Milano 1960: The language of Luigi Caccia Dominioni

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Lise Standaert                 Ghent, June 2012

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1. Introduction

In this dissertation the former spirit of Milan in the sixties will be investigated, more particular zoomed in on the architect Luigi Caccia Dominioni. Research will be done on his architectural language, how it reacts on a specific space and time and which value it may have in our contemporary setting. My Erasmus during the first semester of this year in Milan, was an ideal opportunity to study this topic and gave me the chance to fully immerse myself in the living environment of Dominioni.

The image of the city of Milan as it is known today, is the result of the rapid modernisation processes and the strong economic boom of the postwar period. In the sixties, the city became Italy’s epicentre of production and trade, and the centre of all financial operations. This resulted in a strong population growth and created a significant social change. As a consequence, Milan became a very heterogeneous city where rich and poor, old and new, residential and industrial coexist in a tense relationship. This ambiguity created an interesting basis for many architectural experiments. The sixties can be seen as an entity where the architectural conditions remained nearly identical, which cannot be said about the architectural responses to it. Although these experiments were a set of diverse dialects, the common thread will always be the search for an appropriate language that fits the new modern image without losing touch with tradition.

An emblematic person in this architectural debate is Luigi Caccia Dominioni. During his career, he constructed a remarkable new style, responding to the local climate and issues. Moreover, his style was rooted in an ideal of the Lombard language and added with the knowledge of more recent tendencies and the constructive, technical innovations. Although Dominioni is rather unknown, with his exceptional architectural works he has left a powerful mark in Milan that influences the city until today. His projects always integrate with the existing historical context and even though some of his buildings are fifty years old, they are still surprisingly modern and accurate. Therefore, it is interesting to look how he responded to a given time and space and more specifically to the language he used in his residential buildings. These residential buildings are the result of a search for new modern ways of living without losing quality, topics that are still relevant in this current era of densification and mass production.
2. Methodology

Since the topic of Luigi Caccia Dominioni had been forgotten for a long time and the interest was only fuelled recently, there are few recent documents available. Therefore, an important aspect of this master thesis was executing research work in the historical archives of the Politecnico di Milano. The resulting bibliography is divided into two parts. One section consists only the texts regarding the topic of Dominioni and the other the general texts that I have read to gather more information about the general architectural climate.

This bibliography can be used as a first instrument to analyse the work of Dominioni. The main sources are architectural magazines such as Casabella and Domus. These magazines had and still have and important influence on the critical architectural discourse. In fact they also had a great impact on career of Dominioni. From the bibliography it appears clearly that Dominioni was a prominent figure in the critical discourse until the end of the sixties. Even though important writers such as Gio Ponti and Ernesto Nathan Rogers endorsed the quality of his architecture, Luigi Caccia Dominioni fell into oblivion after the 60s. It would take until an article of Fulvio Irace in the magazine Ottagono in 1988 that the interest in the architect is aroused.

The reason can be found in the fact that in the 70s there is a radical climate change in Milan. A new type of architectural figures emerge, reflecting the mid 70s position of new aims in architecture in line with the mass consumption of the new era. This results in the contempt for everything connected to ‘professionalism’. Professionalism implies that the architectural education should start with the basic understanding of the professional’s responsibilities towards civilisation, building users, and clients. However, according to that new generation, the architect and its architecture should always stay authentic and without any negotiation with the client. This new approach leads to a depreciation of architects like Dominioni, whose whole architectural discourse is based on his clientele and their environment. This humanistic aspect is something that Dominioni always emphasises, for example in the following quote.

Quote 1: « E un servizio che lo ho sempre fatto per gli miei clienti, non e un lavoro che faccio per me, facchio per loro e allora sono sempre stato una persona honesta in questo senso, un architetto honesto chi a lavorato dell’interesse dei client »

« It (architecture) is a service that I always do in favour of my clients, I do not work for myself, I work for them and therefore, I have always been an honest person, an honest architect who worked in the interest of the clients »

1 IRACE, F., Il fascino discreto dell’architettura, “Ottagono”, n. 91, dicembre 1988, pp. 52-63
3 PATETTA, L., Alcune recenti opera del professionismo Milanese, “Controspazio”, n. 13, 1973
4 Interview with Fulvio Irace at the Politecnico
5 Interview Dominioni youtube: http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=2LqExUVolAc, 05/05/2012
During the 80s, writers initiated a revaluation to the years of new historicism where tradition was implemented in architecture as a medium to negotiate new forms of architecture. This brought architects such as Dominioni out of the darkness. It would take another ten years before the first book on the topic of Dominioni was published and the first international interest appeared in his work. Notice that this is still limited to a minimum.

In the bibliography on Dominioni there are only two articles that Dominioni wrote himself. This is a first indication of the fact that he considered architecture as an act in favour of his clients and not in favour of his own ego. This also resulted in the absence of a clear list or index of realised projects. Therefore, the next step in the research was creating a list of all Dominioni’s projects in Milan, followed by field visits to the different projects, resulting in the composition of an inventory. This inventory is not divided in chronological order but in thematic parts. On one hand this gives a clear overview of the extension of his language. On the other hand it indicates the logic of the recurrent themes that will be clarified during the thesis. Furthermore, this division also gives a clear indication of the enormous extension of his skills. Besides residential buildings, he also has the capacity to work on the very small scale, such as renovations, and on the large scale, with his designs for complete urban projects. The section of the residential buildings is divided in three different types, based on elements that have become clear during the literature review and the research.

An individual bibliography is included in the inventory, which immediately gives an indication of the awareness of the building.

As this inventory was a tool during the research, this thesis will contain references to specific buildings in the list to illustrate certain elements more clearly.

This inventory is also publicized on the site of professor Postiglioni: http://www.lablog.org.uk/tag/caccia-dominioni-archi-map/

Besides field visits and the literature study, information was also gained during the lessons of ‘Storia dell’architettura e dello spazio abito nel novecento’ of professor Augusto Rossario and during conversations with Fulvio Irace, with Carlotta Zucca of the office of Caccia Dominioni and Beppe Zucca and with an employee of Azucena.

The dissertation is divided into two parts. The first part can be seen as a reconstruction of the story of the life of Dominioni complemented with the general tendencies in Milan that created the setting of Dominioni’s operations. This is an important introduction because the spirit of that time and place will influence every aspect of his work.

The second part consists of an in-depth study of his language, more specifically applied to his residential buildings. These residential buildings are a new kind of typology, characterizing for both the post war period of Milan as for Dominioni. Therefore, those buildings are interesting objects to study. The first
part of chapter two is a small introduction on this new type of residential buildings. Subsequently, the focus is shifted to four different aspects of his language, which are discussed according to the chronological order Dominioni proceeds during his design process. The first aspect is ‘contesto’, the Italian word for context, which explains the different facets that Dominioni takes into account as a basis for every single project. The next step of his process of designing is the development of the plan. The plans included are reconstructions of plans found in the different magazines. By drawing the plans and façades, an additional insight was gained about different aspects of Dominioni’s language that would not have been clear by just looking at it. Connecting the plans with pictures of the interior will explain the different concepts that are at the basis of every plan composition. The section of volumetry will discuss the bigger picture of the building while the section of the façade will go more in depth into the singular details of the building. These details will be explained by the means of pictures and drawings.
3. Towards the climate of Milan in the 60s: between crisis and continuity
3. Towards the climate of Milan in the 60s: between crisis and continuity

3.1 Introduction

The language of Luigi Caccia Dominioni will be strongly influenced by the prevailing climate he operates in, namely Milan of the sixties. Furthermore, just as the climate of the sixties is not an isolated fact but influenced by the many years that preceded that period, Dominioni was to be influenced by the years that preceded his architectural career. Therefore, this section will highlight the main aspects and movements that have determined both the youth as the career of the architect.

3.2 The prewar period

3.2.1 The architectural setting of Dominioni’s childhood

3.2.1.1 Introduction

Italy enters the 20th century as a new political independent state, unified by the ‘Risorgimento’ in 1870. All former states, some of which were under the reign of Austria, were united, which announced the creation of Italy as the country known today. The young nation continues on the foundations of the 19th century with a sense of nostalgia for the political and the artistic power of the former heydays. This results in all the different forms of art in the recourse to many classical elements, which subsequently are converted into a romantic architectural language that is sometimes accused of being eclectic.

In this setting, Luigi Caccia Dominioni is born on December 7th in 1913, in a noble family, as the son of a lawyer and old-mayor of Morbegno. He is raised in the centre of Milan, in the palazzo that belonged to the family Dominioni for decennia. Casa Dominioni is situated at Piazza Sant’ Ambrogio, which is considered to be an important historical place in the centre of Milan. According to Vercelloni it is the ‘the vein of the complex Milanese tradition’. The fact that he grew up in a prosperous family, in a very historic setting will be reflected in every single aspect of his later career as an architect.

The youth of Dominioni is characterised by the appearance of two major architectural movements that will each have their influences on the architectural practice of the architect. On the one hand there is the traditional movement of the Novecento and on the other hand, the more progressive Rationalistic movement.

6 ‘Il Risorgimento’: the Italian unification, a political and social movement that agglomerated different states of the Italian peninsula into the single state of Italy in the 19th century

7 Morbegno is one of the main villages of the Valtellina, a mountain valley in North Italy. Dominioni will spend the whole period during the First World War and his vacations over there.

8 IRACE, F., MARINI, P., Luigi Caccia Dominioni – Case e Cose da abitare, Venezia: Marsilio Editori, 2002

9 CIMOLI, A.C., Casa Caccia Dominioni

9 VERCCELLONI, V., Caccia Dominioni o il prestigio del gelateo, “Superfici”, n.1, 1961, pp. 68-71
3.2.1.2 The Novecento Movement: a rehabilitation of the memory

The Novecento movement was founded in 1922 as a reaction on the revolutionary ideas of the futuristic movement. During the First World War, people had suffered enough under revolutionary ideas, and were longing for a return to a more conservative approach, which initiates a new classist attitude. Notice that this tendency is completely the opposite of what was developing in the other parts of Europe with the rise of the modernistic movement, influenced by European masters as Gropius, Le Corbusier and van der Rohe.

The name of the movement reflects the fact that its members vote for an updated revival of 19th century design, referring in that way to the great former periods of Italian art. This postwar call for order is likely the result of the former disordered political and socio-economic situation. Therefore, they reincarnate established values and structures of bygone eras. Although this reincarnation praises the unity of a glorious past, there is no clear unity to distinguish in their architectural practice. This reincarnation, either on artistic, literal or architectural level, can be interpreted liberally, because there is a lack of a clear artistic program or main artist, which results in a combination of many different styles.

References are made, among others, to the style of the Middle Ages with references to Palladio and the Roman Baroque. Furthermore, there are also some influences visible from the former ruler Austria. For example, the re-interpretations of the Wiener Secession and the introduction of Adolf Loos in Milan by architects as Gio Ponti and Giuseppe De Finetti. Although some say that this revival of Loos is mostly based on the purely decorative values, it will be possible to make other references in the architecture of Dominioni. The members that had the greatest impact on Dominioni are Giovanni Muzio, Piero Portaluppi and Gio Ponti. Muzio is one of the founding members, who developed a timeless Lombard classical language, highly appreciated by Dominioni. The influences of Muzio, Portaluppi and Ponti will be clarified during this dissertation.

3.2.1.3 The Rationalistic movement

The Milanese Neoclassistic group of veterans was not the only call for a new direction in architecture, opposed to futurism. There was also another movement that took a more progressive path. A young group of Lombard architects announced in 1926, in the magazine Rassegna Italia, the birth of the foundation of ‘Gruppo 7’ with the architects Castagnoli (later replaced by Libera), Figini, Frette, Larco, Pollini, Rava and Terragni. They were all graduated from the Politecnico di Milano. This group is/was regarded as the most important fraction of the Italian rationalism.

Their architectural language can be seen as an intermediate attitude between the nationalistic values of the classical approach and the industrial inspired futurism. They rejected the decorative and traditional approach of the Novecento, which they
accused of being eclectic and an arbitrary simplification based on personal preferences. Furthermore, they rejected the expressive, vital and irrational character of the futurists, in favour of a clear, new and rational architecture.  

Although their language, abstract and geometric, can be related to the modern movement, the rationalist thinkers are opposed to internationalising tendencies. Therefore, they emphasise heavily on the regional and national identity of architecture. As a result, they don’t completely break with tradition, but unlike the traditional approach of the Novecento, they have the prophecy to connect with the tradition of a new, changing society which reflects better the new climate and environment. In this changed climate, they want to implement architecture as a mediator that has to communicate the aesthetic consciousness and the new needs of a new community.

According to their manifesto, the presence of a new society asks a new approach of producing architecture. They are convinced that in an era of mass production it is outdated for architecture to have an individual focus. Instead, architecture should be produced in series, each time improving and more elaborated according to the new improved techniques and machines that are invented to answer new demands. This serial production should also strip everything that is not essential, which resulted in omitting everything that could slow down the building process or make the construction more expensive. Classic components as cornices, thresholds, plinths and balustrades are left out, in favour of smooth surfaces and sharp edges. Furthermore, this more minimalistic approach also applies better to the goal to build economical and fast for a new growing society.

3.2.1.4 Conclusion

From various exhibitions and magazines it appears that the two previous directions are totally opposed to each other and subsequently incompatible. In fact those two movements, the one more revolutionary than the other, are reacting on the same linguistic problems of expressing a new atmosphere.

In line with Loos who blended a classical style with a more rational approach, there is also the combination of these two schools in some cases during the Fascistic period in Milan. This results in an intermediate zone and prevents the establishment of exclusive boundaries. A clear example of this tendency is Piacentini who makes references to the classical orders but in a rationalistic execution.

Although Dominioni may have a different architectural language than Piacentini, this example should illustrate that not everything can be strictly classified and that the architectural debate is much more complex. This background of complexity and duality is an indispensable basis to discuss the person of Dominioni. Although Dominioni is situated between Italian rationalism and the more classical culture, these two tendencies will be complemented with other influences as will becomes clear in the discussion of the later stages of his life.

15 http://www.architectenweb.nl/aweb/archipedia/archipedia.asp?ID=177, 03/05/12
3.2.2 Education

In this setting dominated by two strong architectural schools, Dominioni enrols, in 1931, at the Politecnico di Milano. He follows in the footsteps of many famous architects such as the ones of Gruppo 7 and the famous quartet of BBPR that graduated two years earlier than Dominioni. Among his classmates are some other famous architects such as Ignazio Gardella, the brothers Castiglioni and Marco Zanuso. During his career he will repeatedly cross paths with many of them, but the ones he feels most connected to are Ignazio Gardella and BBPR.

Of many teachers he had, the only ones mentioned by Dominioni are Gaetano Moretti and Piero Portaluppi, both big masters of the Novecento. This is a good indication of the further career of Dominioni. Although the general tendency of the architectural language of the 30s is evolving towards rationalism, he will feel most connected to the ones characterized by holding on to a classical approach. The influences of these masters can be best described by Dominioni’s own words, mentioned in quote 2.

Quote 2 « In università di architettura si impara poco. Io lo so, io ho imparato dalle persone, non dalla scuola. (...) I nostri docenti, Moretti e Portaluppi, erano personaggi interessanti dal punto di vista umano, soprattutto ci hanno insegnato uno stile di vita, li stile delle persone, la serietà, lo spirito. » (LCD, 2009)

3.2.3 The first years of his professional career

In 1936, Dominioni graduates and obtains his professional accreditation in Venice, whereupon he immediately starts a professional studio together with the brothers Livio and Pier Giacomo Castiglioni. The three architects work together until 1942, when Dominioni dissolves the partnership based on political differences and because he considers that working alone will make him a more determined and better architect. After their separation, they each develop a complete different, personal architectural approach.

Together with the two brothers Castiglioni, his first professional years are mainly focused on object design. This activity as designer places him on the professional map by taking part in various exhibitions, such as the Triennale, and competitions where sometimes they gained the upper hand. One of the greatest achievements of this trio is the famous ‘Phonola 548’ transistor radio, which was officially presented at the Triennale in 1940. This radio is regarded as a milestone in the history of object design, it is considered as ‘Il primo apparecchio moderno’, the first modern device.
which was breaking with the past of large non-movable wooden radios and showing the new technical possibilities on the small scale. Due to the mobility and the small dimension of the radio, added with a complete aesthetic transformation, Guiseppe Pagano approvingly notes that the Phonola laid the foundation for the functional designed object\textsuperscript{22}. Furthermore, according to Sgarbi this is the herald of the physical appearance of an ironic kind of aristocratic elegance, which will be peculiar to Dominioni\textsuperscript{23}.

Dominioni is also known as designer for Alessi, particular for the design of cutlery, which is currently exhibited at the MoMA in New York.

Notice that today the architect/designer is still merely known, on the international scale, for his activities as a designer and not for his architectural accomplishments. One of the greatest confirmations of his career as a designer is the Compasso d’Oro\textsuperscript{24} award he received in 2008 for his complete oeuvre of object design.

This intensive design activity is interrupted by the forced call for military service from 1939 until 1943. In 1943 he flees to Switzerland, because he refuses to join the Social Republic of Salo\textsuperscript{25}, where he stays until the end of the war.


\textsuperscript{23} IRACE, F., MARINI, P., Luigi Caccia Dominioni – Case e Cose da abitare, Venezia: Marsilio Editori, 2002, p. 213

\textsuperscript{24} Compasso d’Oro award is the name of an industrial design award, initiated in Italy in 1954 by the Rinascente Company, which is the first and most recognized award in its field.

\textsuperscript{25} Repubblica Sociale Italiana or RSI, headed by Mussolini
Fig. 8: Luigi Caccia Dominioni
3.3 During the war

3.3.1 Time for reflection

The period during the war is characterised by a difficult climate where very little is built because of the lack of finances to develop new constructions. Dominioni regards this impasse as an opportunity to shift his focus on the smaller scale of interior design and the design of interior objects. As mentioned in quote 3, the influence of these studies and realizations are not to be underestimated, because they provide the basis and knowledge for nearly all of his later projects.

Quote 3 « Prima di realizzare delle costruzioni ho dovuto giocoforza per qualche anno occuparmi di arredamento, esercizio che mi è stato però molto utile più tardi; in un certo senso, attualmente io progetto primo l’arredamento e, in base a quello, la casa »

« Before realizing actual constructions, I clearly had to dedicate myself to furniture, an exercise that was very useful later, in a sense, that I actually first designed the furniture and, according to that, the house »

This expression made by Dominioni clearly demonstrates that the careers of Dominioni as a designer and as an architect are closely intertwined. This is the result of his ‘functionalist’ approach, according to Dominioni, the first task of a house is giving the inhabitants a pleasant accommodation to live in. Therefore, the basis of every room is to provide the objects necessary for the place in order to perform its function. An example is the living room where Dominioni always includes the minimal comfort of a chair to repose complemented by a lamppost to provide a source of light to read (fig.10 and fig.19) According to Dominioni this is directly related to the real human needs, which are always prioritised on both the scale of furniture as the architectural scale.

Dominioni calls himself a ‘pianista’, a planmaker. This is a self-invented neologism to express his personality and to express the basis of his activities, which is a constructor of plans and spaces. In that period, houses were diminishing in size, even for higher-class people. Therefore, Dominioni puts a lot of effort in analysing how to optimise small areas, giving them the right amount of space and light, enabling the inhabitant the best possible living quality. Notice that this quest for quality is a completely different approach than many architects of his time. While many architects are looking for some kind of basic requirements for a home, Dominioni tries to avoid this kind of ‘existenzminimum’ in order to reach an ‘existenzmaximum’. His clients are mainly people from the rising class of the bourgeoisie. Dominioni also belongs to this part of the community, which makes him fully aware of their lifestyle and needs. Although this bourgeoisie is a new upcoming class in a rapid transforming society, they want to remain closely linked to their roots. Therefore, Dominioni will always integrate elements in both his plans as in his furniture, that are closely related to the bygone time of old aristocracy of the 19th century.

28 Mentioned by Fulvio Irace during an interview at the Politecnico di Milano
Fig. 7: Design of plan and furniture
The result of these studies during the war and a perfect illustration of his commitment towards quality and his clients can be found in the foundation of the company ‘Azucena’. Therefore, this topic will be discussed in this section although the company will only be founded after the war.

Notice that the attention for design is not a singular fact for Dominioni, the postwar period initiates a ‘golden age’ for furniture and design in Milan. Furniture and design become the elements of spectacle on the Fiera’s and the Triennale. Furthermore, they are considered as the laboratories for new materials and production techniques. Engineers and architects are studying the possibilities of prefabrication and standardisation on the small scale, which is then also applied on architecture. Therefore, the influence of design and furniture on the period that follows the war is not to be undervalued both on the career of Dominioni as on the general climate of Milan.

3.3.2 The story of Azucena

From the moment Dominioni returns to his work as an architect in 1945, he faces the problem that he does not find the furniture appropriate for his clients and their homes. As mentioned in the previous paragraph, these clients are mainly people of the middle and the higher class. This is a new generation that looks for new aesthetic values to represent themselves and their houses. Therefore, Dominioni decides to manufacture the designs he made during the war himself. In 1947 the collaboration with a group of young Milanese architects and designers, Ignazio Gardella, Corrado Corradi Dell’Acqua, Maria Teresa and Franca Tosi, results in the foundation of the company Azucena. Azucena is a company that produces traditional furniture and design objects with a surprisingly modern touch. The company still exists and nowadays the collection consists of more than 150 products, of which about 85 per cent is originating from the hand of Luigi Caccia Dominioni.

The particularity of the company is the close connection between client, designer and producer, which was also the initial starting point. In the first years, many of the objects were designed and manufactured in close relationship with the client to fit the specific spaces. Although initially the piece of furniture was designed for a specific client and room, the models have been produced on a larger scale, eventually provided by some improvements or flexibility (e.g. scaling) to be adaptable to a different situation.

Since, the houses are getting smaller after the war, all space should be used optimally. Because the form, the size and the material of the objects can have a great impact on the room, Dominioni works everything out into the smallest detail. For example, he always designs round chairs because these give a smaller and more elegant impression and interfere less with the circulation paths. In addition, round chairs will always have the same composition and
direction, and will therefore always appear neat independently of how they are placed. Since Dominioni designs a room down to the smallest detail, the company has to produce every single object thinkable. The production consists of sofas, tables and chairs but also lampposts, and even door handles. With those objects Dominioni wants to create a space adapted to the new needs and wishes of the new households.

As in the general architectural field, those design objects have had a great influence on Dominioni’s architectural production. The company can be seen as a technical experimental laboratory where a lot of fine research was done on new and improved techniques. Many of these new techniques and principles will later return on the bigger scale in the buildings of Dominioni. For example the bold use of new materials, the refined techniques of polishing lacquering, the groundbreaking galvanic processes and the new bending techniques for steel. Taking the example of fig. 12, the Cavaletto table, one of the first productions of Azucena in 1947. The table looks surprisingly modern with a surprisingly slender and sophisticated structure. This structure is also reflected in the balconies of the office building at piazza Velasca. Furthermore, this refined example illustrates that the industrial processes are always complemented by the craftsmanship of the skilled artisan, namely Dominioni. The fact that everything is designed with refined taste and craftsmanship is reflected in every aspect in the construction of his buildings.
Opposed to the austere opacity of conventional interior objects, the objects of Azucena are carried out in lucid materials that reflect the incoming light, illuminating even the smallest rooms (fig.11). Those lucid new and modern materials are frequently combined with more traditional materials, which often gives a surprising effect. It simultaneously creates a sense of tradition by which the inhabitant can still feel to be connected to his roots.

All these aspects demonstrate the commitment of Dominioni towards his clients, which is also reflected in his architectural production. He always works in close contact with his clients and always works everything out to the smallest detail to obtain the best possible architectural atmosphere. As mentioned in quote 4, he will never start from some pre-imposed conditions, he will always be open to change and try to improve himself.

It should be mentioned that Dominioni’s interest in interior design and design of furniture makes him closely linked to the Neoliberty style. The Neoliberty is a revival that rises from the ashes of the Art Nouveau (Stile Liberty). Just as in the beginning of the 20th century when the Art Nouveau wanted to represent the new economic wealth and power of the new born state, the Neoliberty proposes a return to a more civic, bourgeois architecture. Opposed to
the rise of standardisation, it called for a return to a more local building tradition. It is an approach that indulges in a ‘rinnovamento del gusto’\textsuperscript{36}, the renewal of the importance of personal taste. By providing an extensive lexicon, it gives the opportunity to the young generation to experiment and design as free as possible outside the limits of the rigorous orthodoxy. This results in many cases into an eclectic, sensuous, highly decorative style\textsuperscript{37}. The results of this style are primarily found in interior design, the design of objects and of furniture.

Although Dominioni fits perfectly in the image of refined interior design and a more bourgeois architecture, he always states that his architecture and his designs are never purely ornamental. His furniture and his interiors are always the expression of the plastic and volumetric laws to create optimal and functional living conditions (e.g. the round chairs).

Therefore, the aesthetics of an area should always be the result the natural way of living, without being pre-imposed or fixed.

Furthermore, Dominioni states that the key to understanding the beauty of his industrial produced objects, is the fact that everything that is not absolutely necessary must be stripped away and that the object must be reduced to its bare essentials. Notice that this is the same reasoning as the rationalistic movement in paragraph 3.2.1.3. This expression shows that everything that is designed by Dominioni is based on functionality, but his objects prove that this does not mean that the result cannot be elegant. On the contrary the functionality of the object will even enhance its beauty\textsuperscript{38}.

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\textsuperscript{29} CONTIENE, I.P., Catalogo Mostra Architetti Verona - Bimestrale sulla professione di Architetto dell’Ordine degli Architetti Pianificatori Paesaggistie e Conservatori della Provincia di Verona

\textsuperscript{30} His personal friend, Vico Magistretti will also design some models for the company

\textsuperscript{31} http://www.animalidomestici.co.uk/artists/luigi-caccia-dominioni.html, 20/04/2012

\textsuperscript{32} LCD, 1963-1970, inventory pp. 53-55

\textsuperscript{33} Catalogue Azucena, Mobili e Oggetti

\textsuperscript{34} KIRK, T., The Architecture of Modern Italy, New York: Princeton Architectural Press, 2005, p. 159

\textsuperscript{35} N.N., Caccia: ovvero le cose come sono, “Stile”, n. 21, 1942, pp. 24-25


\textsuperscript{37} WATKIN, D., De Westerse Architectuur, Een geschiedenis, Roeselare: Roularta Books, 2001

\textsuperscript{38} N.N. Caccia: ovvero le cose come sono, “Stile”, n. 21, 1942, pp. 24-25
3.4 Postwar period

3.4.1 The exhausting conquest for democracy

After the war there is an international language appearing of brutalistic architecture and curtain walled buildings that spread itself as a homogeneous wind all over Europe. Italy opposes to this trend, trying to avoid generalisation and exploiting the new gained freedom, by aiming for an original and national identity. The insecure stance regarding the future that characterises the postwar period creates a romantic feeling and some kind of desperation to return to tradition. This results in the quest for the creation of an Italian architectural language that reflects their nation, according to the changes in their culture and the evolution of the society, free from the former purist and monumental language, without breaking with history and tradition.

To see how postwar Italian architecture responded to both local and more general conditions it is important to outline the former spirit of the time and place. It is important to realise that the reconstruction after the war did not only covers rebuilding the urban tissue. The end of the war also marked the end of the fascistic era, which initiated a liberal period. During fascism everything was either forbidden or compulsory. After the war, there is no longer a law dictated, which results in a state of insecurity and anarchy. Although the bombing during the war has wiped complete historical grown centres off the map in some single seconds, one could say that the fascist period has disturbed an ancient concept of a coherent society, and therefore has maybe caused even deeper social and moral wounds than the material losses during the war. Therefore, one of the main problems of the new state is the lack of continuity and of a prepared older generation with the social experience of a coherent state.

The fact that the market was not regulated by clear and strict modern legislation, but by the involvment of the authorities, resulted in a sense of anarchy, which subsequently resulted in a severe speculation of both the land as the houses. This all results in a moral trial and the opportunity to reconsider certain values whose importance have been exaggerated in the romantic perspective of a policy aiming at autarchy, and in a reconstruction that wants to emphasise on the national consciousness and the popular values.

3.4.2 50s – 60s: the economic miracle

The liberation of the market together with export and technical evolution and rapid industrialisation, a market that a few years ago was still lagging behind the other European countries, knows a big and fast economic development. This rapid economic boom also known as ‘il Miracolo Economico’ is best visible in Milan, the epicentre of Italy’s industry and trade. On the one hand this industrial boom was only possible by the influx of a new labour force but conversely it also stimulated the migration. Milan knows a great influx of people from the south, the
‘Veneto’ and the countryside attracted by the great prosperity caused by both commerce and industry, which created a very heterogeneous society. Together with the destructions of the war this influx created the need for a large amount of new and economic housing.\textsuperscript{41}

Resulting from this population expansion there is also a significant spatial expansion of the city to be noticed. This expansion forms concentric circles of new developed property around the former small historic centre. Due to a state of anarchy caused by the political instability, it is not difficult for the private sector to develop itself in a liberal way, away from any rules, planning or order. Subsequently, the physical development of the city is heavily exposed to the laws of speculation, which is only interested in financial profit. This results in a city that is continuously developing itself ‘a l’improviste’. On the one hand in the new developed parts where the rise of the infrastructure and the housing units happens spontaneous without any imposed restrictions. On the other hand it parasitises on the old tissue of the city centre. This causes situations where the historical structure is completely scattered and therefore incapable to school itself in another way.\textsuperscript{42,43}

As a reaction, the city starts the introduction of the first city plans, which has particularly no bearing. And as a response to this incompetence there is the emergence of a critical class of singular committed architects with singular qualitative works, which will be discussed in the next section.\textsuperscript{44}

Another characteristic of this economic revival is the formation of a new social class, ‘la Borghese Milanese’. These are the real inhabitants of Milan as the catalytic centre of industry and financial transactions, namely entrepreneurs, intellectuals and technicians.\textsuperscript{45} Those new players on the building market need new typologies to satisfy their personal needs regarding living, entertainment and business. This results in the search for a new identity of housing typologies and in a new type of buildings for tertiary purposes, which will be the main focus of Dominioni’s career.\textsuperscript{46} The search for new typologies complemented by the shameless speculation results at the end of the 50s in the appearance of a completely new skyline, defined by rise of the first skyscrapers such as the Torre Velasca\textsuperscript{47} and the Pirelli Tower\textsuperscript{48,49}.

\section*{3.4.3 The architectural response}

\subsection*{3.4.3.1 From neorationalism towards neorealism}

Although on the threshold of the Second World War rationalism had taken a strong and stable position in the architectural debate, it will turn into a crisis after the war. This is caused by actions such as closing the magazine ‘Casabella’ by the government and by the decease on the field, of some established identities, such as Terragni, Banfi and Pagano at maybe the moment they were needed the most.\textsuperscript{50} This results in the rise of a new movement, the MSA, headed by Ernesto Nathan Rogers who sees this as an opportunity to solve previous deficiencies of the rational movement. Immediately
after the war he gathers a group of young architects as a defence against the revival of academism in favour for the continuation of the prewar rationalism that is subjected to a broader historical development. Their major challenge is not only producing a large amount of new building units, but mainly analysing the research question of how during an era of mass production it is possible to preserve or actually give a larger sense of community and life. Therefore, interdisciplinary research centres are created, focusing mainly on new quarters for cheap housing (conducted by INA casa\textsuperscript{52}). These quarters can be seen as interesting laboratories for testing ‘existenzminimum’, new architectural forms and formal proposals. Resulting from these researches there is the development of new typologies such as row houses, apartment blocks, and residential towers\textsuperscript{53}.

After the first years of the reconstruction, around 1950, when the most basic measures of the reconstruction are taken, the critic discourse shifts to an emphasis on the need to come in contact with the actual reality of the country. Before, the trials to express the changes of society in architecture resulted too many times in a complete rupture with continuity. The main problem is the fact that mass-production, industrialisation and generalisation in architecture is too monotonous, not linked to the reality of a place, and thus incapable of creating an appropriate language for an ambiguous nation and population. Subsequently new demands result in the need for new iconography and therefore demand a new type of architect. Due to these new demands a new movement arises in the fifties, ‘Neorealism’\textsuperscript{54}. This formation, of architects like Asnago & Vender, Magistretti, Albini, Ponti, Zanuso, Morasutti and Gardella and Luigi Caccia Dominioni, represents a new, second generation that starts thinking about modernity connected to tradition\textsuperscript{55,56}. Although they have a profound knowledge of history, they will never be slaves of their past. Instead, this generation looks at the past, not purely to imitate it, but to study it and to learn lessons from it, trying to create a contemporary figurative vocabulary with the knowledge of the social and functional aspect of construction. This results in a set of dialects that are extremely locally bound and interlaced with elements from everyday life. One of the most singular dialects can be found in the language of Luigi Caccia Dominioni who is one of the best examples to illustrate this movement\textsuperscript{57}. A great knowledge of history and the capacity to learn from his predecessors is something that is characteristic for the architect. Furthermore, he will always look at the reality of the location in which he must intervene. Therefore, he will never enforce a certain solution, but he will look for the most convenient answer for a specific place, time and function.

3.4.3.2 APAO: ‘Associazione Per l’Architettura Organica’

In the years directly following the Second World War there is also another important movement to
distinguish that can be linked to the projects of Dominioni.
The foundation of the ‘APAO’, Rome, which did not have a great tradition of rationalistic architecture, responds in another way than Milan to the established values of a neo-academism and the result of the all-absorbing speculation. The group is based on the book of Bruno Zevi ‘Verso un’architettura organica’ that introduces the principles of Frank Lloyd Wright in Italy. In the footsteps of Wright, they see organic architecture as a social, technical and artistic activity at the same time. Their main goal in architecture is to create a proper environment for a new democratic society, and is therefore the antithesis of neo-classicism and the representation of a monumental government subservient to the myths. Both on urban scale and architectural scale their main goal is to build for the human being, which means, shaped to human scale, according to all spiritual, psychological and material needs.

It is necessary to reflect this psychological approach with the Scandinavian influence of Nordic empiricism and existentialism introduced by architects as Max Ernst Häfeli, Werner Moser, Rudolf Steiger and Sigfried Giedion. These architects attach great importance to the notion of the interior space and its composition. The perspective of the users and their observations become one of the main aspirations and control the composition of the whole interior layout.

As will be described in section 4.3, of planimetry, Dominioni implements similar principles as the design instrument for the layout of his plan. The empirical side of the users’ perspective and the interior quality of the houses will be the main concern of the architect, something that is described by the words of Gio Ponti in the following quote:

« Una penetrazione psicologica, un riconoscimento psicologico del personaggio umano, l’abitore, nelle sue passion come dice il Caccia riconduce l’espressione razionale verso l’uomo e ci educa alle interpretazione psicologica nel servirlo (...) Diro ancora che questo nuovo atteggiamento, riconosce una basilare funzionalità, e ci libera dalle accademie formali. »

« A psychological penetration, psychological recognition of human character, of the inhabitant, as Caccia says, in his passion he leads the rational expression back to the human being and that teaches us to serve in the psychological interpretation (...) I will say that this new attitude, recognise a basic functionality, and frees us from the formal academics. »

(G. Ponti)

3.4.3.3 The architectural response of Luigi Caccia Dominioni

From the moment Dominioni returns to Milan, he continues his work as an architect. The first year he works together with his colleague Castiglioni, after which he opens his own studio at Piazza Sant’Ambrogio in 1946. His first commission was the renovation of this family palazzo, Casa Dominioni, which was destroyed by the bombing of the war. This renovation is his first actual architectural intervention and represents a founding
moment in the development of the poetics of the architect\textsuperscript{63}.
Since the building defines a kind of ‘grammar’ of his architectural language, to which he will remain faithful during his whole career, it is interesting to look at this building as some kind of introduction on all his following projects.

As mentioned before in paragraph 3.2.1 the building is located in the historic heart of the city. Dominioni answers to this loaded design assignment with a building that is embedded in the local tradition but with a personal stamp, by which it is not plain imitation of the past. The image that Dominioni creates is not new, but according to new techniques and intentions. He generates a building that perfectly fits the modern way of life, closely linked to the surrounding, historical context.

Comparing the pictures of the situation before the bombing and the one after the reconstruction performed by Dominioni clearly shows the similarities and the differences between the two buildings. (fig. 21 and fig. 22)
Although the building is raised with one floor, the volumetric impression is still the same. This is due to the similar calm composition of the façade and the

\textsuperscript{63}IRACE, F., Il fascino discreto dell’architettura, “Ottagono”, n. 91, dicembre 1988, pp. 52-63

\textsuperscript{64}D’AMIA, G., Luigi Caccia Dominioni, architecte milanais de l’après-guerre, “Moniteur architecture AMC”, n. 131, 2003, p. 26

\begin{quote}
\textsuperscript{6} ‘réinventer’ la tradition Milanese à travers une recherche passionnante et variée qui refuse toute convention et toute concession à la mode
\end{quote}

\begin{quote}
‘He 'reinvents' the Milanese tradition through an exciting and diverse research that rejects any agreement and any concession to fashion’
\end{quote}

(G. D’Amia) \textsuperscript{64}
similar proportions of the vertical windows. On the other hand, there are also the typical horizontal strokes, corresponding to the typical lay out of the façades of Lombard palazzo’s, respectively corresponding to the base, middle floor and attic. This division is accentuated by the use of different materials and by the retraction of the walls that create exterior galleries. Furthermore, it is even enhanced by projecting a cornice that is similar to the original one.

Besides looking at the original building it is also interesting to look at the environment of the building. This environment is visible on fig.23, which is a panoramic view of 360° of Piazza Sant’ Ambrogio. This picture should make clear that Dominioni looks very carefully at the surrounding buildings in order to complete a coherent urban image. The colours that characterise the basilica Sant’ Ambrogio and many other buildings are reflected in the earth tones of the plaster that covers the building of Dominioni. Notice that the collocation of the different colours look suspiciously alike the building at the opposite side of the piazza.

On fig. 22 it is also clearly visible that the two sides of the building are defined differently. The shortest side is characterised by rigorous simplicity, entirely covered in light stone with two rows of narrow windows, which gives a more rationalistic impression.

This approach of simplicity is also visible in the main façade, though less obvious. There is no abundance of decoration in the façade, everything that is not necessary is stripped away. The elements that give the façade its specific character are elements that are necessary and functional.

Notice that this is the characteristic way of thinking of the rationalistic movement, but Dominioni translates this in a different, more traditional way. Although there was for many years, in the general architectural debate, a great aversion for traditional elements such as cornices, gutters, and it seemed that only a flat roof could reflect the modern needs of the society, this is all clearly re-introduced in the building of Dominioni. This will, though sometimes less explicit, also be reflected in the following buildings of Dominioni.

An example of elements that are both functional as decorative are the drainpipes. They come at the surface at the first and the fourth floor and create a rhythm of the façade that is even enhanced by the shadows they cast on the façade. Other elements that animate the façade are the sliding shutters, which give a different impression when they are open rather than when they are closed. Furthermore, the colours that are used on the façade are the natural colours of the plaster. Only the small balustrades have a formal touch. In these artworks the initials of his parents ACM (Ambrogio Caccia Dominioni) and MP (Maria Paravicini) are incorporated. This is another great example of Dominioni’s profound knowledge of craftsmanship.

67 Inventory p. 3
In the main façade, in contrast to the original design, the window composition changes according to the different floors. Although the number of windows is different, this does not compromise the image of the building because they are still aligned to each other, which creates a coherent image. (as visible on the drawing of the façade p. 100, 101)

The different composition of the windows is the result of the fact that each floor consists of a different plan composition. The floor plans are linearly, with different environments aligned along the street. A remarkable item included in the plan, are the two spiral staircases, which are tightened around the cabin of the elevator. These stairs will be another recurrent theme in the many plan compositions of Dominion\(^68\).

### 3.4.3.4 LCD: a short list of a long career

Dominioni is mainly known for his object design and his residential units, but as visible in the inventory he also made buildings for other typologies, e.g. offices, religious buildings and schools. Furthermore, his historical skills are confirmed by the many assignments he got for the renovations of important historical buildings. The main examples are the renovation of Pinacoteca Ambrosiana\(^68\) and of the Basilica di Sant’Ambrogio\(^70\), both one of the most important treasures of Milan.

Besides interventions on the small scale, he is also capable in doing interventions on the large, urban scale. He was for example a consultant for the QT8, in 1947, which is the first postwar experimental housing quarter in the outskirts of Milan. He also worked together with Belgioiso and other architects to create a revision of the PRG\(^71\) of the zone Cappuco in 1956. His most famous urban intervention is certainly the new urban quarter San Felice in 1972\(^72\). This is a type of garden city situated in the outskirts of Milan that should provide a new and healthier setting with all urban conveniences and with a good connection to the centre of Milan. In this project he works, just as in the project for the new urban quarter La Virdiana, together with Vico Magistretti with whom he had a close friendship too. Although they both have a very different style, they complement each other perfectly.

Besides a cooperation with Magistretti, and although he is a very individualistic architect, he will also enter into a close cooperation and friendship with the artist Francesco Somaini. From the moment the two meet in 1954\(^73\) they will have a mutual impact on each other’s work. The collaboration of the artists, both embedded in the same Lombard culture, is an exceptional example of ‘l’integrazione delle Arti’, an integration between buildings and the fine arts. Initially, Somaini will design the mosaics that cover the floors of Dominioni’s buildings. In a later period of their collaboration Somaini will also design sculptures that are incorporated in the projects of the architect. An example of this is the sculpture in the fountain in the park at Corso XXII Marzo\(^74,75\).
Furthermore, he worked in close contact with the architects of BBPR. The reason can be found in the fact that Dominioni is a cousin of Belgioiso. The first project is Casa Pirelli, at Via Cavalieri del Santo Sepolcro right in front of the architectural office of BBPR. Later Dominioni will be appointed by BBPR to find a solution for the heavy design task of the connection between the new developed Chase Manhattan Bank and the church San Fedele at Piazza Meda. In addition he designs the office building at piazza Velasca, that such as the name implies, is sharing the same square as the famous Torre Velasca.

Although he mainly worked in Milan, he also designed projects for other regions. During the 50s and the 60s he simultaneously works in Milan and Morbegno. The best-known buildings in Morbegno are the Vanoni library built in 1965-1966 (fig.24) and the church of San Giuseppe ai Prati Grassi (1988-1993)(fig.25). Although he worked at Milan and Morbegno at the same time, the different context will clearly result in a different architectural image.

Beside Morbegno, he designs also projects in cities like Lecco, Monza, Verona and Bologna.

From 1975 until 1982 the architect moves to the Principality of Monaco to the wishes of his spouse, where he realises the complete complex Parc Saint Roman with the giant skyscraper, displayed on fig. 26, as eye catcher.

In 1982 he returns to his hometown where he, until today, is still operating in his architectural office, together with his cousin Caccia Dominioni and Beppe Zucca.

3.5 Conclusion

The architectural history of Italy is not a consistent linear story, but a complex landscape of contradictory movements that each in their own way respond to a set of ambiguous issues and conditions in their search for reality. This results in a state of continuous crisis with as common thread throughout history, a constant quest for how architecture can translate the contemporary actors and factors in a continuous way without losing contact with both reality and tradition. This quest for an own architectural language results in the sixties in a diverse set of different interesting dialects.

One of the most singular characters of the sixties can be found in the architect Luigi Caccia Dominioni. The architect is characterised by a traditional Milanese kind of refinement, always open to new ideas and eager for novelty but driven by the need for a seemingly timeless environment unaffected by changing fashions. Although many links are made between Dominioni and architectural styles such as the Novecento or the Neoliberty, Dominioni will always dispose his language of any pre-imposed style. He can be seen as one of the main examples of Neorealism, a style that always looks for the actual conditions of the location and...
the project. Therefore, it sets itself outside any primarily ideological definition of a particular style, which generates more freedom for the architects to experiment.

In these experiments, Dominioni shows a profound understanding of different styles, which he interprets and implements in his own way without just copying them. This includes for example implementing traditional images in his architectural language with an own personal stamp. Furthermore, Dominioni has a great knowledge of modern materials and production techniques, which is always complemented by the right amount of craftsmanship. This combination results in refined and beautiful objects, which are in addition very functional. Another facet that has a great impact on his designs is the humanistic aspect, emphasised by both his teacher Piero Portaluppi as the empiristic movement, which always attaches great importance to the user and their perceptions.

This set of heterogeneous influences is embedded in every single aspect of the language of Dominioni and serves as a background on which the next chapter can be projected.

76 LCD, 1962-1965, inventory pp. 20-21
78 Monastery di Santa Maria Presentata at Poschiavo, the Churches of San Biagio at Monza (1968) and of Arenzano (1968) Golf Club in Monticello Momasco in the province of Como (1972-1985), the complex Garbagnate and via Mangolfa (1991-1996), the headquarters of the Insurance Catholic in Verona (1967-1970), square of Santo Stefano in Bologna (1989), the Center Ekotecne between Lecce and Monteroni (1990), projects for the accommodation of the headquarters building of Banca Popolare di Verona designed by Carlo Scarpa and the reorganization of the Faculty of Agriculture in Bologna.

79 http://www.archimagazine.com/bdomini.htm
4. The language of Luigi Caccia Dominioni
This section will focus on the formal language of Dominioni applied on his main typology: the condominio. The analysis of Dominioni’s architectural language consists of four different chapters that will explain every single aspect of his architecture. The four different concepts will be discussed in a particular order, which follows the chronological development of the process of designing of the architect.

The first element that characterises his work is the contesto or context, a wide concept with different aspects. This context serves as a base for all his buildings and will be used as starting point to discuss and to connect the three other characteristics of his work namely the planimetry, volumetry and the façade.

4.1 The Condominio: a bourgeoisie in search of an author

The typology of the condominio is the result of a changing society in the postwar period. Due to the economic miracle a greater separation appeared between rich and poor, creating a new ruling class: ‘La Borghese Milanese’.

Although this partition of the society was created by the positive results of the economic boom, they also felt the more negative influences of a growing population and as a consequence, the growing pressure on the land. This pressure created two main different reactions.

On the one hand there were the people who were not longer capable of living in the city, and moved outwards the centre. This reaction resulted in the development of a new residential model of complete urban quarters in the green peripheral belt of Milan. One of the main examples is ‘quartiere San Felice’. This is a new urban quarter, some kilometres outside the real heart of Milan, designed by Dominioni in association with Vico Magistretti.

This quarter is a type of città giardino (garden city), where people of the higher class live together in a new artificial context with all the necessary accommodations but in a cleaner, healthier and greener setting added with a great connectivity to the city centre. These quarters can be confused with the ‘quartiere popolare’, for the poorer people, but there is a distinct difference in quality. The quarters for the rich people are better developed, with more space and luxury and with more facilities.

More frequently the rich people did not want to give up their life in the centre. Their wish of staying in the centre coincided with some compromises that had to be made. This resulted in the fact that the homes in the city centre are getting smaller and were often shared with different families.
This joint ownership resulted in the typology of the condominio, a building block with individual and common property. Furthermore, the inhabitants found it necessary that the building expressed their aristocratic lineage. This resulted in some kind of laboratory where both the first generation of ‘teachers’ and the second generation were doing research in how to express this new elite and their position in a new modern metropolis. The outcomes were meanly updates of the formal language of the façade and the upgrade of the common areas.

Although the condominio is a typical element of the postwar Lombard residential architecture characterising for Milan, studied by many architects such as Zanuso, Gardella, Asnago &Vender etc, Dominioni is considered as ‘the inventor’ of the language of the condominio. This is because he developed a completely different approach and language than many other architects. This language will be discussed in the next section of this dissertation. Notice that besides responding to the residential needs of the bourgeoisie, Dominioni also designed new typologies to meet the other demands of this new class. He has for example designed office buildings, schools and commercial buildings.

4.2 Contesto

4.2.1 A range of connotations

The contesto (or context), in its full sense, was important in the evolution of Dominioni, which made him the architect and person he is today. This aspect was already generally explained in paragraph 3, where the aspects of the evolution to the climate of Milan in the 60s were specifically highlighted with an eye on the life of Dominioni. To understand every facet of Dominioni’s architecture, this section will explore more in depth the full range of connotations of the contesto, because they define the setting for all his architectural projects and subsequently will have a major impact on his architectural language.

The origin of the Italian term ‘contesto’ is rather difficult to translate due to the various connotations in different languages. Contesto implies more than the English translation ‘context’. The English translation ignores for example the aspect of the ‘genius loci’, a term that dates from the classic Roman culture to indicate the spirit of place.

Considering the fact that Dominioni himself did not write great theories, the concept will be illustrated by the words of Ernesto Nathan Rogers, which fits perfectly in this debate. Rogers introduced the term contesto to highlight the typical atmosphere and the uniqueness of a certain place. D’Amia states that Dominioni’s architecture was a copy of the manifesto of Rogers. Quoting the words of Rogers to clarify the constructions of Dominioni doesn’t necessarily mean that Dominioni is an impersonator of Rogers. The fact that his first buildings were erected before the publications of Rogers indicates that Dominioni was already very committed to this topic. Therefore, it would be better to state that they had a mutual influence on each other.
From 1953 until 1965 Rogers was the director of the magazine Casabella, an Italian architectural and design magazine with a focus on modern, radical design. He changed the name into Casabella-Continuità. From that moment on, the magazine had a critical approach in assessing the works of the first generation of modernistic architects and emphasised on the importance of the preservation of tradition and locality in architecture.

The goal of Rogers’ critical attitude was not to counter the modernistic movement completely, but to criticise their established values. He accuses the modern movement of being plain formalists, provided by a lexicon that ignores the values of the past. Throughout history, architecture has always been a battle between conservation and innovation. Both innovators as conservatives have the common incorrect opinion to think that old and new are contradictory concepts. However, it is important to realise that instead of being opposed, they complement each other. The past has introduced events that are the original processes that created the context where the present can build on. In this way the past always projects itself on the present.

The general doctrine of the modernists looks at the place as an abstract phenomenon, and does not absorb the particularities and characteristics of its environments. Their rational approach is insufficient to obtain poetic motives in architecture, creating feelings such as belonging, security and individuality. Therefore, he states that architects should analyse and take into account the existing constructions and the way they function because they tell the real (his)story of people. The way people evolve over time is a dynamic phenomenon, heavily influenced by their history, resulting in individuals with specific needs and beliefs. As such, he wonders how architects can create a completely new architectural style that breaks completely with the past. How can extreme rationalism be so insensitive and deny all this? How could the Masters of the Modern Movement think that they created an ‘original’ architectural language?

As a result Rogers claims that instead of one general rule taken from a lexicon, architects should look into every project ‘caso per caso’. Because it is impossible to a priori find a general solution for a place, every place is different, according to its surroundings and the particular phenomena that occur there.

Quote 7 « Architettura è sublimazione delle necessità della vita: è l’arte che definisce, nello spazio, il tempo »

« Architecture is the sublimation of the necessities of life is the art, which is defined in space and time »

(E.N. Rogers, 1954)

Imagining what the ‘ambiente’ (environment) means today is a philosophical challenge. What determines our contemporary society and what are the conditions that have to be taken into account? It is precisely on that point that the modernistic approach needs a thorough revision. Rather than aiming at rationality and mass production of a project it should aim at an appropriate language for
A modern civilisation, for the new liberated citizens that should have the possibility to differentiate themselves, a language ‘tra invenzione e ambientamento’, between invention and responding to the environmental conditions. An interesting deviation from this topic is the fact that this engagement towards the actual space and the environment in the other parts of Europa occurred much later. During the 80s philosophers like Deleuze introduce the notion that space is developed by the exchange and interchange of multiple objects instead of the one-way communication of modernism where space was considered as a universal concept.

4.2.2 The Preesistenze Ambientali

4.2.2.1 Introduction

To define the range of different influences on a place, Rogers introduced the term and theory of the ‘Preesistenze Ambientali’, which had a great impact on the architectural debate of those days and influenced many famous Italian architects as Boeri, Giancarlo De Carlo, Magistretti, Gardella and Luigi Caccia Dominioni. The term is literally translated as ‘pre-existing environment’, which not only covers the physical surrounding of a place but also the historical, cultural and sociological stratification of the environment. Rogers theorised these two concepts by defining two essential powers that will be able to keep tradition alive. The first power is the vertical one. By this he means the permanent phenomena rooted on the site, based on an objective ground of consistency. The other, more subjective power is the circular one, connecting elements in a different, dynamic way, based on the continuous intellectual interaction between people and tradition. In his opinion, every artist should be on the intersection of these two essential powers since balance can only be obtained if those two powers collaborate. Therefore, it is unproductive to pursue only one single aspect of tradition. For example, when you implement a reference to previous periods by means of an ornament it should have a reason and a reinterpretation. When it is only an ordinary reproduction of a historical element, without highlighting the local needs of the people, it will degenerate into folklore or plain formalism.

In order to counteract this formalism, Rogers stated that there are two different guidelines that can and have to be followed in contemporary architecture. The first direction is the affirmation and integration of the improved techniques, practical instruments and innovative materials. An artist should embrace the recent technical progress and should involve it in creating a new figurative language in line with its function. Another, more conservative approach is a new language consisting of an interpretation of older, more traditional elements in a modern way, connected with the lifestyle, without losing a coherent vision with the past. Simply said, searching for a new formal language by adopting and interpreting existing values without copying them.
4.2.2.2 LCD: the perfect translator of the Preesistenze Ambientali

It becomes even more interesting when those two approaches mentioned by Rogers are combined, something that is clearly visible in the work of Caccia Dominioni. Dominioni combines innovating building techniques and materials with a great sense of craftsmanship to erect modern buildings and furniture, which are always rooted in tradition. Even though, these two aspects are not always easily distinguishable, and the one aspect sometimes prevails over the other, the dichotomy is always there. Interesting examples are Dominioni’s tertiary realisations. Dominioni perfectly understands that a new typology demands a new language. Furthermore, he knows that this does not have to mean that this new language has to break with traditions, as for example is the case with the curtain-wall structures of modern skyscrapers.

To illustrate this, the office buildings at Corso Europa\textsuperscript{94} (fig.28), situated in the centre of Milan, will be taken as an example. Those office buildings express values of both modernity and tradition. Although realised in 1959, the buildings still have a very contemporary image. The innovative appearance results from a highly skilled modern use of material and techniques combined with traditional elements. Maybe, the traditional image does not stand out at the first glance but it is clearly present when having a more detailed look at the building and when being provided with some background knowledge of Italian architecture. Characteristics such as horizontality, refined vertical windows and the tripartite of the façade, consisting of a base, middle and a cornice are definite elements of a traditional Italian palazzo. These features are also reflected in other projects of the architect such as Casa Dominioni or Beata Vergine Addolorata\textsuperscript{95}. Due to the combination of the different operations, the building at Corso Europa has become an iconic image of the architecture of Dominioni because it is in perfect equilibrium with the historical context but at the same time standing out as an architectural masterpiece. This vital union of native tradition and the original contributions of new thoughts and techniques will be a recurring theme in the architectural language of Dominioni. The fact that tradition has to be implemented in architectural thinking should not mean that the contemporary interpretation couldn’t match our present-day taste and technical conditions. Therefore, the formal language of architecture must satisfy the demands of the present and must subtle represent the ethical claims of both the individual as the collective\textsuperscript{96}.

\textsuperscript{94} LCD, 1953-1959, inventory pp. 52-53
\textsuperscript{95} LCD, 1948-1954, inventory pp. 62-63
\textsuperscript{96} ROGERS, E.N., Il gusto al servizio della tecnica: due palazzo per uffici e abitazioni di Agostino Agostini e Luigi Caccia Dominioni in corso Europa a Milano, “Casabella-Continuita”, n. 230, 1959, pp. 31-37
4.2.2.3 The Preesistenze Ambientali applied on the example of the Torre Velasca

Many texts declare the Torre Velasca to be the best example to illustrate the approach of this ‘Preesistenze Ambientali’97. The Tower (fig.29), situated in the heart of the city of Milan, is designed by BBPR and completed in 1958. It was a loaded design task because the tower had to deal with a lot of resistance due to the fact that it was the first tower in Milan and moreover because it was situated in the city centre. BBPR tried to integrate this project with the existing context without plain imitation. The value of the architecture coincides with the language of the building, which coincides with the language of the city.

The tower has both supporters and opponents. On the one hand, there are people like Alvar Aalto, who exclaims that the tower was very Milanese, in a way concluding that the Preesistenze Ambientali is to coincide with the city itself100. Secondly, there is the opposition that accuse the tower to be in rupture with the canonical requirements of the Modernistic Movements and to be an Italian institutional betrayal. However, it became an iconic symbol of the city, perfectly representing the issues and the tendencies of Milan in the 60s101.

Although the tower is one of the best known examples of Roger’s theory, he himself refers to Luigi Caccia Dominioni as the best representation of his ideas, as mentioned in the following quote.

Quote 8 « The tower refers to the material consistency, robustness and sullen sobriety of medieval architecture of the Po, which shares the warm colour. The subtlety of the citizens, their broad respire, make that the Velasca establishing a ‘sympathy’ to the surrounding environment without the use of dialect and without identifying themselves exclusively with Milan »

(N.N.) 98

Rogers stated that the intentions of the Torre Velasca were to pursue a new approach in terms of the function of architecture in modern society. The functions of architecture need to be re-examined in a broader sense with consideration of psychological and historical consciousness because architecture draws its vitality from the environment, which helps in turn to create that environment99.
On the one hand, Dominioni is perfectly able to interpret the objective, specific character of the environment and on the other hand he translates the practical needs of the people, which is the subjective aspect of these pre-existing conditions. These two general aspects will influence every single facet of his architectural language.

### 4.2.3 Lessons drawn from the physical context

#### 4.2.3.2 A juxtaposition of images

In analyzing the formal language of Dominioni a similar approach as BBPR and the design of the Torre Velasca can be distinguished to create a coherent relationship with the environment. Historical the Torre Velasca can be seen as a modern interpretation of the old medieval types of Italian castles, such as Castello Sforzesco (fig. 31). Instead of making explicit references to that particular image, a composition of different elements are referring to typical historical Italian elements, resulting in a building that blends into the urban fabric. A juxtaposition of some pictures of historical elements and details of the buildings of Dominioni makes clear how Dominioni also adopts pre-existing...
images and re-interprets them. By giving a new interpretation on a classical element, it became relevant for that time, and it did not degenerate into a formalistic game without any value.

Without claiming the absolute origin of a particular element of the architecture of Dominioni this collage wants to demonstrate the different opportunities of references that can be made. It is possible that different people read the elements differently. The different connotations one can give on an element create, according to Venturi, great architecture because due to the tension and ambiguity, people can recognise certain parts and as a consequence can feel connected to the building.

Below some examples will follow of references between the work of Dominioni and historical elements that I discovered during my research.

The first reference can be observed by placing the campanile of the Basilica di Sant’Ambrogio (the church in front of the house where Dominioni grew up and has his studio) and the chimney of the building in Via Vigon next to each other (fig. 32 and 33). The link between the building of Dominioni and a church does not indicate similar religious purposes, but may suggest a similar function as a defining element of the skyline of Milan (though on a smaller scale). There can also another similarity be noticed between the building at Via Vigon and the campanile. The finishings in white stone of the edge of the residential building and those of the campanile look very much alike, and articulate the volume in a similar way.
Another example worth mentioning are the finishings of the monastery Beata Vergine Addolorata. This is the first building where Dominioni uses his famous gratings in the building skin (fig. 34). Placing the picture of a detail of the façade next to a detail taken of the church right in front of the building can hint at a possible inspiration for these openings that define the façade.

A second lesson that can be learned from the Torre Velasca is how functional needs can influence and determine the design and form of a building. The specific shape of the building is a deduction out of environmental conditions and the need for building space, privacy and light. Therefore, the volume of the tower expands when the building rises above the rooftops of the surrounding buildings, in order to generate more light and floor area. A similar approach is visible in the building at piazza Carbonari (fig. 42) that has a specific volume that is different on each side. This form, hailed by many, is not just a formal gesture. Actually, the form is completely defined by the planning regulations because towards the smaller streets, the building had to be lower to pass through enough sunlight to the nearby houses. Instead of focusing on the form as a basic element, or as the application of an existing theory, it is the result of the interpretation of existing elements, rooted in reality. This shows how beauty can grow from reality and defining rules, which therefore should not be regarded as negative or limiting.

According to Rogers it is the responsibility of an architect to analyse the space and translate this in a personal way. Important is to realise that this interpretation should be expressing the demands of society and not the egocentric needs of the architect. Architects must recognise the fact that their actions are never isolated and will always influence its surroundings. This requests respect and harmony with the existing buildings, using the energy of the building to immortalise the vitality environment on the one hand, and on the other hand it requests a sufficient amount of flexibility to allow margin for the operations that will follow. This coexistence of the personal elements, depending on the location and the surrounding buildings, instead of a personal signature is clearly visible in his famous quartet BBPR (Banfi, Belgiojoso, Peressutti and Rogers). Although the group consists of four different architects, personalities and preferences, they put aside their own personal stamp in order to converge to a common continuous image.

Although Dominioni has a lot of respect for this group and loves their projects, he cannot understand how they always managed to work so closely while they are so different. But regardless his more individualistic attitude (e.g. the split up with the brothers Castiglioni to develop a more personal language) he unmistakably has the same approach. Dominioni is never aiming to place his own personal signature in the urban tissue of Milan, his goal is not to express his personal ego but that of his clients in a peaceful coexistence with the surrounding.
4.2.3.2 The example of the building at piazza Meda

These previous lessons are also visible in one of Domionio’s personal favourites (fig. 43), the connection between the Chase Manhattan Bank (BBPR) and the existing apse of the 16th century San Fedele Church (Pellegrino Tibaldi) at piazza Meda in the historical centre of Milan. In this difficult assignment, the office of BBPR commissioned Domionio at the last moment to correct the mistakes made by the previous architect in order to make a better connection with the classic icon of the church and the new modern implementation of BBPR. Since the construction had already started, the architect had little contribution to the design of the plan. He was mainly focused on the site itself, which resulted in a design process that took place in the field instead of in his office. Domionio is always very involved in the execution on the field to allow changes during the building process. Due to on-site changes to his design, the plans and façades he drew do not always fit reality. This is a significant example of self-questioning and constant correction and revision.

« Many urban legends are told about him: he was able to move in a few centimeter all the windows of a façade already performed by an entrepreneur known for being thrifty, he was famous for performing on site, drawing directly on the walls the details of its architecture… »

(V. Gregotti)

Returning to the project at piazza Meda shows Domionio’s ability to sew into the pre-existing environment. The small intervention is not a simple imitation of the architectural style of one of its neighbouring buildings, it is a composition of details borrowed from both styles. Comparable to the Torre Velasca, a reference to the medieval Lombard square towers can be made by a re-interpretation of pulled-in fixtures, vaults and cornices. The roof termination with overhanging and rows of windows that extend around the corners, which is an allusion to medieval fortifications, can also be a reference to the strip windows of 1920s. Openings of very different characters complete the distinctive volume in the manner of a collage. The circular main window in the upper part of the building could, quite speculatively, be read as a reference to classic church windows, or maybe as the projection of the apse of the church onto the façade. Again there are multiple references that enhance the complexity of the building, by which it subsequently can integrate with the two different backgrounds.

The building is enclosed by two impressive buildings, but it is precisely by this enclosure and the rules it involves that the small tower stands out. It completes the started perspective and it perfectly

Quote « Le leggende metropolitan che si raccontano su di lui sono moltissime: che riusci a far spostare di pochi centimetri tutte le finestre di una facciata già eseguite da un imprenditore noto per essere parsimonioso, che era famoso per eseguire in cantiere, direttamente disegnando sui muri, i dettagli delle sue architetture... »
answers the planimetric and volumetric requests to supplement the other buildings. One can say that the building would never have been such a success without the two neighbouring buildings and their conditions. On the other hand, also the opposite can be stated, Belgiojoso for example, said that the work of Dominioni also reinforces the image of the Bank\textsuperscript{112}.

Another great example to illustrate the respect that Dominioni has towards the group of BBPR is the office building at Piazza Velasca\textsuperscript{113}, which is standing literally in the shadow of the famous Torre Velasca. On fig. 44, can be seen that the office building is carried out in a screen of glass with a strict division. When taking a closer look at the picture, the reflections of the Torre Velasca can be noticed in the façade of Dominioni’s office building. Furthermore, it appears that Dominioni has copied the rhythm of the tower in the division of the façade of his office building. Looking at this reflection it is almost as if the building of Dominioni dissapears in favour of this monument. This shows the remarkable respect that Dominioni has, not only towards BBPR but towards the complete surrounding environment. Although this commitment is not always obvious at first sight, it will always be embedded in the designs of Dominioni.
Fig. 45: Projects of Dominioni in Milan

Fig. 46: Building at Via Santa Maria alla Porta

Fig. 47: Casa Pirelli

Fig. 48: Buildings at Via Nievo

Fig. 49: Building at Piazza Carbonan
4.2.3.3 Conclusion

Previous examples make clear how the architect can efface himself in function of the true mission of architecture, serving the client and his wishes. At the example of Piazza Meda the mission is translated in resolving mistakes made by the previous architect and to convert this into a quality. Dominioni’s architecture is an artifice that tries to distinguish the different places and to fit those in an appropriate way. Each time and each case the problem to be solved is different. A church in Monza is not a condominio in the centre of Milan or an industrial building in the outskirts.

Instead of focusing on form as the basic element, or the application of an existing theory, attention is paid to the interpretation of the existing matter, of reality. This perfectly matches the words of Rogers who concluded that there is the need for a clear methodology that links an individual project to a given time and space. Since it is impossible to build in a uniform way in different countries (and even in the same country or city), due to the climate and different cultures, constructions will not only differ naturally according to their function, but also according to the location and the proximity of ‘costruzioni preesistenti’ (existing buildings).

Due to the influence by the physical surrounding a clear distinction in the language of Dominioni can be discovered. Notice that this does not mean that he contradicts himself, but it means that he will revise some principles to fit more accurately into the existing context. In first instance, there will be a difference in architectural language according to countries and cities. In Italy, his approach results in a different design than in Monaco because of the differences in environmental elements. Also within the same country his projects differ according to the exact location. As an example a comparison of his buildings in Milan with those of Morbegno (fig. 24 and 25) can be made to demonstrate different formal characteristics. In Morbegno, the architect feels more free to experiment while in Milan he is more restricted by a more heavily charged environment. In Morbegno the local conditions are different, it is a rural area with different resources at its disposal, which results in another use of materials. Important is his statement that although his formal language differs between Milan and Morbegno, his plans will be the same. This indicates that his approach towards the clients will always be similar.

Finally, a clear difference can be observed depending on the position of buildings in Milan itself. As indicated on fig. 45, concentric circles can be observed, coinciding with the Navigli, that are defining the formal historical core of the city. Within the first two circles there clearly will be a very different, more classical approach than outside these circles. This is the logical result of the fact that within the circle there is a dense, historical valuable tissue and outside there are new neighborhoods that only started to be developed after the 2nd World
War. This means that there is no defining pre-existing environment outside the circle and therefore, the architect is free to create a modern image of which the roots are still embedded in the Milanese history. Furthermore, there are no examples of the condominio situated outside the 3rd circle. This is due to the fact that the rich people want to stay inside the center. When Dominioni builds outside the circle it will either be complete urban quarters for the rich people such as Quartiere San Felice, as mentioned in paragraph 4.1, or in one single fact a private villa for the family Pasquinelli.

4.2.4 Lessons learned from the social context

4.2.4.1 LCD: the translator of ‘il Gusto’

While a lot of Milanese architects are committed by creating qualitative public housing for the influx of migrants, Dominioni covers a different target of clients. He is charged with the task of searching a new appropriate language for a new type of client, which was part of the rising educated Milanese Middle and upper class.

What seems at first sight as an abstinence of one clear language appears to be the perfect translation of both external factors and the personal desires (gusto) of the clients. As already mentioned before in paragraph 4.2.3.2 Dominioni always effaces his personal ego in favour of his client. However, there will always be an interaction of his personal preferences and those of his clients. Since Dominioni is also part of that class of elites and most of his clients are friends, he is perfectly able to replace himself in their minds and to feel what they desire without violating his own preferences.

As explained in previous part 4.2.2.1 it is important to build in a continuous way. By transgressing the canons of modernity, Dominioni’s architecture results in an unpredictable more diverse and plural language. The component of the taste will play a key role in two senses. On the one hand it frees elements from the structure of a modern canon and secondly it allows different compositional patterns to co-exist unprejudiced, controlled only by the question of how these patterns are able to communicate aesthetic pleasures.

In general, the personal taste of the client will have the most impact on the interior lay out of the buildings. The interior lay out can be seen as a reflection of the people who commission them, giving priority to ‘ingenious freedom’ and the freshness of ‘affectionate evocation’ to much abused interior layout schemes.

4.4.2 Il gusto represented by the film ‘Io Sono Amore’

Even though, the façades of Dominioni have a quite modern face, the interiors will always give a fairly traditional impression. This stems from the desire to return of the known environment of the former heydays. Since Dominioni himself states that he learned a lot from his tutor Piero Portaluppi and

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116 LCD, 1963-1966, inventory pp. 22-23
117 IRACE, F., Il fascino discreto dell’architettura, “Ottagono”, n. 91, dicembre 1988, pp. 52-63
118 CRIPPA, M.A., Luigi Caccia Dominioni: il dato reale, “Abitare”, n. 327, 1994, pp. 112-114
119 GUADAGNINO, L., Io sono l’amore, 2009
120 Quote 2 in paragraph 3.2.2
Villa Necchi designed by Piero Portaluppi in 1932 in the historic centre of Milan. especially how he managed to execute the desires of his customers I thought it was interesting to illustrate the way people use the space by showing some screenshots of the film ‘Io Sono Amore’, which takes place in ‘Villa Necchi’1. Although this house is much larger than the apartments of Dominioni, the architect will pursue the same elements in his interior lay out and design.

Something that can be seen on the screenshots is the fact that the house has a high representative value. This is visible from the first glance at the building. The building should express the high standard of living of the owners, who belonged to the upper middle class of Lombard industrial families. In the film there is a shot of the entrance (fig.54-57), a glass door, reached by some monumental stairs marked by an overhang and brightly lighted. From this point of view there is also an inlook to the entrance hall receiving a glimpse of the domestic life. This creates a boundary, a transition zone, but at the same time it gives the visitors the feeling of being welcome. The entrance hall, with the monumental stair, is the start of the rich succession of many representative rooms in the house. The representation of the building is enhanced by the introduction of decorative arts and furnishings. These artworks will never be just placed in the space, instead they are strategically positioned to generate the optimal effect. For example in fig.51 people are sitting around the table and behind the person at the head of the table a fire place is visible perfectly aligned to the opening between the two spaces.

Another theme is the types of doors used in the villa. These vertical elements go high up to the ceiling, and are sometimes flexible elements that can be placed open. This happens in the movie when the servants are finished setting the table. This insures the separation and privacy between the two rooms, between inhabitants and servants. These strategies and images that Portaluppi introduced will reappear in the projects of Dominioni. This cannot be seen as a surprise because this is the real domestic life that Dominioni wants to obtain with his architecture, trying to give his clients the highest possible quality of life.

4.2.4.3 Conclusion

Dominioni will never pre-impose a specific architectural language. Instead he always looks at the reality of the project, which is determined by both the physical as the social context of the building. Therefore his language can be seen as a set of dialects of which the grammar is defined by the actual location and by his clients. Although both aspects always influence each other, in the next sections will appear that both factors will influence the language mainly on another scale. The specific location of the building will be more reflected in the exterior appearance of the building, while the client will mainly be expressed on the interior scale of the dwelling.
Fig. 66: Casa Pirelli — view on the church San Simpliciano
By refashioning both the domestic container and the workplace, he established the standard type of new Milanese condominium that took its rightful place on the urban scene without doing violence to things that were already there. But his ‘style’ doesn’t lie solely in this supremely assured equilibrium; his aptitude for architecture modelled on lifestyle also carried him from tried-and-tested essays in spatial illusion to a genuinely organic representation of domestic living. Abolishing the right angle generated a new vision tempered by his habitual pragmatism but also fuelled by the ideas he had explored in the preliminary sketches for his great finished designs, where soft lines of pencil and colour gesture towards an almost animistic conception of space.

(F. Irace, 2002)
4.3 Planimetry

4.3.1 Introduction

In the reflection on the language of Dominioni there is a clear order in how the architect executes his process of designing. The first aspect of every design project is the context that creates the principal basis for his buildings. The next step in the process is the plan, from which eventually the whole building will arise.

Quote 12 «Insomma io sono un pianist, al punto che delego tutto alla pianta, e mi trovo in contrasto con gli altri architetti che fanno della scultura piu che dell’architettura»

«So I’m a planmaker, I delegate everything based on the plant, and I find myself at odds with other architects who make rather sculptures than architecture.» (LCD)

Similar to the context, the plan also consists of two main aspects, the physical and the social. The two different aspects will be explained separately because each aspect will have its own influence on the design process. It will also appear that in each of the next three topics (planimetry, volumetry and façade) one aspect will prevail on the other. It will be the social aspect that has the biggest impact on the plan. This does not mean that the physical aspect is ignored. First the physical influence on the plan will be explained. Because, the physical aspect will be implemented mainly to enhance the social aspect of the user and his lifestyle.

4.3.2 The plan as interaction with the physical context

The physical context creates the links between inside and outside. These links are important both for the perceptive as the functional value of the residence.

The first concern of the architect is always to create a comfortable house independent of the climatic conditions. ‘Una casa di città per tutto l’anno’, a house for the whole year, comfortable both in winter as in summer, is not that evident in Milan. Therefore, Dominioni always uses sliding shutters or panels to regulate the light according to the course of the day. By controlling the incoming light and ensuring a good airflow Dominioni succeeds in creating a pleasant living environment, even during the tropic summers characteristic for Milan124.

The architect also studies the location of the windows in order to generate optimal panoramic sights. The location of the windows, regulated by the exterior elements, will subsequently have an influence on the interior lay out of the plan. The position of the walls and doors are associated with the placement of the window openings. The doors, for example, will be mostly placed in such way that during a walk through the house one always comes out on a window. As such, he creates panoramic views on the surrounding exterior elements like the garden, trees, churches, etc. Furthermore, those views prevent dead ends in the house and mitigate the border between the inside and outside. The strategic placement of walls and windows also

124 CRIPPA, M.A., Luigi Caccia Dominioni: il dato reale, “Abitare”, n. 327, 1994, pp. 112-114
produces interesting and clearly regulated effects of inflowing and reflecting natural light. Light will always be one of the main concerns in Dominioni's interiors. Both natural as artificial light will flow into the rooms in a very calculated way. One of the most elaborated examples is the top floor of Casa Pirelli\textsuperscript{125} (fig.66). The window frames a perfect view on the church San Simpliciano. The fact that the window is encapsulated creates a bright comfortable small sub-place\textsuperscript{126}.

Creating regulated views and generating optimal light effects is something that will reappear in almost every aspect of the plan and will be discussed more in detail in the next section.

Sometimes the influence of external elements is less subtle perceptible in the plan. The orientation of the bow window and balconies in the building in Via Vigoni\textsuperscript{127} (fig.67), for example, are oriented to generate an optimal view on the church Santa Maria dei Miracoli. Another example is the plan of the building in Via Senato\textsuperscript{128} (fig.68). While most plans have a rectangular form, this building has a more irregular form. It is a funded assumption to state that this is caused to obtain a better orientation (since the street is north oriented) and to create an outlook on the park and the historical building of the ‘Archivo di Stato di Milano’. The orientation on particular elements will mainly occur in the historical centre. This is not surprising since outside this core the areas still have to be developed and therefore, there are little elements that are worth focusing on. Out of the city centre, the buildings of Dominioni become focal points itself.
Although all these elements are based on the interaction with the physical context, they are mainly introduced to enhance the interior experiences. Therefore, one could say that the social aspect of the user and his observations will have the greatest impact on the plan.

4.3.3 The plan as the expression of the resident

To understand the social engagement in the plans of Dominioni and to situate his approaches in the general setting it is recommended to start with looking at the wider architectural debate. During the postwar period there was a clear emergence of many literary magazines, each with its own opinions about architecture. The brightest writers, such as Ernesto Rogers and Gio Ponti, are opposed the new general tendency of the lack of consideration for the occupants. In the new mass era there is too much stress on the building as an end in itself, and not enough stress in the fact that the building exists for man’s use and not vice versa.

Rogers, the director of the magazine Domus, with the subtitle ‘La Casa dell’Uomo’ (the house of the man) considers that the function of a house has to transcend the purely functional aspect of a physical protection. He states that architects should ‘rendere più umana la casa’ (make the house more human) by pursuing a kind of utopian commonplace that meets the needs of every single occupant. The building should exist for man’s use and not vice versa. This is clearly a reaction against the rationalistic movement as a pawn of speculation. In that case standardisation and the rationalisation of the space perhaps shape the physical shelter of a house, but fail to create a real home.

Quote 13 « Nessun problema è risolto se non risponde all’utilità, alla morale e all’estetica nello stesso tempo. Una casa non è casa se non è calda d’inverno, fresca d’estate, serena in ogni stagione per accogliere in armoniosi spazi la famiglia. Una casa non è casa se non racchiude un angolo per leggere poesie, un’alcova, una vasca da bagno, una cucina. Questa è la casa dell’uomo. E un uomo non è veramente uomo finché non possiede una simile casa. Esiste questa casa? E’ mai esistita? »

« No problem is solved if the utility does not respond to the moral and aesthetic demands at the same time. A house is no home unless it is warm in winter, cool in summer, quiet in every season to accommodate in a harmonious way spaces for the family. A house is not home unless it encloses a corner to read poems, niches, one bath and a kitchen. This is a man’s. And a man is not truly a man until he owns such a house. Does this house exist? Did it ever exist? »

(E.N. Rogers, 1946) 129

Also Gio Ponti responds to the rising marginalisation caused by the speculation of real estate. The motto of Ponti, ‘Milano Moderno’, aims for a quest for a technical civility able to express the myth of a new culture ready to rise from the ashes of its past. This will only be possible when the ethic engagement of architects transcends the lacking alliance of the modernistic movement.

Mainly focussed on the directing class of the community, the bourgeoisie, he is looking for a

129 ROGERS, E.N., Domus, La Casa dell’uomo, “Domus”, n. 205, 1946
A tighter relation between the client and the executor. This tight relationship is one of the main characteristics of Dominioni and therefore, Ponti always had great respect for him.

Dominioni responds to the new building task of the condominio with an opposite approach than the modernists with the tenement block as a compilation of standard units. Although almost every building provides homes to different people, Dominioni is able to ensure the privacy and individuality of every single inhabitant. By designing a complex and diversified plan composition he fulfils the contemporary society’s lifestyle and ‘the ideal of individual property’.

These highly qualitative plans would never have been realised if the architect during the war had not focussed on the smaller scale, asking himself the question how he could retain the quality and grandeur of former bourgeois buildings. Since the designs of Dominioni are one of the best examples of the Neorealist movement, it is no surprise that he always start with the reality, a practical scheme that fits most accurate to the function it has to perform. In this case the real function, as previously mentioned by Rogers, is giving a suitable home to the inhabitant. Since every human being is different this results in many different lay outs of plans, instead of one ideal plan that is repeated over and over again. This idea matches perfectly the ideals of Rogers.

When the client is known, the plan is the physical interpretation and translation of the wishes of that specific person. Many architects see this specific design assignment as a limitation of their own intelligence and capability, but Dominioni considers this as a real opportunity. This stimulates him to reconsider, reinvent and optimise his plans over and over again. However, in most of the buildings the client is rather undefined. When this occurs it is Domioni’s task to characterise a type of class, and to derive a set of conditions from the ideal type of client. As he has the same origin as his typical client, he recognises himself in their occupations, recreations and passions and therefore, his background provides a solid base in understanding how these people live.

Even though he does not know every client, the plans will vary in size, disposition and organisation, as if it was intended for one specific person. This contrasts with the rationalistic approach applied by the forces of speculation. Besides ideological considerations this also has a commercial purpose. Different sections of apartments with different layout...
will open to a wider audience and will be a more desirable target on the selling market. Therefore, they opted for a construction ex novo in the case of Casa Geronazzo with different types of apartments instead of a good feasible renovation of a standardised plan.

The variation in size and division is made possible by the use of a flexible, mostly irregular, skeletal structure made out of reinforced concrete. This skeletal structure generally does not result in a rational exchangeable plan because Dominioni imposes a way of life that is focused on obtaining the maximum possible quality. Therefore, these frame structures show a completely different understanding than the skeletal structures of for example Le Corbusier. In contrast to the ‘plan libre’ of Le Corbusier, Dominioni is more stimulated by the free thinking of space reflected in the raumplan of Adolf Loos. The dimensions of each separate compartment are determined by the function of the space and level of importance. Parallel to the plans of Loos, the building will not consist of just a sum of spaces, but rather as a whole network of linked spaces. (e.g Casa Pirelli fig. 101-105)

In certain exceptions the plan is less defined and has a more rational structure. This is visible in the plans of Casa Dominioni (fig.69), in the building in Via Santa Maria alle Porta (fig.70) and also in Via Massena. These more rigid plans have to make it possible to house both offices as residences. Since the groundplan is the startingpoint for the whole construction, this more rigid division will also be reflected in the façades of these buildings.

4.3.4 The condominio as micro-città

Quote « Sono architetto fino in fondo e trovo l’urbanistica ovunque… In realtà, l’appartamento è una microcittà, con i suoi percorsi, suoi vincoli, gli spazi sociali e quelli private. Mi sono sempre appassionato agli spazi piccolo e ho sempre dato l’anima per farli sembrare più grandi, per esempio allungando i percorsi, contrariamente a una certa modo ache tende a ridurli. L’ingresso diretto in soggiorno non lo amo, perché non riserva sorprese, mentre il compito dell’architetto, io credo, è anche quello di suscitare un succedersi di emozioni. (…) miei ingressi, le mie scale, persino i mobile sono soluzioni urbanistiche »

« I am an architect to the last detail and I find urbanism everywhere … In reality, the apartment is a little city, with its paths, its constraints, its social and private spaces. I have always had a passion for small spaces and have always wanted to make them to look larger, for example by lengthening the routes, contrary to some tendency to reduce them. I don’t like a direct entry into the living room, because then there are no surprises, while the role of an architect, I believe, is also to raise a succession of emotions. (....) my entries, my stairs and even my furniture are urban solutions » (LCD)

The predominant form of a condominio, as is typical for residential blocks, is a rectangle. However, a first glimpse on his plans reveals that Dominioni avoids the mechanical repetition that might be associated with these volumes. Instead of the standardisation of elements, there is a large variety of units (e.g Via Nievo fig.73). This is the representation of the new
bourgeoisie with their own individual needs of privacy and identity. Dominioni states that he is an urbanist who composes space according to the dynamic concepts of urbanity in both space and function. Therefore, the building blocks can be seen as ‘ville sovrapposte’, villas placed on top of each other, instead of a street or city that consists of houses placed next to each other. It is a composition of different and individual plan expositions where public and private spaces merge into one another. The different spaces and the paths that will connect them will have, just like in the real urban setting, their own flows, rules and constraints.

The whole plan composition will be based on the progression through the building and exploring the interior, resulting in vibrant and sinuous paths. This walk will be loaded with a dense amount of information, caused by the presence of a variety of layers, giving the possibility to discover ‘la vita interiore di un’architettura’ (the interior life of architecture).

The curved lines on the plan are the result of the translation of the real movements of people. Parallel to the paths of human beings, he tends to look for an uninterrupted flow during the act of walking by diminishing abrupt changes of directions by rounding of corners into gentle curves. These curvatures are animating the plan and will also ensure a kind of spontaneity of how people occupy spaces and how they move through the building.

Although the whole building block is a compilation of different units, every single plan consists of an assembly of recurring themes. These themes are not always translated in exact the same way and are less or more noticeable according to the potential of the individual unit (e.g. size of the apartment, budget of the occupant, etc.). This similar approach, regardless time, place or resident, is due to the fact that Dominioni always considers the experience of the human being as his main concern. He always tries to generate an optimal quality in the apartment, independent of the wealth of the inhabitant and the size of the place.

The entire design of his plans is based on the perception of the individual walking through the house and the translation of these movements. During this path he always looks for a continuous perception of the space, with an uninterrupted flow during the act of walking and with a permanent exchange between private and public parts. In the next section, a virtual reconstruction of a walk through a set of the most characteristic buildings of Dominioni will be made describing the defining elements. The combination of text and pictures should make it possible to give a clear image of the perceptions and created effects. Notice that the images are collected from different buildings illustrating every single aspect of the general themes. Besides the pictures, ground plans are included to clarify the lay out of the different

Quote 17 « involucro del movimento che scorre al suo interno, (...) la piu estesa pelle dell’uomo »

(H. Häring)
buildings. An extra layer will be placed on top of these plans to explain some methods used by Dominioni. Furthermore, the position of where the picture was taken will be indicated on the plans, connected with the view lines possible from that point.

4.3.5 Public to Semi public: towards an organic style

As already mentioned in the previous paragraph 4.3.4, Dominioni always wants to create interaction between the different areas, between inside and outside, public and private area and between the different rooms in a house. This is already visible having a first look at a building. The entrance is always strongly indicated. On the one hand there will always be a threshold, stairs that have to be mounted or descended. On the one hand these stairs have a functional purpose, they elevate the ground level, which gives the apartments on that level a higher degree of privacy. On the other they have a more symbolic purpose to create a monumental and almost sacral filter between the public and the private space. However, the transition between the public and the semi public space may not be a brutal limit because it should give the visitor the feeling of being welcome. Therefore, Dominioni blurs the strict boundary by the introduction of glass doors and when possible by creating a niche. This niche, created by the retraction of the door, creates a transition zone that enhances the relationship between inside and outside. When possible, the entrance is always drawn inside the building. This is visible in the plans of Casa Dominioni (fig.69) and of Casa Geronazze (fig.71). In Casa Dominioni this is a typical historic solution, a passage that leads to a cortile (courtyard) and provides the entrance to several buildings. A similar approach is also visible in a less historical building block in Corso Italia. In Casa Geronazze this solution has no functional goal because it does not connect different buildings. Probably it is based on the representative effect of palazzo’s and their entrance hall.

From the entrance you pass by the reception, staffed by the portiere who usually lives under the same roof and has a small apartment to his disposal on the ground floor. This is a service present in all private housing blocks in Milan, taking care of the reception, privacy and general problems.

The discrete elegance of the common areas, intended to work as open atria immediately catches the eye. Although those areas are never very large in size (because it had to be in proportion with the individual size of the apartments), a magnificent spatial feeling is created by the play of light. Both natural (skylights (fig.82) and/or glass tiles(fig.79) in the walls) as artificial light are reflected by the walls, the ceiling and the pavement. This reflection is made possible by a careful choice of materials such as light stucco and/or reflecting wall coverings. The floor is often covered by an even more elegant finishing, namely the mosaics of the artist Francesco
Somaini. It is important to notice that those mosaics are not only used as decoration but they also contribute to the whole spatial experience, creating an atmosphere that meets the requirements of the residents. To satisfy the bourgeoisie, explicit and less explicit references to a glorious past are made, including the use of floor coverings influenced by the techniques of the romans. In both eras these artworks are used to create a representative space, but as always, Dominioni will never simply copy elements of the past. Instead, the mosaics represent a personal expression of the artist, usually in consultation with the client and anticipating on the contemporary context. Besides a representative function, the drawings also have a functional meaning. They are reproductions of the paths of the people and emphasise the importance of the entrance and the atrium. The gradations in colours and movements give the place more light, they highlight special focal points and places to keep halt. They flow like rivers through the galleries connecting and differentiating the spaces. These refined structures are not only reflected in the public areas but are also in the representative parts of some private apartments, e.g. in the entrance, the lounge and living area.

The implementation of mosaics is one of the main examples to illustrate the fact the Dominioni believes that architecture should never be separated from interior design and decoration. Instead architects should realise that art could be used to complement and improve the architectural space. It is clear that
the two artists work together in a close relationship. These mosaics are always integrated with the existing architectural elements, the compilation of the furniture, the art and the niches in the space. Architecture should never be an isolated component but should complement and be complemented by the elements surrounding it. In a similar way the placement of his furniture will be discussed. The furniture works together with the decoration to have an integrating functioning of the interior architecture.

The play of light and the mosaics acts as a kind of sign, leading the visitor through the building. The pictures of the entrance of Casa Pirelli (fig.81-82) and the building complex in Corso Europa (fig. 78-80) make clear how the spaces reveal themselves gradually. Because there is never a direct overview of the space, it is impossible to understand, the whole spatial composition when standing at the entrance. Impelled by a kind of mystical light and/or the indications of the mosaics, the real centre of the building, the stairs, is reached. Those stairs function as a central hub around which the entire architectural organism is designed.

The circular or elliptical stairs, usually enclosing an elevator, are already present in the first plans Dominioni made and are one of the most obvious recurrent themes in his plans. The stairs are the real protagonists of the whole plan, partitioning and connecting the spaces both vertically and horizontally. In plan they are dividing the spaces mostly in asymmetrical sub-areas and vertically they...
are the axis along which the spaces are perceived. They cut right through the volume, which is visible from both the interior as the exterior. At the outside there is the rise of external protruding dormers that animate the volume and provide the inside with unexpected skylights.

At first sight, these stairs look historic revivals of the graceful precursors of the Baroque and the Renaissance. Furthermore, the stairs also refer to the Art Nouveau, which flourished at the end of the 19th century, because similar expressive staircases can be found in houses of architects like Victor Horta. As a result many people refer to Dominioni as an architect of Neoliberty. Although these elegant stairs with their gracious handrails, according to the laws of craftsmanship, are becoming extraordinary sculptures in the setting of the building, Dominioni, as mentioned in the following quote, gives a more functional explanation for their form.

Quote 18: « L'uomo non riesce a muoversi che in un modo, che io definirei natural. Quindi l'angolo retto non è umano in un certo senso. Per l'uomo è molto più comodo arrivare in curva, difatti lo possiamo vedere nella realizzazione di molte mie scale che sono sempre curve »

« A man can not just move in one way, which I would define to be natural. Therefore, in a certain way, the right angle is not human. For people is much more convenient to move in curved lines, in fact we can see this in the realization of many of my stairs, they are always curved »

Those curved lines are the result of functional requirements, which will create a certain feeling of, like he describes it, ‘razionale sorpresa’, a
surprising rationality. According to Dominioni, people always move in a natural way. Just like grazing cows will never walk in straight lines from point A to B, people will also always move in flowing lines. If a stairway would be rectangular this will generate abrupt movements and will interrupt the continuity of the flow. Furthermore, a circular stair makes different trajectories are possible. In the centre of the circle the rungs follow each other more closely, which is perfect for little children, while at the edge of the circle the path will be more comfortable for adults.

With these words in mind, it is clear that its octagonal staircases have the same objectives as the round ones, in a somewhat more rational implementation. Although the gentle curve as a space defining element is considered as a kind of ideal, this will not always be feasible in practice. This will result in the appearance of a more segmented form of angles of 45 degrees, both in the executions of his stairs as in the placement of the walls throughout the buildings.

4.3.6 Semi Public to Private

4.3.6.1 The domestic life on stage

The stairs can be considered as the distribution centre of the whole building, of both the public as the private atmosphere. This distribution centre had a highly representative function because Dominioni states that every path has to start from a centre that must be anchored to a strong fixed symbol. From this point, the transition has to be made from the...
public to the private parts. As mentioned in the previous quote, even his stairs and his entrances are based on the urban setting. The urban setting can be found in the fact that the singular apartments are directly connected to the stairs like a house is directly linked to the streets. In a condominio you will never find a long hallway on which several apartments are grafted, something that often occurs in similar big building blocks. Similar to the real streets (and in the transition from outside to the inside on the ground floor), the transition from semi public towards the private atmosphere should happen gradual. Therefore, the front doors are mostly enclosed in a niche that differentiate the place and delimits a clear transition zone.

Before proceeding to the discussion of the plan lay outs of the individual apartments, it is important to clarify the title of this part. It is already known that the whole interior composition will be based on perception. The spectator is always driven forward by a feeling of curiosity. This feeling is generated by the fact that there is never a complete overview of the apartment and the different rooms. By introducing small openings in the walls between the different rooms, the spectator will be able to catch small glimpses of the other spaces, which will even enhance the mystery. Dominioni wants to create a kind of game of seeing and not being able to see, of watching and being watched. Like Mosayabi states in the following quote, this creates some kind of stage with the domestic life of the inhabitants and their visitors as subject. Therefore, he emphasises the everyday rituals, which will get a cultural significance.

The game of watching and being watched and making links between different rooms not only happens in the horizontal plane. Although most of Dominioni’s apartments are single storey houses, sometimes the flat will consist of two storeys or double height spaces. In this case, the links between different rooms will also appear in the vertical plane, which gives the game of watching literal an additional dimension.

3.3.6.2 The introduction of the gallery

Because Dominioni believes that the first glance sets the tone for the rest, entering the apartment will never happen in a restricted lobby. Although the houses are reduced in size, Dominioni wants to give them back the grandeur from the former high days. Therefore, he introduces in every plan a long space that moves through the entire apartment. In optimal conditions, he transforms this corridor into a gallery, a system of well thought out passages, connecting the different spaces. The origin of the term ‘gallery’ goes back to the Greek and Roman era, and refers to the traditional element that has an important place in the public sphere of Mediterranean countries. Although the first purpose of a gallery is conceiving a covered path for pedestrian people, protected from sun or rain, it is the more psychological aspect that will clarify the implementation in interior architecture. The gallery tends to create comfort and well-being
by giving the pedestrian a sense of self-importance in relation to his surroundings. Subsequently this will produce a sense of excitement and involvement of becoming an integral part of the architecture, street and city. Converted to the scale of the interior plan, it will create a sense of participation in the domestic life of the inhabitants.

Throughout the entire walk through the apartment, Dominioni tries to create instants of encounter and surprise, to evoke emotions and to amuse the inhabitant by the introduction of curved stretches of paths. Those paths reveal themselves only gradually and provide a scenographic impression of interesting and unexpected moments. In contrast to straight paths, which divulge immediately what is to come, the segmented routes limit the views and create continuously transforming segments, and therefore, alter the priorities of perception. Therefore, the visitor is driven forward by its curiosity and its desire to find out new spaces on the winding tracks. Just as on the street, the visitor will be able to catch a glimpse the space, building up the tension to the main room.

This suspense is obtained by a careful study of the view lines throughout the building. Many authors mention the plans and studies of Gio Ponti to illustrate this. Although the two architects are concerned with the psychological aspect in architecture and the experience of the observer, they both have a different approach to translate this into the plan. By looking at the plan of Villa Planchart of Gio Ponti, it becomes clear how view lines can be used as a design instrument. But whereas the observer in the plan of Ponti has a general overview of various rooms, Dominioni works with blocking the view at specific points. Dominioni allows each time only one specific viewpoint, which will be decisive for the path. Another difference can be found in the fact that Dominioni implements the corridor as the backbone of the whole composition in every plan, while Ponti tries to avoid the corridor in his plan. Although they do not use the same principles, they have the same goal of placing the true character of the occupant ahead. According to Ponti, it is not the promotion of pure functional use, but the stimulation of the quality of the users by giving greater weight to the poetic feeling that is the true nature of modern architecture. According to Ponti, Dominioni was even more successful in fulfilling this job than him as indicated by the quote.

The corridor is also an instrument to make the house look bigger. Dominioni states that by making the representative paths as long as possible he tries to give an extension to the house. From the very first moment a visitor enters, he will always be able to catch a glimpse of the other spaces but it will never be clear where those spaces actually end, making the apartment look bigger than it actually is. This is due to the retraction of the walls.

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**Quote 19**

« ma che bravi che siete stati. Avrei volute fare anche io il vostro lavoro, ma voi l’avete fatto meglio di me »

« You are so good. I wish I could have done your job, but you have done it better than me »

(G. Ponti)
and by blocking the view lines. As a consequence you will never be able, when you look from a specific point to the next room or space, to see all the walls of that room. Therefore, it becomes impossible to estimate the real dimensions of the room. In some cases those spaces, which can only be partly observed, will really contain a room, but in other cases this may simply be a niche. Eventually the space will be revealed by the forward movement manipulation of the perspective of the different vista’s.

The gallery will never result on a dead end. It will always end on a window, a balcony, a salon or living room. Therefore, these terminal points are always marked by a destination, which even reinforces the constructed tension.

Furthermore, the corridor becomes more than a circulation route by the retraction of the walls and expansion of the dimensions. By introducing elements as niches, furniture, built-in wardrobes and the possibility to open up rooms towards this corridor, its functionality is enhanced.

The evolution from corridor to gallery is visible in the different plans contained within this thesis. When having a look at the plan of Santa Maria alla Porta (≈1.9 m). Furthermore, in the apartment on the right side the corridor ends in the living room straight on a window. When opening the door of the living room, the corridor is charged with a destination, with natural light and with a glimpse of the outside. In this plan it is also visible how moveable walls can connect different rooms (in this case between dining room and living room). On the plans of Via Nievo one can distinguish two different approaches. In the first approach, which is applied in most of the cases, the corridor will be compartmentalised by the introduction of large doors by which the apartment can be gradually discovered. A complete different feeling will be created by opening or closing the doors. When the doors are closed, the people will enter in a defined area. With the doors open, the different spaces will flow into each other, creating interlocking spaces, changing the borders and subsequently the possibility of the rooms. Notice that almost every time the gallery also ends on a window. When this is not the case, it is probably to create the rhythmic expressive façade that will be discussed further in paragraph 4.4 and 4.5. The hierarchical flow through the building is here also very clear. There is one main axis that crosses the whole apartment to reach the living area. This is, according to Dominioni, the perfect extended path, resulting in the most representative room of the apartment, the living room, which is Dominioni’s preferred endpoint. From this main path towards the living room it is possible to ‘branche off’ to the more private areas. These private areas are connected by a kind of secondary path ‘disempgeno notte’ (night
corridor). This branching will also be visible in plans of the other apartments, like small alleys towards more private areas. In one single apartment the spine is more segmented. This enhances the dynamic of the spaces, generating an organic flow of different perspectives and focal points. These dynamics will also be visible in other plans.

4.3.6.3 The example of the building at Via Vigono

Analysing these paths only in plan is not enough. These stimulating paths, filled with diversified movements and perspectives, need to be experienced in 3D to comprehend the full range of the plasticity and the formal richness of the complete composition.

To analyse the 3D experience of a path, the example of the apartment on the top floor of the building in Via Vigoni will be used. This apartment has been exhibited on the Triennale of 1960 as 'Studio di distribuzione dei vani di un alloggio di medio lusso' (‘Study of the distribution of the compartments of a medium-luxury accommodation), and will therefore be a good synthesis of the principles developed by Dominioni.

People enter the apartment via an atrium that is separated from the living room with a glass door. This creates a connection between the entrance and the living room, but the view is limited in order to make a complete overview impossible. Although the view is limited, there are small elements that enhance the visibility, creating the atmosphere of watching and being watched. In the living room a mirror is fixed above the fireplace. (fig. 86) As such, the visitor gets an overview of the space, while entering, by the reflection in the mirror. At the same time, it gives the owner, when in the living room, the possibility to get an overview of the people that are entering his apartment. The use of mirrors is a recurring theme. When placed on a tilted wall, these mirrors can create interesting games of reflections and optical illusions. Illustrating this based on fig. 90, on the picture is visible how portholes are introduced to illuminate spaces without the disposal of natural light. Through these openings, the light flows from one space to another, which is then reflected on the materials or sometimes by introducing mirrors.

Another application is when Dominioni places the mirror at the end of the corridor. By placing it on non-parallel walls, it will be possible to catch a glimpse from the adjacent room. When looking in the mirror a feeling of a magic room is created because the image is indefinitely reflected.

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162 LCD, 1955-1959, inventory pp. 28-29
Fig. 87: Building at Via Vigoni  living room
Fig. 88: Building at Via Vigoni
Fig. 89: Plans building at Via Vigoni
To make optimal use of the space, Dominioni always introduces the flexibility to convert and connect some spaces. The plan of the 3th floor of this building will be taken as an example. The dotted lines in the apartment on the left indicate folding walls. These walls can either separate or connect the living room and the dining room.

Another example is on the top floor of this building, where folding walls can convert the ‘cameretta’ (small bedroom) into a salon by opening up to the corridor. Exceptionally in this plan is the fact that there are two large paths slicing through the apartment along its entire length (fig.88) The one in the front connects all six rooms, which can become one unique environment by opening up the common doors. The doors visible in the picture are a typical and important element in the interiors of Dominioni. Mostly they vertically go up to the ceiling, giving an impression of continuity. When those doors are open, they give a complete different impression than normal doors because the association with doors as border disappears. Most of Dominioni’s doors leave no edges when open, as is also the case with his moveable walls, guaranteeing visual, spatial and psychological continuity between the different spaces.

Dominioni always endeavors to reduce the borders within the apartment. Also in this plan, additional openings are placed in the walls or doors to reinforce this relation between the different spaces to create subtle see-throughs, which generates a game of watching and being watched.

Although the client and his experience are an important factor for every single detail of the plan, this does not reduce the functionality of the plan. On the contrary, by focussing, analysing and translating the way people really use the space, he will create according to him the most logic and functional paths and spaces. This is one of Dominioni’s main beliefs, functionality can result in beauty and those two aspects don’t have to contradict each other. The double standard of beauty and functionality is for example reflected in the tilted placement of walls. This looks a merely aesthetic act, creating sinuous perspective paths, but when studied more carefully, it appears that it also has functional goals. Firstly, more light is reflected when walls are placed in an angle. In addition, this placement also creates another way of entering a space, orientated towards

Quote 20 «I always try to give a certain class at the house, even if it is small. What I’m trying to do is thinking out the shortest paths only for strictly functional links ... however, giving a maximal development to the paths of so-called representation. The result is therefore a kind of rationality attached to a particular conception of live, the system may appear irrational when considered purely practical, but in my opinion it is an element that is able to make the house more human » (LCD)
the centre of the room. This will generate a different use and perception of the space than if one would come in a straight line. Finally, the introduction of an extra wall will provide more flexibility in furnishing the room and also create less residual space.

4.3.6.4 The tripartite: a functional division

Although the plan of Dominioni consists of interlocking spaces, merging into one another, there will be also a more functional and rigid division of the spaces. Analysing the plan reveals a classification of the plan that is closely linked with the classic borghese residences. There is a clear tripartition, which consists of a day area, a night area and a service space. They are separated and connected by corridor. Besides this corridor, which will always be extended to a maximum, there are also pure functional connections that are reduced to a minimum. These functional paths are the tracks inside the service compartment, between this compartment and the zone preserved for the living and dining room and also inside the night partition between the toilet and the bedrooms.

The day zone consists of the living and the dining room and in some cases an additional living room/salon and/or study. Notice that when there are two living rooms (e.g. the top floor of Via Vigoni), one will always be bigger than the other to allow different functions. The living and dining room will mostly be present in the same room. In case those are separate rooms, they will always be in communication with each other by means of flexible wall elements.

The position of the day zone can vary from plan to plan but will always respond to some recurring parameters. Firstly, this zone will always be partly orientated to the sunny side. Secondly, it will always be located on the primarily path through the house and within the shortest distance of the service area.

The next part is the night zone. This area is always reached by branching off the primarily path on some kind of secondary system, the disempegnno notte (night corridor), that will interconnect the different bed- and bathrooms. This ensures the privacy of the inhabitants by a hierarchical progression through the house.

A typical aspect of Dominioni’s night zone are the sleeping rooms. When possible, he will provide walk-in closets integrated in the night corridor. By banishing the closets to the darkest corners of the house, the rooms that are rather small get more light and space. At the same time these undefined spaces will be charged and they get a meaning beyond just a circulation place.

The compartment that is most strictly defined is the space reserved for the service staff, something that is deeply rooted in the life of the Milanese Borghese. In our current era the kitchen is implemented as a representative element but in the 60s this is pure service space, reserved for the staff.

167 IRACE, F., Il fascino discreto dell’architettura, “Ottagono”, n. 91, dicembre 1988, pp. 52-63
All the plans show that these service spaces have a permanent reserved place. This reserved space is on the north side of the building, centrally located and connected to a shaft, with immediate access to the garages. Notice that during the 50s and the 60s the car will be introduced in the plan, by the means of underground garages. In the plans of Dominioni these will be perfectly designed. On the picture it is clear how the architect integrates these garages and their entrance in the design of the building, without trying to hide them.

Plugging in the service spaces on alternative paths guarantees the privacy of the inhabitant, because the paths of the owner and these of the servants never have to cross.

The service elevator is mostly positioned within the plane of the façade, providing natural light to the staircase connected to the circulation tube. In case of the more traditional residential blocks, this service elevator is not visible in the outer shell, but is incorporated in the staircases. This ensures the traditional image of the exterior.

Ideally, as shown on the plans of Via Vigoni and of Casa Pirelli, the service spaces are connected with each other by introducing a 'ballatoio'. This is a typical Milanese balcony, clearly present in the plan and façade of classic Milanese houses. However, in most cases this is replaced by a big 'stanza da lavoro', workspace with the same connecting, distributive function. In an exceptional case there is a kind of reinterpretation of the balcony. On the two upper floors of the building situated at Piazza Carbonari, there is a huge bow flanking the façade on the north side. By collocating and comparing the plans with the façade it shows that this expansion offers the possibility to link the service spaces with the living and the dining room.

Also remarkable is the amount of space that these facilities, consisting of the kitchen, a small bathroom, wardrobe and one or two rooms with one or two beds, occupy. This reflects perfectly the lifestyle of the Milanese higher class.

Quote 21 « Where we in the United States often will have two cars and no domestic help, the Italian will have two servants and a bicycle. » (G.E. Smith, 1955)
Fig. 96: Building at Via Vigoni – kitchen
4.3.7 LCD: the ‘Homo universalis’

Quote 22 « Fare grandi cose con piccoli interventi »
« creating great things by small interventions »
(M.A. Crippa, 1996) 170

Dominioni always elaborates his designs to the smallest detail, from the urban scale to the small scale of interior decoration. The introduction of the term ‘homo universalis’ refers back to the time of the baroque, where architects were men of many talents, creating more than just architecture. In that time, buildings where described by a bigger urban setting and art works were created for a specific place and with a specific size. This results in a perfect integration and a more sustainable outcome than if the pieces of art had been purchased by some committee afterwards.

It is clear that Dominioni is a rare modern example of this universal man. Dominioni believes that architecture and its decoration can never be seen separated. 171 A perfect example of this synthesis of architecture and decoration are the mosaics used in his buildings, described in paragraph 4.3.5. Just as these mosaics, all the other elements implemented in his interiors will never be just to fill the places. Instead, these elaborated elements, such as his furniture, niches an stairs, will always transcend the ordinary, becoming pieces of art defined in the space.

Since his interiors are designed into the smallest detail to create an optimal living environment, it is important to revert back to the first steps of his design process, namely his furniture as a basic device.

His furniture responds adequately to the general trend of duality visible in modern furniture of that period. On the one hand, the wish for luxury creates the implementation of new, modern materials, in order to express the power of the new elite based on knowledge and innovation. At the same time, they desire to return to the refinement and the individual approach of the era of craftsmanship. 172 Therefore, Dominioni’s individual pieces are made out of modern materials but by the laws of craftsmanship and with many references to traditional elements. Every piece of furniture is designed to be able to exist individually but on the other hand, his furniture is also made to be combined and to co exist complementary with the more antique pieces of the inhabitants to counteract monotony. The old elements enhance the new ones, and the modern elements flatter the old. Furthermore, each piece of furniture is specifically placed in the interior linked to the orientation, visibility, light, space and movement of the person, and contributes as such to shape the flux of the paths through the house 173, 174.

Quote 23 « Sraordinario pezzo unico artigianale-vi è una rara intesa fra l’architettura e il modo di abitare –senza squilibri, senza contraddizioni, con armonia »
« An extra-ordinary crafted piece which is a rare agreement between the architecture and way of living, without imbalances, without contradiction, with harmony »
(LCD) 175
Besides the foundation of Azucena, discussed in paragraph 3.3.2 Dominioni also collaborates with the company ‘Lualdi’, specialized in producing doors. In the postwar period it was common that famous designers and architects entered into an association with a specific company in order to contribute in the design process and to deliver the company a reputation. During this section of planimetry, the influence and importance of the doors is already mentioned a few times. Therefore, Dominioni has studied this down to the finest detail. Dominioni states that a door occupies a certain amount of space. Since the houses are getting smaller, it is important to design doors that do not take more space than necessary. Therefore, he searched for solutions where the required space was not more than a few millimeters besides the dimensions of the door. This resulted in, according to Dominioni, ‘the world’s most beautiful door’ \footnote{Interview Dominioni: http://www.infoprogetto.it/articoli/123/intervista_a_caccia_dominioni.html, 05/05/2012} (fig 99). Just as in the example of his stairs, this is again an example of how functionality can result into real beauty. This combination of functionality and beauty is something that Dominioni seeks for in every single aspect of his architecture. With this aspect Dominioni links himself to the baroque, which is according to him the most powerful and urban architectural form of all \footnote{Interview between Dominioni and Fulvio Irace, IRACE, F., MARINI, P., Luigi Caccia Dominioni – Case e Cose da abitare, Venezia: Marsilio Editori, 2002}. This is a completely different association than many authors make between Dominioni and the baroque. Their associations are generally based purely on formal associations of the gracefulness, while Dominioni is opposed to this kind of formalism \footnote{MALFATTI, P., L. Caccia Dominioni a Milano Porta Genova: memoria industriale, “Abitare”, n. 394, 2000, pp. 224-231}.

### 4.3.8 Materials: reinforcing effects

The materials used by Dominioni always enhance the effects explained in the previous parts. He uses, for example, clear colours and bright materials that optimally reflect both the natural light at day and the artificial light at night. These materials can be light plaster, varnished wood, metal, mirrors or reflecting ceramic. Besides the coverings of the walls, ceilings and floors, also his furniture is made of these materials, generating an even bigger play of reflection.

Just as the mosaics of Francesco Somaini, the other floorcoverings indicate directions and focal points. Furthermore, they can enhance the centrality of a space and they can also be used in order to delimit spaces. Though some places are connected by opening the doors, the autonomy of a place can be created by using different materials or placing them in different directions.

\[\text{Fig. 97}\]
Fig. 98: LCD_Mínimo organico, 1997-1998

Fig. 99: LCD_Unit 36, 2000-2001
Dominioni’s main objective for every building is creating a suitable home to live in. Therefore, he always starts from the development of the plan, which should be the expression of the inhabitant. The fact that the residents have had to make concessions by changing their homes for an apartment building, does not have to mean that they should make concessions in terms of privacy, quality and individuality.

Therefore, Dominioni rejects the typical uniform, repetitive plan compositions, in favour of a composition of different units that are cut to the size of the inhabitant. Furthermore, Dominioni always tries to create stimulating spaces with the highest possible spatial impression and utility, which results in an elaborated network of interconnected spaces and paths. This network is always based on the perceived experiences while walking through the building and the apartment. The architect tries to stimulate the emotions of the people by creating surprising and exciting places of encounter. He succeeds in this by creating controlled and surprising illumination and by creating controlled view lines, so that a space reveals itself only gradually. Moreover, the rooms always look bigger by reducing the borders between inside and outside as the borders within the apartment. Dominioni also enhances the utility of the room by introducing some flexibility, for example by adjustable walls, and by working out everything to the smallest detail.

Although the client and his experiences are embedded in every single detail of the plan, this does not reduce the functionality of the plan. On the contrary, by analysing and translating the way people really use the space, he creates according to him the most logic and functional spaces, which are intimately related to life.

It has to be noticed that Dominioni implements this knowledge and principles also to create minimal units with maximal potential and quality. In fig. 98 and 99, the plans for respectively a unit of 42.5 m² and one of 36 m² are shown. In these studies Dominioni looks for the optimal distribution of the place to accommodate a family of four people. These plans clearly show similar approaches and elements as Dominioni developed in the plans for his clients of a higher class. A recurring element is the dynamism imparted by the diagonal walls, cleverly bent at 45 degrees for the purpose of expanding the space and optimising the paths. This shows that although Dominioni meanly designed for the upper class, his search for quality and utility and the resulting elements can be used for a broader audience.
4.4 Volumetry

4.4.1 Introduction

The exterior appearance of a building of Dominioni is always a complex, ambiguous composition of elements. Therefore, one could say that there are two scales in the exterior image of the building. On the one hand you have the general image of the building, which is the first impression perceived while looking at it. Furthermore, there is a more detailed image of singular elements that can be distinguished when looking more carefully. Although these two aspects can never be seen separate from each other, since the singular elements create the general picture and the general picture imposes preconditions for the singular elements, they will be discussed in two different chapters. This chapter of volumetry will discuss why and how the buildings get their specific image. Subsequently, it will serve as an introduction to the next chapter of the façade, which will discuss more in detail some specific facets of the elements that define the volumetry.

4.4.2 How to play with geometry

The social aspect of the context, the client, also influences the exterior image of the building. As in the interior lay out of the plan, Dominioni wants to express the ideal of individual property in the exterior appearance of the building. ‘Everyone its own plan, and therefore in the façade, everyone its own windows’\textsuperscript{181}. However, this expression is not achieved by the means of sculptural volumes but by the way these volumes are edited. Therefore, he introduces some inventive trics and compositional exceptions to express the individual wishes of the clients and to highlight the different units.

The basic principle of most of the buildings is a parallelepiped. The only exception is the building at Piazza Carbonari\textsuperscript{182} (fig. 106) with a more irregular, expressive volume. As mentioned in paragraph 4.2.3.1 this is the result of legislation and not a formal game.

Some authors mention the influences of Le Corbusier on Luigi Caccia Dominioni\textsuperscript{183}, mainly considering a reference between l'Unité d'habitation and the building block in via Nievo\textsuperscript{184}. Opposed to these assumptions this parallelepiped is not the result of trying to pursue great primary forms, as is the case in the purism of Le Corbusier. Furthermore, the approach of Dominioni to domestic design is exactly the opposite of the approach of Le Corbusier since Dominioni aims for an individual expression instead of standardisation. However, the origins of the simple architectural forms can be found in the fact that Dominioni opposes any kind of pre-imposed

\textsuperscript{180} CRIPPA, M.A, Luigi Caccia Dominioni – Flussi, spazi e architettura, Torino: Testo e Immagine, 1996.


\textsuperscript{182} LCD, 1960-1961, inventory pp. 10-11.


\textsuperscript{184} LCD, 1955-1956, inventory pp. 6-7.
formalism. When he has to connect the building with existing buildings, these buildings will impose the preconditions of the volume. When the building is a freestanding block, he will start with a simple volume without pre-imposing any expressive form. The rectangular form is the most functional, logic, elegant and timeless form of a multi-family residential building. Furthermore, a simple volume is always easier to manipulate according to the individual needs.

To convert the plan into a volume, Dominioni uses a flexible skeletal structure. This gives the opportunity to organise the interior units according to the individual wishes of the client. Furthermore, it makes it also possible for the architect to manipulate the façade freely.

Notice that this is a completely different approach than the modernistic use of a geometrical structure, where it changed its role from being an instrument to being a theme. The modernists consider it as the deep structure of matter and the ‘proper function’ of construction. Dominioni however, does not believe in this kind of pre-imposed rigid structure. He believes that the use of the building makes the rules and not the other way around. This ideology is a representation of the social aspect, a triumph of civilisation, based on liberation instead of purification, which results in a graphic formulation without any reference to the structure.

4.4.3 How to mediate with the surrounding: integrating versus standing out

Although the common thread of all the buildings is expressing the individuality of the inhabitants, the general expression of the buildings will be different according to their urban location. There is a clear difference inside and outside the circle of Navigli. (fig. 45). This is due to the fact that a historical loaded context demands a different approach than a new to develop area. In general, the difference can be explained by the different concerns and goals the architect has regarding the different areas. Inside the circle of Navigli, Dominioni’s main concern is to integrate with the existing context but in the new neighbourhoods, he wants to revive the place by creating a building that stands out, a monument for the area.

4.4.3.1 Within the historic centre hiding in the: shadow?

When discussing the way how Dominioni integrates with the historical centre, it is important to keep the ‘Preesistenze Ambientali’ of Rogers in mind. Furthermore, it is interesting to look at the manifesto of Muzio ‘Milano 800-900’. The manifests have many arguments in common, but in the text of Muzio more attention is paid to how continuity can be achieved in the real setting of the historical streets of Milan. Muzio, as mentioned in the quote 25, emphasises the fact that Milan has no predominant

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185 In the buildings of Dominioni the structure is never visible, which is atypical for Milanese buildings of that time. In many Milanese buildings the structure is visible in the outer shell. According to Pagano this is even a common elements between architects of the Novecento like Muzzio and the rationalists like Terragni.

186 ZUCCHI, C, Condominio XXI Aprile a Milano, Genova: Sagep Editrice, 1993

187 Mentioned by Fulvio Irace during an interview at the Politecnico di Milano
style, but is a multifaceted city with images of different styles placed together. The complexity of the fusion of different languages resulted in the coherent image of the city. Therefore, the new buildings that are implemented in the historical centre should try to complement the harmony and homogeneity of that historic fabric.

By introducing timeless elements and by a sound knowledge of the classical order, Dominioni succeeds in aligning his new buildings with the existing context. This is generated by a feeling of coherence without fixed relations, and by some kind of complexity that creates a sense of pleasure.

Inside the historical centre, there are two main typologies to distinguish. The first one is the freestanding block (e.g. Casa Pirelli) and the second one is included in an existing screen of buildings (e.g. the building at Via Vigoni). Both typologies have to continue harmoniously the original rhythm of the pre-existing buildings, both in horizontal as vertical proportions. A good example to illustrate this is the building in Via Santa Maria alla Porta (fig. 107). The height of the building is aligned to the surrounding buildings. Furthermore, the building is compartmentalised in two parts by a strict delineation, a different use of materials and the introduction of various types of window openings, which reduces the volumetric impact of the building. As a result, the building merges harmoniously with the lively tissue of the surrounding buildings. A same approach is visible, even though less distinct, in Casa Pirelli. The building is divided into two asymmetric parts by the introduction of a glass strip. In addition, there are displacements in the window openings, which break the continuity of the building that otherwise could be perceived as monolithic and rationalistic. The fact that the windows do not follow a, calm rigid composition will be present in all his buildings, both in the new as the historic areas.

One of the first elements that differentiate a building in the centre from one in the periphery is the material used to finish the building. Dominioni will always use plaster with the typical warm colours of the Lombard region in the centre. These materials perfectly integrate with the existing buildings which is in contrast to the ceramic materials used in the peripheral areas.

Although the building has to blend in with the environment, the building also wants to represent itself as a distinct element in this environment.

\[\text{Quote 25} \quad \text{Oggi ancora a noi sembra necessaria una reazione alla confusione ed all’esasperato individualismo dell’architettura odierna, ed il ristabilimento del principio di ordine per il quale l’architettura, arte eminentemente sociale, deve in un paese anzitutto essere continua nei suoi caratteri stilistici, per esser suscettibile di diffusione e formare con il complesso degli edifici un tutto armonico ed omogeneo.} \]

\[\text{“A reaction to the confused and exasperated individualism of today’s architecture seems necessary to us, in order to re-establish a principle of order for which architecture, a socially eminent art, must have a continuity of style in a country, in order for it to diffuse and form a harmonic whole of the complex of its buildings.”} \quad (G. Muzio, 1921)\]

\[\text{188 Giovani Muzio was one of the founding members of the Novecento movement and much appreciated by Dominioni. MUZIO, G., Milano 800-900, “Emporium”, 1921} \]

\[\text{189 Lecture Marvin Trachtenberg ‘Building-in-Time: Thinking and Making Architecture in the Premodern Era’, 10/05/2012} \]

\[\text{FORTY, A., Parole e Edifici, vocabolario per l’architettura moderna, Bologna: Pendragon, 2005} \]

\[\text{190 LCD, 1962-1965, inventory pp. 20-21} \]

\[\text{191 LCD, 1955-1959, inventory pp. 28-29} \]

\[\text{192 LCD, 1962-1965, inventory pp. 20-21} \]
Therefore, the building is strongly delineated, both horizontal as vertical. The vertical lines are created by using the drainpipes as an actual element in the façade (e.g. fig. 108 Casa Pirelli) or sometimes by delineations visible in the building in Via Vigoni 194. (fig.109) Horizontally, the building is always separated from its underground by a base, consisting of a different material. When the building is covered with plaster, the base is mostly coated with a ceramic material, and when litoceramic materials are used, the base is mostly covered with plaster. The height the building is limited by the introduction of a strong overhanging roof. This cantilever always creates a border of shadow, enhancing the separation between the building and the sky. Notice that the base and the roof are typical elements of the former Lombard Palazzo’s. By re-introducing these elements it appears that Dominioni wants to represent a same class of inhabitants.

The introduction of light and shadow as defining element of the volume is a recurring theme in the realisations of Dominioni in the historic centre. This creates a more complex diversified image without adding any unnecessary ornament. This is also clearly visible in the withdrawn position of the windows in the façade, creating an additional game of shadow on the façade and demonstrating the thickness of the construction.

Other typical elements characterising and animating the volume are the protruding dormers and the massive bow windows. These elements are also found outside this historical context but will have a less traditional translation.
4.4.3.3 Outside the centre: painting the city

During the 60s, new urban developments took place outside the circle of Navigli. Since outside the historical centre the area is less historically loaded, Dominioni has more freedom to experiment with a more modern language. Furthermore, these peripheral areas have a powerful metropolitan scale, which results in the possibility to construct buildings of a larger scale. These peripheral areas were mostly regarded as inferior and therefore neglected. Dominioni believes that his buildings should be able to revive the area by standing out as some kind of monuments. Therefore, the buildings will have a public function within the urban tissue, resulting in a pictorial value, marking their role and presence in the city\textsuperscript{195,196}.

The first difference between these buildings and the ones in the centre is the fact they are perceived in in a different way. The buildings in the centre are perceived more as static screens by walking by, while outside the centre the buildings are perceived in 3D by driving by. The sequence of the surfaces will result in a more dynamic image of the building. This can be illustrated by the example of the building at Piazza Carbonari\textsuperscript{197} (fig.106). Because the building is positioned at a roundabout, three façades can be perceived while driving around the building. On the one hand there is the continuity of the surface and on the other hand there is the game of displaced windows, creating a dynamic image of the building.\textsuperscript{198} Furthermore, the introduced corner windows give the impression that the strip windows continue, which effaces a purely two dimensional image of the façade.

The homogeneity of the surface is created by the cladding of the building. While the use of material is rather neutral in the historic centre, the materials used in the peripheral areas do not aim to integrate the building with its surrounding, but rather aim to make the buildings stand out. Therefore, the buildings are covered with litoceramic materials that reflect the sunlight. By the introduction of different shades and colours this light will be reflected differently on each point, creating a smooth shimmering surface. Furthermore, the windows are always placed in flush with the façade, and while the windows in the centre are performed in wood, these windows are in aluminium, enhancing the modern, smooth shimmering surface. Dominioni learned this lesson from Gio Ponti, who pleads for smooth surfaces without shadow, because the new modern era is an era of transparency \textsuperscript{199}.

By comparing the buildings in the centre with the ones outside of it, it appears that Dominioni tries everything to delineate the building inside the centre, while he takes the opposite approach outside the centre. Since the building has a more massive volume in the peripheral area, the architect tries to dematerialise the volume, to avoid a monolithic expression of the building. He succeeds in this by introducing for example corner windows and gratings as visible in fig.112. Furthermore, the windows have an offset from floor to floor,
dematerialising the building and at the same time responding to the individuality of every single plan composition. The fact that the windows are placed in flush with the façade reduces the materiality of the building, denying the thickness of the materials and creating the image of a façade as a slender screen. Just as the typical curtain wall structures, this screen is a non-supportive curtain of a shiny skin of glass and ceramics.

The roof is also less distinctly expressed than inside the centre. Instead of a big expanding roof, the roof will only be a small light strip cutting the volume, which is a more modern approach typical for the rationalistic movement. This results in a perfect harmony with the sky and skyline of Milan.

4.4.4 Conclusion

Dominioni is aware of the visual and psychological impact a building can have on the people and on the surrounding. He understands that a building draws its vitality from the environment but at the same time, it helps to create that environment. Therefore his façades are always carefully elaborated compositions that do not reveal themselves immediately. Although his buildings always start from a simple and strong shape, he obtains a complex image by editing these volumes. The shape, dimension, interrelationships and rhythm of the windows, define a large part of the expression of the building. Moreover, these windows affect the way the
residents experience their environment, and the
other way around the windows reveal to the outside
world something about the interior living conditions
and about the relations between residents in the
block.
Furthermore, Dominioni understands that his
buildings are inscribed in the visual perception of the
city and therefore have a commitment towards it.
Since the context inside and outside the historical
centre is completely different, the commitment
towards this context is expressed differently, resulting
in a different expression of the buildings. This results
in two different types of building blocks, according to
their position towards the centre.
In the historical centre, Dominioni’s main concern is
to complete a continuous tissue. He succeeds by
aligning the buildings to the surrounding buildings
and by implementing a variety of (traditional)
elements. These elements create coherence with the
surroundings without any fixed relations. Since these
buildings are located in the most expensive part of
the city, the clients have another standard than in the
buildings located outside the historical core. While
outside the historic centre the people belong to the
middle class, the ones in the centre belong to the
highest part of that middle class. These people want
to make fewer concessions and participate much
more in the process of designing to express their
personal wishes. Furthermore, the apartments are
larger, cover different floors and the building block is
shared with only a few families. Therefore, this
typology tends more to a private ‘urban villa’ than to
a real new modern way of urban living.
Outside the historical core of the city, Dominioni has
more freedom to experiment. This freedom is due to
the fact that inhabitants interfere less with the
process of designing and to the less historical loaded
setting. Furthermore, the buildings outside the centre
aim for a different impression than those in the
centre. They can be seen as monuments to revive a
new developed area. This results in large,
freestanding building blocks with surprising,
asymmetric façades covered with ceramic stones.
These building blocks are not only monuments for
the surrounding, but also for the inhabitants.
Therefore, Dominioni brings the large scale building
back on the human scale and expressing the
individuality of its middle class inhabitants. These
blocks can be seen as a strong reflection on the
theme of a new, denser, modern way of living.

This classification corresponds to the classification
made in the inventory. Notice that in the inventory
there is also a 3rd typology included. These buildings
are situated in the centre of the city completing an
existing curtain of buildings. They can be seen as the
intermediate between the two previous types, not
giving up the dialogue with history, but in a more
modern translation.
4.5 Façade

4.5.1 Introduction: calculated order and disorder

This chapter will elaborate on the concept façade of Dominioni’s architecture. As all the aspects of Dominioni’s language are interlinked, this chapter will be based on conclusions of previous ones. The aspects discussed in previous section Volumetry will appear to have the highest impact in this chapter.

The basis principle of every façade is the fact that it grows out of the ground plan. The groundplan consists of a compilation of diverse units what subsequently is translated in the exterior appearance of the building. Notice that the exterior image of a building is always subjected to more rules than the interior one, because it has to take into accounts the external environmental factors of the surrounding. These external factors will be different according to the relative location to the center. Outside the city center the parameters will be less defined than inside the centre, which results in a higher level of freedom to experiment with a more modern language. This results in two strong formal themes. On the one hand one could define the residential buildings located in the historic center. Those buildings are a revision of the traditional neoclassicism, covered with plaster and with rhythmic spread openings. On the other hand, you have Dominioni’s surprising, asymmetric façades covered with ceramic stones, which can be seen as a strong reflection on the theme of a new modern way of living.

In both types Dominioni introduces a playful variation of images, in order to prevent a monotonically appearance\textsuperscript{202}. By blending old and new elements, Dominioni guarantees a degree of cultural continuity with a vivid ambiguity of images that draws the attention of the people. Due to previous aspects, Rogers gave Dominioni the name of a ‘lively experimentalist’\textsuperscript{203}.

Previous chapters also make clear that Dominioni is very involved in the architectural process and that he cares about the effects of these architectural pieces on the people. Furthermore, he wants to make the people more involved in architecture. This involvement will be created by the fact that the full notion and stratification of the façade will never be clear at the first sight. This is due to the introduction of various images and small operations (such as scaling and shifting), which generates a heterogeneous image. When having a more detailed look at the façade, it becomes clear that all the singular elements and operations are always carefully chosen in order to obtain a coherent image. Therefore, a committed spectator will always perceive an image between recognition and surprise, between order and disorder.

This section will discuss how the plan is converted into the façade together with the elements that Dominioni uses for this process. A number of themes are determined to explain the singular elements, what their origin and their function. The themes will be the most defining elements of the façade. Notice that although the defining themes will be the same inside the historical centre as outside this centre, the translation of these themes will usually be different.

\textsuperscript{202} CRIPPA, M.A, Luigi Caccia Dominioni – Flussi, spazi e architettura, Torino: Testo e Immagine, 1996, p. 11

\textsuperscript{203} POLIN, G., Un architetto Milanese tra regionalismo e sperimentazione: LCD, “Casabella”, n. 508, dicembre 1984, pp. 40-51
Fig. 113: Façade building at Piazza Carbonari
Fig. 114: Façade building at Via Nievo
Fig. 115: Front façade Casa Carbonari
Fig. 116: Rear façade Casa Carbonari
Fig. 117: Casa Pirelli
Fig. 118: Façade building at Via Vigoni
4.5.2 Plan v façade

Quote 26 « se un architetto vuole bene operare deve cominciare il proprio lavoro dall’interno piuttosto che dall’esterno: la disposizione di ogni singolo arredo condiziona la distribuzione interno dall’alloggio e, di conseguenza delle facciate; anche se faccio un grattacielo, la facciata nasce dal letto »

“If an architect wants to operate in a good way, he must start his design from the inside rather than from the outside: the disposition of each individual furnishing affects the internal distribution of the room and consequently of the façades, even if I make a tower, the façade is born out of the bed »

(LCD)

The approach of Dominioni to deduce the façade from the plan is the opposite approach than often used in Milanese buildings. Typical is that a structure and a façade is imposed to which the plan subsequently has to adapt. Dominioni rejects this kind of façadism and he always creates his façades as perfectly tailored suits.205

However, by comparing the plan compositions with the drawings of the façade, it is clear that Dominioni also has other objectives besides purely translating the interior into the façade. The clearest example is visible in the plans of Via Nievo (fig. 73) where the 2nd, 7th and 8th floor have more or less the same division regarding the living rooms. However, the arrangement of the openings are different, to create a more vivid façade.

Looking at the façade of the building at Piazza Carbonari reveals that rooms with similar functions are frequently represented by windows with a different height and from a different type. (fig.113)

This is easily to explain by the fact that besides Dominioni’s dedication toward his clients, he also understands that buildings are part of the visual daily life of the people and the city. Therefore, the typological reasons of the façade will alternate with reasons that belong more to the field of the visual arts.

Both Mosayebi206 as Fulvio Irace207 mention a link between the modern paintings of Mondrian and the modern experiments of Dominioni. Furthermore, Irace states that if the modern buildings can be compared with the abstract paintings of Mondrian, his more traditional buildings can be compared with the blurred paintings of Morandi. Morandi is an Italian architect whose paintings are stylistically embedded in the Italian tradition. The individual themes will be discussed with this aesthetic approach in mind. (fig.119 and 120). Sometimes, the window compositions on the plan do not always fit the real composition on the façade. Probably the reason can be found in the fact that the architect is someone who changes the plan during the construction when he thinks something can be improved (as was mentioned in paragraph 4.2.3.2)

Fig. 119: Mondrian
Fig. 120: Morandi
4.5.3 Material use as leitmotif

4.5.3.1 Plaster

The use of material is one of the strongest constants in the work of Dominioni. Generally, there are two totally different materials to distinguish namely the more traditional ‘stucco’, plaster and the modern litoceramic materials. As mentioned in the previous paragraph 4.4.3 the two materials will be used in different parts of the city to obtain a different expression of the building, stucco in the centre and litoceramics outside the centre. This division is carried out very strictly with only one exception, namely the building at via Santa Croce\textsuperscript{208}. Nowadays, the building block is covered with a dark plaster even though it is situated outside the centre and even though it is clearly one of Dominioni’s more modern typologies. However, originally the building was covered with a grey, reflecting litoceramic cladding (fig. 121)\textsuperscript{209}. A comparison of the two pictures (fig. 121 and fig. 122) clarifies that the original building has a totally different appearance than the current one. The building loses the typical expression of Dominioni’s modern buildings by giving it a new covering. Losing its shimmering skin, the building has a rather dark and gloomy appearance. The typical plasters used by Dominioni have a brighter and a warmer colour than the one in Via Santa Croce. By which they fit the typical warm Lombard colours present in the Milanese streets (fig. 123). Dominioni’s colours are always the natural colour of the material, respecting the true nature of the materials. Throughout his whole design approach,
Dominioni remains loyal to the true nature of these materials. He knows the strengths and weaknesses of the materials and therefore, he is able to apply them properly depending on the specific situation. This strategy is also highlighted by Ridolfi by the below quote.

"We must love the materials we use, get to know them, support their technical and aesthetic qualities to extract the maximum results from them." (M. Ridolfi)

Therefore, the typical colours of the buildings of Dominioni will be earth tones. These are the natural colours of the plaster, derived from the oxides, salts and earth in the materials. This is not only the case in the buildings covered with plaster, but also in the ones with litoceramic coatings. Generally, these buildings are brown, except for the first residential building Dominioni experimented with litoceramics, in Via Nievo, which has a green-blue colour.

4.5.3.2 Litoceramics

In the postwar period, Milan was characterised by a renewed interest in building coatings for residential buildings. Referring to the use of noble materials in previous times such as the marble claddings, it is clear that coating is actually anchored in the former material use of Milan buildings. In a quest to find alternatives for the dictates of the white stucco rationalistic movement, architects make a modern interpretation of these noble and durable materials. The inspiration was found in the buildings of the Wiener Secession that at the beginning of the 20th century was also looking for new ways to break with the academism. Giovani Muzio was one of the first architects to start experimenting with clinker in his buildings, which was an updated version of the traditional brick. Many other architects followed this example, including for example Ansago & Vender and Gio Ponti. However, the real master of this technique was Luigi Caccia Dominioni. Although many authors state that Dominioni used this material for the first time in his office building Loro and Parisini in Via Savona, he already used it in an earlier building, namely in the building for the convent Beata Vergine Addolorata. Many other architects followed his example, which resulted in the typical image of the blue-green or brown shining residential middle class buildings that is still characterizing the outskirts of Milan. Therefore, these buildings have generated a complete Milanese architectural school, although Dominioni, has never held any actual lesson.
The material used by Dominioni works as a separated skin, which hides the structure. This is a rather unusual approach for Milanese buildings, since in most buildings of that time the structure was always visible and was a defining element of the façade\textsuperscript{215}.

Before Dominioni introduced these materials as a surface finish, he already used it to cover his interiors. By using these materials in his interiors, he probably started to appreciate the qualities (such as durability, possibility to reflect light, creating homogeneous surfaces) of these materials, giving him the idea of using them in its façades. A similar action will appear in a later stage of his career, for example in the commercial building for the Essalunga in the Rubattino\textsuperscript{216} (fig. 124). This building is covered with some kind of studs. These coverings are inspired on the pavement of churches such as Sant’ Ambrogio\textsuperscript{217} (fig.125). Dominioni loves the reflecting qualities of these convex materials. Dominioni states that he experimented with these materials because they create a lively façade. Moreover, it has also a functional purpose, the small format and the relief prevents people from vandalism, from spraying graffiti on it\textsuperscript{218}.

Because the use of these materials is influenced by the Wiener Secession, and particularly by Adolf Loos, it is interesting to look why they implemented these materials. Loos had a total aversion of decoration, because he stated that ornamentation is always very specific and therefore becomes outdated after some time. Therefore, he considered it a crime to waste too much time adding ornamentation. Instead, he liked using the building materials in their full potential e.g. marble, glass and steel to create durable, smooth and precious surfaces with sharp edges.

Dominioni also uses these litoceramic materials for its functional and aesthetic qualities. The functional qualities of the materials can be found in the fact that they ask little maintenance, never degenerate, always keep their colour and therefore appear as new. Dominioni always combines these materials with other durable and smooth materials such as glass and aluminium.

Besides these functional qualities, the material also has aesthetic values. The material creates a faceted but homogeneous and smooth surface, which generates a splendid volume without any relief. Due to the combination of different colours and applications (opaque, reflecting or vitrified and filled up or hollow) of the material, it is possible to create a lively animated façade. Notice that there are also different colours and forms of the material, hexagonal or extruded rectangles and flat or convex, that create different motifs, directions and reflections.
The stones used in Beata Vergine Addolorate\textsuperscript{219} are opaque while the coatings of the residential buildings are reflecting ceramic materials. This is easily to explain based on the different functions both buildings have to fulfil. The difference is due to the fact that the main concern of a monastery is sobriety while residential buildings should become some kind of monument for the surrounding area\textsuperscript{220}.

From the moment Dominioni introduces the litoceramic stones in the building of Beata Vergine Addolorate, he starts to look for the different potentials of the material. Interesting is his introduction of the alternating hollow and full gratings, which are perforated elements made from the same material and creating a translucent and transparent grid. Some people consider this as a new concept, but these elements were probably inspired by traditional elements. On the one hand there is a clear resemblance between the decoration of monastery and the church right in front of it, see paragraph 4.2.3.1. On the other hand there are clear similarities with the vented walls of the traditional farm buildings that already exist for thousand years, as visible in fig.130. Besides the decorative and visual goals, these traditional elements are functionally implemented in buildings to ventilate the building to create a more comfortable environment\textsuperscript{221}. Also Gardella implemented these gratings in his hospital in Alessandria in 1934.\textsuperscript{222} The fact that Dominioni takes inspiration from traditional and functional elements cannot be seen as a negative element, it doesn’t make him less authentic. Moreover, it shows the intelligence of the

\textsuperscript{219} LCD, 1948-1954, inventory pp. 62-63

\textsuperscript{220} N.N, A Milano una zona chi si va transformando, “Domus”, n. 403, 1963, pp. 10-16

\textsuperscript{221} SMITH, G.E. Kidder, L’Italia costruisce, New York: Reinhold, 1955

\textsuperscript{222} Lessons Storia dell’architettura e dello spazio abito nel novecento of professor Augusto Rossari
architect to look at the reality and learn lessons from it, subsequently translating those into interesting contemporary architectural elements.

These gratings also create more privacy than a glass façade. Besides controlling the incoming views, they also controls the incoming sunlight, as some kind of brise the soleil Furthermore, the gratings create a good looking transition between indoors and outdoors. These elements are clearly visible in the upper floor of the loggia of the building Beata Vergine Addolorate\textsuperscript{223} and in the convent in Via Carlo Farini\textsuperscript{224}. The tower of the convent consists completely of parapets made out of these gratings. In this image it is also perfectly clear how these gratings are welcome elements to break with the monotony of the façade, because although the motif is every time the same, it gives rhythm to the buildings, by the display of skin contrasts and the play of shadow and light.

Interesting is how the effects change from day to night. At daytime the darker gratings can be distinguished from the other coating because on the other coatings the lights is reflected while shadow is created on the gratings by the thickness of the material. At night these details catch the eye because they radiate the interior light. Therefore, these gratings work at daytime to illuminate and animate the interior of the building, while at night it is the interior light that animates the exterior environment (fig.131,132). Both at day and night the movements of the people and of the elevator, that is sometimes placed behind screen of these gratings, animate the façade even more.

The use of these playful elements is another example of how Dominioni creates decoration based on functional use, without adding new elements.

The use of glass tiles in the façade has more or less the same purpose as the gratings, but is more specific applied to illuminate the circulation tubes. As mentioned in paragraph 4.3.6.4, the residential buildings have two different types of circulation tubes. On the one hand there is the main, representative entrance for the inhabitants and the visitors and on the other hand there is a separate distribution tube for the servants that directly connects to the service area. Since this service area is always oriented on the north side, this side of the building will always contain the service elevator. In the modern façades this elevator will always be clearly present (e.g. Via Nievo 10 fig.133) It looks like this elevator slices through the building, dividing and dematerialising the big building blocks. In the residential buildings in the centrum of the city, this elevator is less visible in the façade because it is a modern element that does not fit the desired traditional image. The elevator is only visible when the service area is oriented towards an inner court, the cortile. In that case the façade is much more free because it does not have to integrate with the surrounding buildings. The difference between the front side and the backside is clearly visible in the façades of Casa Dominioni\textsuperscript{225}. While the front side integrates perfectly with the surrounding buildings, the backside is less traditional and consists partly of glass tiles. In Casa Pirelli\textsuperscript{226} and Casa Geronazzo the elevator is positioned in

\textsuperscript{223} LCD, 1948-1954, inventory pp. 62-63
\textsuperscript{224} LCD, 1960-1963, inventory pp. 64-65
\textsuperscript{225} LCD, 1947-1949, inventory pp. 2-3
\textsuperscript{226} LCD, 1962-1965, inventory pp. 20-21
the centrum of the building instead of in line with the façade. This is due to the fact that the north side of the buildings are oriented towards the street. Still there are is a small vertical strip of glass to see in the front façade of Casa Pirelli. This is a remainder of the first façade designed by Dominioni that had a more rational approach than the final, more traditional façade\textsuperscript{227}.

Since the service tubes are connected to the main circulation tube in plan, the introduction of glass tiles will provide some kind of mystic natural light to the interior circulation of the building. This will enhance the contact between the inside and outside and it will optimise both the experiences perceived from the interior as the exterior (fig.134-135).

4.5.4 Windows: vertical v horizontal

The windows create the differentiation in the façade in each building type of Dominioni. The fundamental characteristic is that, on each façade, one or more fields point away from the general image by the means of displaced locations or by changed dimensions. This creates variety and asymmetry in the façade. Although the façade has to express the individuality of the inhabitants, it is also important that the general image of the building is coherent. Therefore, the windows are always linked to each other by scaling and displacing a basic unit.

This composition is the result of the collocation of the different housing units. The introduction of a flexible skeletal structure gives the opportunity to have freedom in the interior composition, but at the same time it makes it also possible to modulate the
external image freely. It gives for example the opportunity to create the corner windows that are typical for Dominioni’s modern building types. The additional layer of lines that is placed on top of the façades (fig. 113-117) has to demonstrate that this structure creates the modulation of the windows. Although there is a great flexibility with this modulation, this shows that the composition is not arbitrarily.

Dominioni uses the same method to create variation in his façades regardless the type of building. However, the types of windows he uses differ whether the building is located in the historic centre or outside of it. As mentioned in paragraph 3.4.3.3, discussing Casa Dominioni, and visible on the façade in fig.115, the typical windows for traditional houses have vertical proportions. These windows are a respectful execution from the Italian tradition with a sense of proportion and reserved formality. The typical aspect is that the sides of the windows are tilted over an angle of 45 degrees. This has a visual, aesthetic purpose. This action animates the façade with a game of light and shadow and shows the thickness of the façade. On the other hand this also has a purely functional intention. Since the rooms are getting smaller Dominioni always aims for solutions to generate the most possible natural light inside the building. In this way, even a small window will be able to let a considerable amount of light to flow in. Another effect of these tilted walls is the fact that the window is retracted into the wall, which results in many cases in an elegant combination with the shutters and the balcony in line with the façade.

The modern types such as the buildings at Via Nievo and Piazza Carbonari have strip windows. These windows give the buildings a human scale by a clear display of the construction height. The horizontality of the windows is enhanced by the introduction of the black enamelled panels. The choice to introduce these elements is probably based on the fact that windows viewed from the outside also appear as dark reflecting panels (fig. 134,137). Therefore, these planes are introduced in the façade on the places that the architect wants to enhance the horizontality of the strokes but where a window is not possible. Furthermore the introduction of these panels creates an additional layer of variety on the façade. This is clear on the front façade of the building at Piazza Carbonari. Although the 2nd, 3rd and 4th floor have the same window lay out, the 3rd floor will give a different impression due to the

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introduction of these panels. Like every element introduced by Dominioni, these panels have next to a formal function also a functional purpose. They cover the structure of the sliding shutters. These sliding shutters are white panels that create a lively contrast with the black panels and the windowpanes but also with the coloured coating of the façade. Due to the contrast with the windowpanes and the panels, the shutters give a complete different impression when they are open or closed. This creates a lively game in the façade that tends to the field of the visual arts. Notice that Dominioni also used another type of shutters, namely Venetian blinds. These blinds open in the vertical direction instead of the horizontal, which even enhances the variety of the façade. The structure of the windowpanes and the black panels is executed in aluminium, which creates a distinct contrast with the coating of the building, which subsequently creates a strong delineation. All the elements of the façade (windows, panels, aluminium structure and coating) are placed in flush with the façade and are carried out in reflecting materials, resulting in a general image of a sharp and smooth, reflecting and homogeneous volume.

Notice that a variation of these strip windows is also introduced in the more traditional type of buildings. For example in the building at Corso Italia, or the building in Via Santa Maria alla Porta. These are reflected on the top floor, to create a loggia. This is a historical element that Dominioni introduces in many of his buildings. Another interesting variation on these strip windows is visible in the building at Via Santa Croce. Here the window is continued vertically instead of horizontally.

4.5.5 Shutters

An important aspect of the rhythmic façades of Dominioni is the use of external shutters. People think of Dominioni as an innovator regarding the topic of the shutters used in his architecture. The main innovating element is again the way he looks at the reality and the search for answers in tradition. Shutters are a typical element in the Italian architecture, introduced to control the great variety of temperatures, because North - Italy is characterised by meteorological phenomena that very few European countries experience. In the winter it is cold while in the summer it is boiling hot, which asks for adaptable façade solutions instead of

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231 LCD, 1957-1964, inventory pp. 36-37
233 LCD, 1959-1964, inventory pp. 40-41
permanents ones (e.g. reducing the size of the windows). The most optimal solution is shutters, which are adaptable to the course of the day and to the period of the year. Furthermore, introducing these elements is not only a way of regulating the incoming sunlight but is also an element to control the degree of privacy in the house, which is an important aspect in a dense city like Milan.

The most common shutters in the designs of Dominioni are the sliding shutters and the ones that have to be pushed open out of the centre. Notice that Venetian blinds are mostly only used to complete the other shutters.

The shutters on fig. 138 are the most common type of pushed open shutters in the buildings of Dominioni. This type of shutters is usually used in combination with the windows with vertical proportions. As mentioned in the previous paragraph, these windows are usually retracted into the wall and tilted to an angle of 45 degrees. Notice that this type of shutters is only implemented in the more historic setting.

The shutters are made in such a way, that when they are closed, they prevent direct sunlight to enter but the view and breeze is not completely impeded. Sometimes these shutters even consist of different compartments to create an even greater flexibility.

The other common type of shutters is the sliding one. This type is used, both in the more historic parts as the in the outer parts of the city. Generally, there are two types of sliding shutters to distinguish. The first type is the more classical one made out of
wood and the second one is a more modern form, manufactured from synthetic materials. Usually these shutters will be used according to their location in the city, but this division is not that strict. Take for example the building at Via Massena. This building is located outside the centre but the shutters are fabricated in wood. This building is clearly one of the best examples to illustrate the visual effects of this type of shutters. As mentioned in paragraph 4.3.3, the building has a rather rigid interior division because it has to house both residences as offices. This should result in a rigid façade composition, but by introducing these shutters, Dominioni is able to give the building an expressive and rhythmic appearance. This is due to a totally different impression these shutters give when open, half-open or closed (fig. 110, 140).

In the building at Via Massena the shutters slide in front of the façade but in some cases they disappear in the façade or behind the finishing of the façade, as in the example of Casa Dominioni, animating the façade in a more subtle way. This is also visible at the buildings at Via Nievo (fig. 139) and at Piazza Carbonari Dominioni, yet in a more modern version. Instead of timber, Dominioni introduces black enamelled glass panels, behind which the windows can disappear.

Shutters are not the only elements implemented to create a favourable living climate within the urban fabric. Dominioni always tries to generate some kind of green fence around the buildings, not only in favour for the inhabitant but also to give some green back to the city. In summer, these trees create some kind of natural sunscreen, while in the winter they lose their leaves and let sunlight come into the buildings. Furthermore, these trees form a lively screen that differentiates the façades even more.

4.5.6 Balcony

4.5.6.1 Ballatoio

Another typical element, embedded in history and reinvented by Dominioni, are his balconies. The first type is the ‘ballatoio’, a type of balcony that is used in residential buildings. Originally the ballatoio was implemented in the former ‘casa popolare’, public housing, represented by some kind of gallery that runs along the complete outer façade of the buildings, connecting the individual units with the common facilities such as the toilets.

In Dominioni’s designs these balconies are used both on the backside as on the front side of the buildings. In general, the ones on the back/north side will be used to connect the service rooms with the rooms they have to serve for, namely the living and dining room. On the front side the balcony has next to the functional utility also the integration function. The addition of typical, traditional elements, helps the building to integrate with the surrounding buildings. The ballatoio is implemented in both the more traditional as the more modern buildings of Dominioni. For example in Casa Dominioni, as visible on the drawings of the façade, both types are implemented, the functional one on the backside
and the more representative at the front side of the building. On the front side, the two ballatoio are retracted into the wall, which animates the façade by creating a greater difference between the clear and the darker parts of the buildings. Notice that the railings are always carried out in elegant ironwork, in line with the techniques that he had first applied and exercised on his furniture.

In the building at via Vigoni\(^{238}\) (fig. 142) it is difficult to say if this ballatoio is either incorporated within the volume of the building or if it is an added element, because they are lined up with the edge of the roof and the bow windows. The gallery connects the rooms in front of the building, namely the master bedroom, the living and the dining room. The rhythmic evolution of the balcony creates a dynamic façade and creates an interesting game of shadow as is visible on the drawing of the façade. Furthermore, it creates a controlled and manipulated inflow of sunlight.

Another excellent example of this type of balcony is in the building at Via Massena\(^{239}\). The gallery runs along the entire length of the building, and along half the sides of the building. Dominioni makes use of this opportunity to make a remarkable detail of this corner (fig. 110) This makes the regular volume somewhat more irregular and playful.

4.5.6.2 Bow Window

Another typical element of Dominioni’s façade, as already mentioned in the previous paragraph, is the bow window. Although the elements in the traditional and modern buildings of Dominioni seem very different at the first sight, they all find their origin in the same traditional type of the curved bay window or the ‘bow window’. These elements are projected out of the plane of the façade and are some kind of fusion between a window and a balcony. They are introduced in the façade to create more space, to provide a wider view and create a more lighted house. In the original, traditional forms these windows are generally limited to a single floor, but in the façades of Dominioni these elements sometimes are scaled to larger proportions, becoming a distinct element of the façade and the volume of the building. On the pictures included it is clear that this type of window has many different versions in the architecture of Dominioni. In the more traditional buildings (e.g. Casa Geronazzo\(^{240}\) fig. 141) the window consists of the same finish as the façade material. This creates, although the bow window is corbelling out of the volume, a coherent image of that volume.

In the building at Via Vigoni\(^{241}\) (fig. 142) the bow window is visible in one of its most recognisable forms. Partly carried out in the material of the façade and partly carried out in the typical application, fully glazed with a strong black delineation. As already mentioned in paragraph 4.3.2, the specific orientation of this window gives, in this specific building, the opportunity to orient the building on the nearby historic church.

At the buildings in Via Nievo\(^{242}\) (fig. 143) and Piazza Carbonari\(^{243}\) these bow windows are implemented in a more modern version. Taken out of proportion, it
generates a game of contrasts between the coloured bricks and the strong black delineation.

Although these windows have a different formal expression, they all underline the special conditions of the interior composition, mostly it is the translation of the living room projected on the façade. In one building, in Via Santa Croce, it looks as if bow window is applied in the reversed way, which creates a clearly articulated whole in the screen of the façade. In other buildings these sharp incisions are introduced in the façade without the tilted walls, for example in the building at Via Nievo. As a result, the balcony is retracted into the volume of the building.

4.5.7 Conclusion

The façade is always a complex composition of elements. At first sight these elements can seem arbitrarily placed, but in fact these elements are always aligned to the structure, the interior composition and to each other. Although the elements are always aligned to the interior composition, the architect sometimes introduces small deviations in order to create a more expressive exterior image. Dominioni never adds any excessive ornamentation to create this façade and its expressive character. The image is completely defined by the presence of functional elements, such as windows, balconies, pulled in or protruding bow windows. This shows how functional elements can and must have a contribution in the exterior appearance of the building. Furthermore, Dominioni is not afraid to borrow inspiration from the past, adopting existing values with an own interpretation. Most likely this is not only to make a continuous connection with the past but also because he understands that it is possible to learn a lot from previous interventions. The lessons that he draws and the elements that he reproduces are never a nostalgic replica. Instead they are designed to respond to the changing lifestyles. Therefore, people should look the same way at Dominioni as Dominioni looks at his precursors.
Fig. 143: Building at Via Nievò
4.6 In the footsteps of Dominioni

Although Dominioni is rather unknown, he has influenced the spatial and formal studies of some contemporary architects. Therefore, this part gives a representation of contemporary architects who implement elements of the language of Dominioni in their own architecture and give an example of how Dominioni could be interpreted today.

The best known apprentice of Dominioni is Cino Zucchi. The most obvious references are found in the residential buildings he designed for ‘Nuovo Portello’ a former brownfield in the outskirts of Milan. The architecture of these buildings openly, wants to speak the language of Luigi Caccia Dominioni.247 Although this is the most obvious example, it may not be the most interesting one. Many critics, such as Eli Mosayebi248 notice that these buildings can be seen as formal reproductions without any connection to the plan, while the plan is actually the basis for all Dominioni’s developments. This formalism is for example clear in the cuttings of the roof. While in the building at Piazza Carbonari, the form is defined by the legislation, it is hard to believe that this also was the starting point for Cino Zucchi.

In other projects it looks like Dominioni has influenced Zucchi in a less apparent way. An interesting example is the social housing he designed in the historical context of Venice249 on fig. 148 and 149. A similar experimental language can be noticed, an excellent piece of contextualism executed with modernist restraint. The alignment to the existing buildings, the expressive façade,
defined by traditional materials, sliding shutters and the irregular, sharp cuts into the volume is something that characterises both Zucchi and Dominioni.

Another recent building, visible on fig.150-152, in the centre of Milan, aims to integrate with the surrounding historical context by embracing the residential Milanese tradition of the 20th century, represented by architects such as Gio Ponti and Luigi Caccia Dominioni. Consistently with urban planning regulations, the design is conceived to rebuild the urban fabric, aligning the building’s height to that of surrounding buildings. Street elevations are sober and elegant, characterised by cuts of different sizes and on different locations, dematerialising the volume and creating an overall dynamic and contemporary image.

According to Fulvio Irace, Dominioni also influenced architects as Peter Holl and Guidarini & Salvadeo on certain aspects. Steven Holl reinterprets the gratings of Dominioni in a more modern way to create elegant and fascinating games of light. The office of Guidarini & Salvadeo introduces the irregular arrangement of the openings to define their public housing.

Although there are few examples of people that are influenced by Dominioni in Italy or Milan, it appears that in Switzerland more architects follow in the footsteps of Dominioni.

The most obvious example is Chebbi Thomet's housing for elderly project in Zurich in 2008 (fig.
157-159), which is clearly inspired Dominioni’s building block in Via Nievo (fig.143). Furthermore, Christ & Gantenbein refer for their Volta project in Basel to Dominioni’s residential buildings as an example of a modern way of urban living. Therefore, the plan does not consist of standardised types of apartments but is customised for the individual resident, a type that is adapted to different situations. This individuality is also expressed in the façade but by using other methods than Dominioni. The façade in the courtyard is subjected to strong deformations, creating the rhythm of the façade and giving the impression of every single unit. Notice that Christ & Gantenbein also introduce the strip windows that are so typical for the buildings of Dominioni.

As visible in the residential tower in fig. X the architectural office of Diener & Diener also introduces simple volumes with expressive façades. This is based on a similar commitment as Dominioni towards both the exterior appearance as to their clients. Just as in the buildings of Dominioni, the windows, their shapes, dimensions and interrelationships define the expression of the building. Moreover, these windows influence the spatial quality, how the inhabitants experience their environment. At the same time, the windows also reveal something about living and about the relations between individuals or residents in the block.
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Fig. 162: "Quote Jean Baudrillard, la chapelle Sainte-Marie, Sarlat, 2005"

"L'architecture est un mélange de nostalgie et d'anticipation extrême."

Jean Baudrillard
5. Conclusion

Milan in the sixties is characterised by a continuous search for a new language appropriate for a new liberal and ambiguous nation. This quest for an own architectural language is the breeding ground for many interesting architectural experiments. From the ashes of architectural styles such as rationalism and the Novecento movement a second generation of architects arises. One of the most singular characters of this generation can be found in the architect Luigi Caccia Dominioni.

With his experimental architecture he responds to the local climate and the former issues that arise in the post war period. One of his main concerns is how to create in a modern era architecture that embraces modernity without denying its origins. Furthermore, in his residential buildings, the condominio, he is committed with the search for a new modern way of urban living. In these buildings Dominioni shows a different approach than many other architects, rejecting standardisation in favour of the individual. Due to this individual approach some people accused him of being too bourgeois and therefore he was deliberately excluded from the critical architectural discourse for many years. It is important to realise that although Dominioni is mainly commissioned by people with a higher standard, the topics he examines are actually accurate for all architectural audiences. Quality, individuality, privacy, identity and efficiency is something that applies to a broader public than just the bourgeoisie, and therefore these buildings can be seen as interesting case studies for example for large scale metropolitan buildings.

Although his architectural language appears as a heterogeneous set of dialects, the methodology he uses in order to obtain this language is very consistent. Therefore the structure of this dissertation is based on the structure of his process of designing. When Dominioni starts to develop a building he always considers chronologically four aspects, the context, the plan, the volume and eventually the façade.

The context can be seen as what determines the reality of the project the actual basis for the entire development of the building. Although the context is always a coherent entity consisting of many connotations, in this dissertation, it is disassembled into two parts. The first aspect that defines the basis of every project is the physical context, the location in which the architect must intervene. Dominioni understands that each place presupposes its own conditions. Due to the location there are clear differences to distinguish between the different buildings. Not only between different countries or
different cities, but also within the city of Milan. Within the city of Milan there is a clear difference when the buildings are located in the historic core of the city or when they are situated outside this centre, in a new to development area where the conditions are not yet determined.

The second aspect Dominioni is concerned with is the subjective component of the client, his wishes and experiences. Dominioni considers architecture a service he does in favour of his clients and not in favour of his personal ego.

Since everything is determined by these two previous aspects, it could be said that the metaphor of the language of Dominioni corresponds to the real linguistics. Like a real language, the architectural language of Dominioni consists of an extensive vocabulary with different dialects of which the grammar is defined by the people and the location they live.

Based on his commitment towards his clients he considers the plan as the basis to develop the whole building. In the development of the plan Dominioni knows a different approach than many other architects, by rejecting the standardisation of a repetitive plan composition in favour of a composition of different units that are cut to the size of the inhabitant. A dwelling must be made on the size of its inhabitants and not the other way around. Dominioni, who calls himself a piantista, redraws his plans a thousand times to the smallest details, thinking of furnishings, materials, routes, internal and external views, the hierarchies of users and functionality in order to create exciting and surprising paths and spaces. This empiric side of the users’ perspective should never be underestimated, it can give an added value to even the smallest home.

Furthermore Dominioni always aims to optimise the use of the spaces, for example by introducing moveable and tilted walls and by integrating furniture from the first step of the design process. Although at first sight his plans can look like formal gestures, analysing the plan reveals how elaborated every single detail is. The many elements that were described during this dissertation can serve as directives to conceive space today. It is important to notice that the elements developed by Dominioni not only can be used to create qualitative houses for the rich people. On the contrary, just as in the designs of Dominioni, these elements can be implemented to optimise both maximal as minimal units.

The commitment Dominioni shows in his plans clearly returns in the further development of the building. On the one hand this development grows from the plan, trying to convert the individuality expressed in the plan into the exterior appearance of the building. On the other hand, Dominioni is also aware of the visual impact a building has on it surroundings. Therefore, a different approach is visible within the historical centre en outside this core. This is due to the fact that the preconditions of these two zones are completely different and subsequently impose other objectives. While within
the historical centre Dominioni’s main concern is to integrate with the pre-existing environment, in the outskirts of the city his buildings have the social function of reviving the area. This illustrates clearly that Dominioni always looks at the reality of his design tasks and not imposes one ideal solution that applies to every situation. This he sees as an opportunity to constantly question and reinvent himself.

Although the general expression of the buildings is different according to their location towards the city centre, the method used to define this expression is similar. Dominioni always creates complex façades by the introduction of a variety of elements. At the first sight these elements may seem arbitrarily placed but in fact they are always aligned to the structure, the plan and to each other, in order to create a coherent image. Furthermore, the elements that are shaping the façade always have a double standard. They shape and animate the façade, but in addition they always have to be functional. This is a recurring theme in both Dominioni’s interiors as exteriors. Everything that is introduced, has to fulfil its function with the greatest care, which is creating a pleasant living environment both for the people inside the buildings as outside. According to Dominioni this is only possible when the living areas are besides functional also psychological stimulating.

Dominioni is never afraid to look at the past and adopt existing values with an own interpretation. We have a rich architectural past and it is meaningless to think that everything should reinvented over and over again.

The contemporary references that are made with Dominioni show that the topic of Dominioni is still very accurate today and can be applied in many different ways and for many different targets. It has to be mentioned that the meaning and principles of Dominio’s language lose their value when they are just formal copies. Therefore, we should look at Dominioni in the same way as Dominio looks at his precursors. Therefore, Dominioni’s language can be seen as an exceptional lexicon that can provide inspiration on many different levels. For example the way he optimises spaces by the introduction of flexible walls is something that is still applicable today, in this time of densification. Moreover, this lexicon is always the result of an extremely committed design process that effaces itself in favour of the client and the pre-existing environment255. Therefore, we can not only learn from the elements he implements but we can also take inspiration from how and why he implements them.

255 This is perfectly described by the picture I took some years ago of the quote of Jean Beaudrillard in fig. 162
6. Attachments
6 Attachments

6.1 Bibliography

6.1.1 Dominioni

6.1.1.1 Books

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