limited to politically reactionary critics. As architectural historian Richard Etlin has noted, there was an "internecine warfare" among the ranks of rationalist architects during the racial campaign. For instance, the architect Giuseppe Terragni charged that *Casabella* editor Pagano was either Jewish or a Jewish sympathizer.[37] However, the opposition between realism and subjectivity found in the criticism of modern art was rather more nuanced in the case of rationalist architecture, which from the beginning proclaimed that "the new architecture" was based on logic and rationality.[38] Nevertheless, just as in the arts, the reactionary decisions that defined the identity of a modern architecture for the Fascist state—which inevitably led to a racial idea of ancient renewal—were strictly applied by members of the various state bureaucracies that presided over public projects as well as the juries that were part of the public competition processes. As a result, architectural taste during the late-Fascist era was similarly shaped along eugenic lines.

An Architecture of Racial Purification

Just over one year prior to the passing into law of the "Provisions for the Defense of the Italian Race" by the Fascist government, a public competition was held for the design of the Piazza e gli edifici delle Forze Armate, the initial stage being held between October 25, 1937, and February 21, 1938.[39] This was the last of four major public competitions held for the most important permanent buildings and public spaces for the Esposizione Universale di Roma. As an "Olympics of

Civilization," the E42 was intended to assert the historical and contemporary importance of Italian culture on a world stage, and thus legitimize Mussolini's geopolitical ambitions. Like the world's fairs of the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries—which historian Charles Rydell argues were hegemonic efforts to convey social and technological progress "laced with scientific racism"—the E42 offered a "symbolic universe" that would affirm Italian cultural, technological, and racial superiority to its domestic and foreign visitors.[40] This broad purpose was described in the initial proposal by Giuseppe Bottai as intended "to highlight all of the progress and all of the discoveries of over twenty-seven centuries of human activity."[41] However, in contrast with the metropolitan and colonial displays at the 1931 Paris Exposition coloniale internationale, which Patricia Morton argues attempted to maintain racial hierarchies in the face of the threat of hybridity, this imperial exhibition was almost exclusively preoccupied with the problem of a "pure" Italian identity. In this regard, a more pertinent comparative is the German Pavilion at the 1937 Paris Exposition internationale, whose recourse to the antique in its architecture and statuary, art historian Karen Fiss argues, reflected "the National Socialist ideal of beauty and racial purity."[42]

In the case of the Piazza e gli edifici delle Forze Armate, racial purity was thematized in the descriptive language of the call for entries, formalized in the design constraints of the competition, and strictly enforced by the jury and through subsequent oversight by the Architecture, Parks, and Gardens Service of the E42. The broad expectations for the competition were conveyed in the call for entries, which stated that "even in the most modern functional forms, the basis of architectural inspiration must be the classical and monumental sentiment in the pure sense of orientation of the spirit."[43] This idealist vision subsumed functionalism to the apparent inner spirit of the design. The competition called upon its entrants to "express the essential characteristics of Roman and Italian architectural art in the masses and in the bold and imposing lines" of their designs.[44]

This eugenic approach was given more concrete expression in the urban design guidelines and programmatic requirements in the call for entries. The project was to be located on a piece of high ground at the eastern terminus of an east-west axis that crossed the central artery of the E42, the Via Imperiale. The three buildings were to be arranged to create a "constructed environment" for the Italian armed forces, responding to "the need to create an organic and unified composition."[45] The detailed program of the buildings was intended to glorify the past and present accomplishments of the Italian military. Each branch was to be represented through a narrative of its development as well as an impassioned display of sacrifice: the Edificio del R. Esercito featured a "solemn temple of the glories of Italian warriors," the Edificio della R. Marina incorporated the memorabilia of the navy, and the Edificio della R. Aeronautica included a shrine to heroes of the

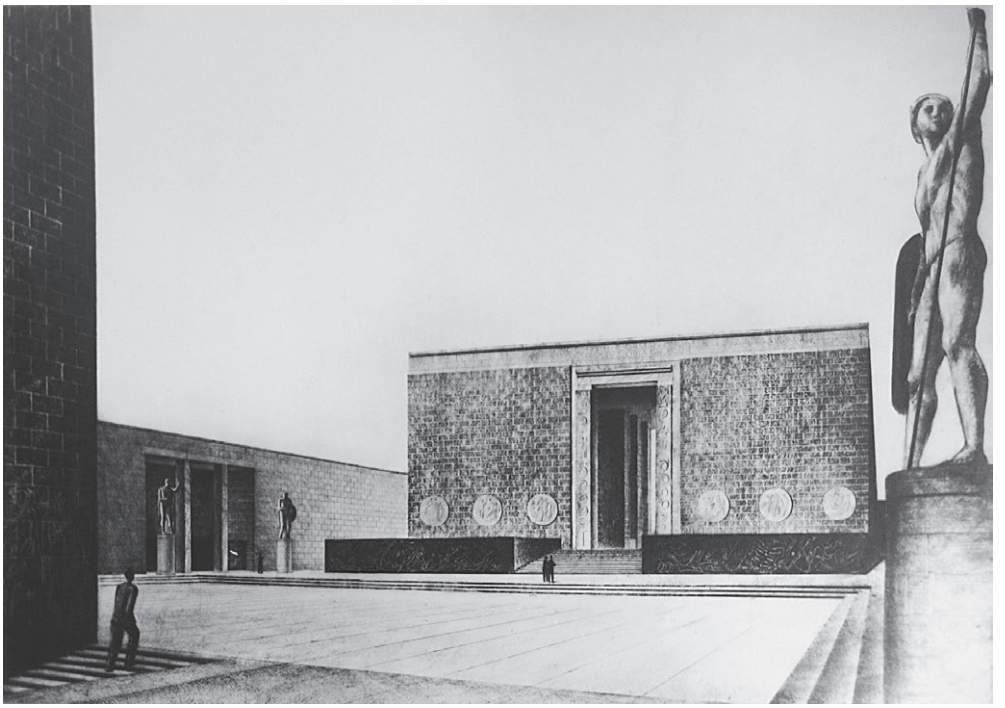

Fig. 9.1 Mario De Renzi, Piazza e gli edifici delle Forze Armate, Stage I, 1938. View. *Architettura* 17, Special edition (December 1938): 889. Author's collection.

air force.[46] Notably, all of the Italian armed forces were compelled to trace their origins back to the Roman period.

This strong direction was supported by the input of the jury, which presided over this process. It was chaired by Cipriano Efisio Oppo, a painter and art critic with strong nationalist sentiments who was vice president of the E42. The attitude and aesthetic values of the jury are evident in their decision making, as well as in the input they provided to the competitors, which tended to favor proposals that created a sequential, axial experience. This compositional preference is evident in the positive jury comments for the first stage proposal by De Renzi, which was praised for its "exceptional sculptural strength and nobility of design," and the criticism of the entry by Pollini for the fact that it lacked "the requested emotions of grandeur and strength that only a powerful organization of architectural masses can produce"[47] (figure 9.1).

The continuing refinement of the projects by the competitors demonstrates how administrative structures were able to significantly reshape public projects in the late Fascist era. In his second stage proposal, De Renzi made a significant shift in the approach to his design, ultimately configuring three main buildings to frame an urban space, and placing the Edificio del R. Esercito as the central element. According to the jury, the resulting grouping created a "strict, steady rhythm

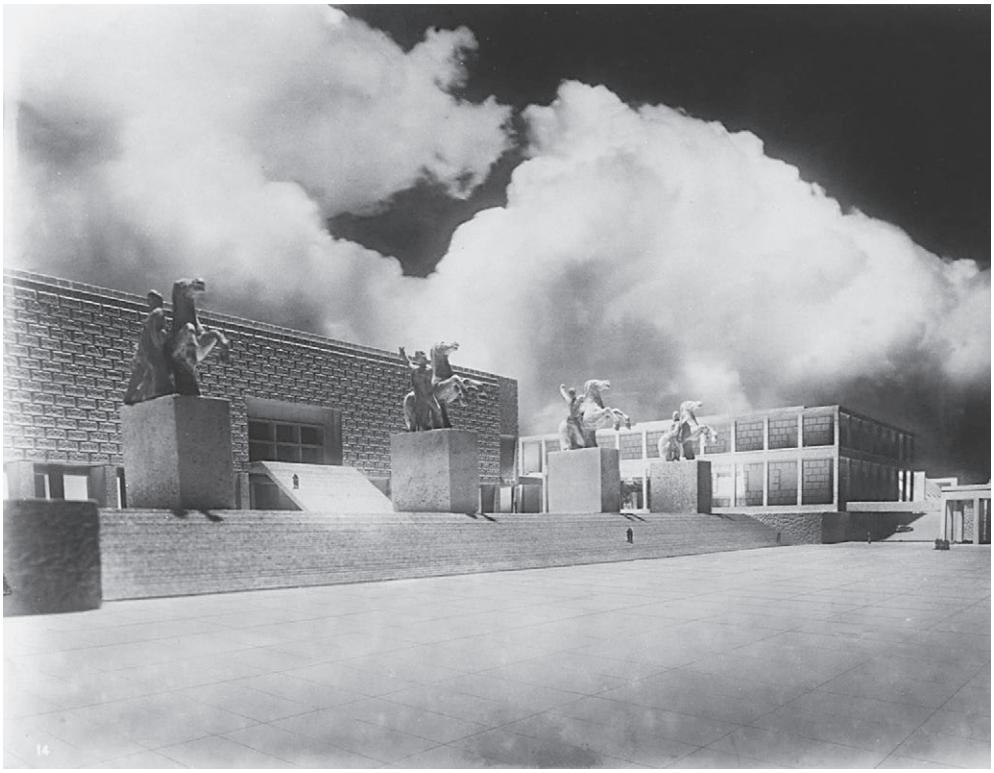

Fig. 9.2 Gino Pollini, Piazza e gli edifici delle Forze Armate, Stage II, 1938. View of model. Courtesy of Museo di Arte Moderna e Contemporanea di Trento e Rovereto, Fondo Gino Pollini.

that, rather than generate monotony, made a powerfully expressive composition."[48] The jury was equally positive about the stage two submission of Pollini, which offered a large square divided into two distinct spaces—one for larger assemblies and rallies and a second that was more intimately framed by the three buildings. Following the review of the stage two proposals, the jury decided to award the first prize and commission to De Renzi and Pollini. The directions given to the two architects was quite clear: the form of the buildings and their positioning would be De Renzi's, and the internal arrangement would come from Pollini (figure 9.2).[49]

As these results demonstrate, the desire expressed in the call for entries for the architects to express "the essential characteristics of a Roman and Italian architectonic art" became more than just a subtle directive—it was an operative demand that the jury enacted through the competition process.[50] This approach also characterized the continuing refinement of the project under the management of the E42. Under the supervision of Marcello Piacentini, director of the Architecture, Parks, and Gardens Service, not only were these architects to merge their two projects into a single scheme, they were called upon to respond to the economic demands of its construction and a change in program. The revised project reacted to the budget constraints by shortening the two wings that frame the central urban

space by thirty meters—resulting in a more focused and centralized design.[51] In the case of the program, which saw the Edifici delle Forze Armate become the Edifici delle Comunicazioni e Trasporti (Communications and Transport Buildings) as part of a redefinition of the E42 master plan, the highly charged narrative and symbolic program of the former design gave way to the creation of a more ordinary and conventional exhibition building.[52] When looking at the full evolution of the project up to December 1938 it seems clear that there was a process of refinement that resulted in the emulation of Italy's ancient sources, and that gave rise to stifling circumstances of an artistic climate that Stone describes as a "historicist, coercive, and censored patronage style."[53] No less so than with the artwork of the times, the building project of De Renzi and Pollini was a reification of Italy's racial laws, which—anxious to extinguish the perceived danger of miscegenation—sought refuge in a pure Italian race (figure 9.3).

Autarchy in Architecture

Not only did the Italian racial campaign provoke an intense debate concerning the identity of modern Italian architecture, one that intimately connected it to the idea of racial purity, it foregrounded the architectural, and in particular material, implications of the already well-established campaign for autarchy. Although latent within many of Fascism's early economic, political, and cultural views, this policy was first presented by Mussolini in a speech to the National Assembly of Corporations on March 23, 1936—less than two months before the end of the Ethiopian conflict and his declaration of an Italian empire.[54] Looking back at this speech, there seems an exact parallel between his argument that the defense of the nation required an autonomous Italian economy free from foreign authority, and the contentious rhetoric proclaiming the importance of protecting the Italian race from foreign influences. In fact, as Gillette has noted, the idea of genetic purity in Italy was tied to racial autarchy—a specious notion proffered by Mussolini that although Italians were deemed to be members of the Aryan race, they constituted an autonomous racial subgroup that had not changed since Roman times.[55] As Stone argues, this political policy had an exact parallel in the regime's support of cultural autarchy, where all forms of expression were "based only on elements authentically Italian and Fascist."[56]

While there was no immediate discussion of the implications of this policy on architecture, in December 1937, an article entitled "Aspects of the Problem of Autarchy in the Construction Field" appeared in the Milanese professional journal *Rassegna di Architettura*.[57] This essay is somewhat typical of the economic and technical interpretation of autarchy in architecture, which was largely concerned with the supply and cost of modern materials like steel and reinforced concrete. This situation changed with the beginning of the Italian racial campaign in the

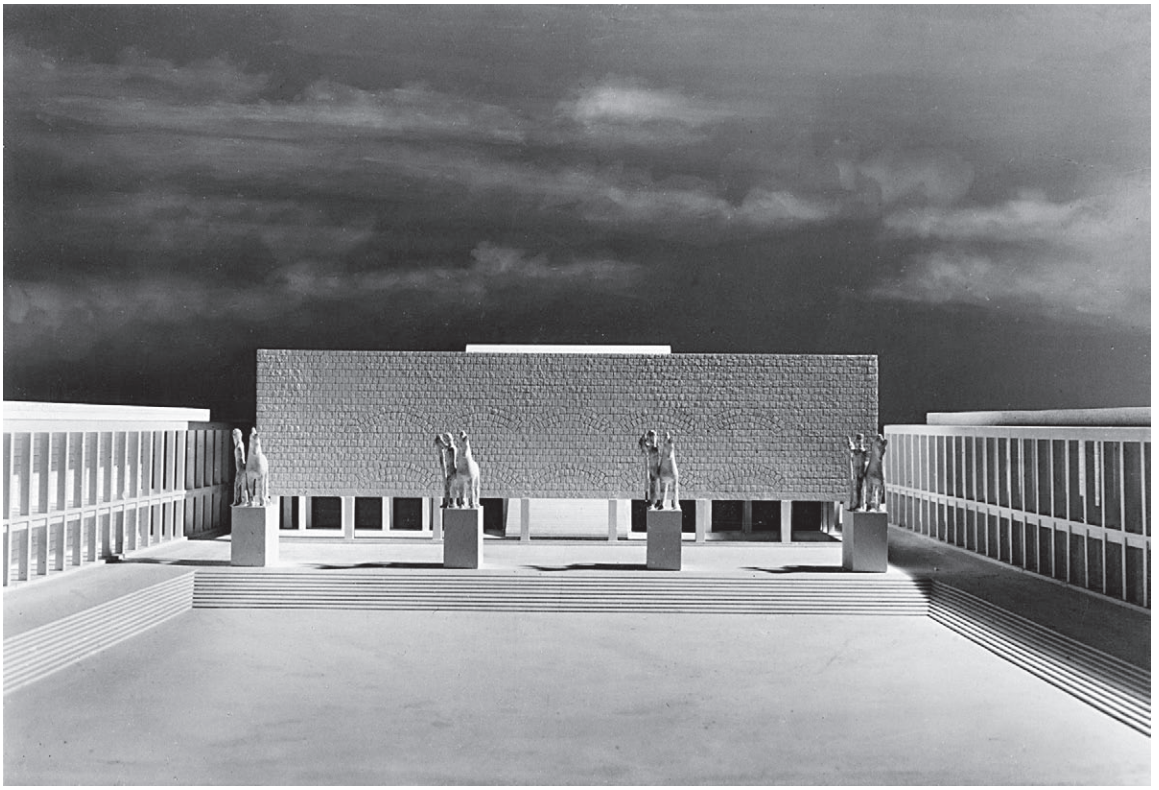

Fig. 9.3 Mario De Renzi and Gino Pollini, Edifici delle comunicazioni e trasporti, 1938. View of model. Courtesy of Archivio Centrale dello Stato, Carte Gaetano Minnucci, Buste 142, Fascicolo 258, Sottofascicolo 2, photo 1724.

fall of 1938. In an essay "Architecture of the Italian Race," rationalist architect Carlo Enrico Rava argues that the "principle of race" was "a natural corollary to the great autarchic battle to which every aspect of the life of the Nation is committed."[58] He further contends that being called to use "construction materials that are all and only Italian" would allow architects to attain a character that is "spiritually, politically and racially" Italian.[59] It is important to note, however, that not all architects viewed this issue in the same light. In the September and October 1938 issues of *Casabella*, Pagano offers a blistering critique of the policy and its negative influence on modern Italian architecture.[60] In this discussion, Pagano maintains that there was an unresolvable conflict between "our premises of pride in modesty, of honesty and of clarity" and what he called "the pomp of the rationalized monumental"—a direct slight against Piacentini for his influence on the site and buildings of the Esposizione Universale di Roma.[61]

It was in this highly contentious context that De Renzi and Pollini began the last phase of design of the newly renamed Edifici delle comunicazioni e trasporti. In this effort, these architects were attempting to reconcile their initial design with the demands that were coming from the E42.[62] This already difficult process was

further impacted on September 3, 1939, when Germany entered World War II.[63] As the architects would later write in a letter to the Architecture, Parks, and Gardens Service, in September 1939 they began what was essentially a new project. This revised design was, they wrote, "based on constructive characteristics completely different from those of the first project (structure in masonry rather than reinforced concrete), and for which a completely different architectural expression was required."[64] In addition, the E42 was in the midst of a major revision to the master plan. As a result, the Edifici delle Comunicazioni e Trasporti became part of the Italian City of the Corporate Economy, which with no small amount of irony included the Exhibition of Autarchy. However, in examining the evolution of the design by De Renzi and Pollini, the transformation of the building had less to do with the change in program than with the political pressures of autarchy under the wartime conditions—which resulted in a building that was described as a "renewal of the classical tradition in modern Italian architecture."[65]

In the project's final iteration as the Edifici del Corporativismo, dell'Autarchia e dell'Assistenza e Previdenza Sociale, the frame became the dominant element, with travertine used in the wall cladding as well as in the freestanding columns. This material selection supported the formal approach of the project, that is, the material addressed a specifically Italian (and Roman) identity while also reflecting its autarchic character. As noted in an essay on the use of marble and travertine at the E42, not only did these materials represent a literal connection to Italy's past, but also they were the most Italian of materials, as travertine was quite literally drawn from quarries throughout the country.[66]

Under the pressure of the policy of autarchy, the reinforced concrete frame that in Italian rationalism referenced both modern and classical traditions had surrendered to a trabeated structure comprised of fully embodied travertine columns. Despite the fact that this compromise was simply a product of a change in the construction system of the building, its result was quite profound. The expression of the central pavilion of the grouping, which was originally a powerfully blank facade with blind relieving arches, had given way to a classical frame that rendered that central pavilion as a statically composed temple structure. For all three buildings, the dramatic and expressive play between solid and void that existed in the original proposals by De Renzi and Pollini had ceded to a more neutral expression arising from the rhythm of the repetitive structure. Not only did the implementation of protectionist economic policies lead to the sublimation, in a material sense, of architectural expression as marble replaced concrete, but also it caused the racialization of architectural principles that led, in the case of the Edifici del Corporativismo, dell'Autarchia e dell'Assistenza e Previdenza Sociale, to a silent and lifeless version of the classical. Reflecting on this change, it would seem that the creative void that opened up within Italian society as a product of the Fascist

Fig. 9.4 Mario De Renzi and Gino Pollini, Edifici del Corporativismo, dell'Autarchia e dell'Assistenza e Previdenza Sociale, 1943. General view under construction. Courtesy of Archivio Centrale dello Stato, Carte Gaetano Minnucci, Buste 142, Fascicolo 258, Sottofascicolo 2, photo 4880.

pursuit of cultural autarchy had resulted in the complete loss of the expressive qualities of architecture (figure 9.4).

• • •

The last phase of evolution of the Edifici del Corporativismo, dell'Autarchia e dell'Assistenza e Previdenza Sociale during the wartime is perhaps most illustrative of the impact of racial eugenics on the architecture of the late Fascist era. Although the progress of construction at the E42 had gradually slowed, in the early months of 1942, almost two years into the wartime effort, the quota of steel to these projects was cut off and the supply of concrete was almost nonexistent.[67] By the end of the year it was reported that the progress of De Renzi and Pollini's project had halted, while for all buildings the construction was "practically paralyzed."[68] The issue of the labor force was especially problematic, as the workers, who were largely from the Roman *campagna* and beyond, had to return to their homes because of Allied air raids. During the course of Italy's participation in World War II, the worksite of the Esposizione Universale di Roma was gradually abandoned, facilitating its transformation in unforeseen ways. The photographs of

the project from this time show its desolation, poised somewhere between a construction site and a ruin. In Foucault's discussion of biopower he describes the function of racism as being "to fragment, to create caesuras within the biological continuum" and ultimately to establish "the break between what must live and what must die."[69] In considering these thoughts relative to the impact of Fascism's state-sponsored program of racism on architecture, what Foucault describes as "the elimination of the biological threat" was perhaps tied, in the Edifici del Corporativismo, dell'Autarchia e dell'Assistenza e Previdenza Sociale, to the death of modern Italian architecture.