

Lamberto Amistadi, Enrico Prandi FA(little)Magazine and the “little magazines” of twentieth century architecture

Abstract

In a sort of self-reflective mirroring, the Editorial of Issue 43 of «FAMagazine» addresses the theme of 20th-century architecture magazines by identifying in the kind of independent publications developed during WWII known by the term “Little Magazines”, the form through which the journalism of architecture sought to emancipate itself from the conditionings of the building market and professional practices to become organs of study and research on the project and the city.

Starting from the transformations of the editorial context determined by the digital revolution, «FAMagazine» – a scientific Open Access e-Journal – evokes the “Little Magazine” tradition, inserting it into the framework of the new demands from the Italian National Agency for the Evaluation of the University and Research Systems.

Keywords

FAMagazine — Little Magazine — Piccole riviste — Digital Revolution



Fig. 1

Exhibition Clip/Stamp/Fold 2: The Radical Architecture of Little Warehouses 196X - 197X, Canadian Center for Architecture, 2007.

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A few days ago arrived Nicola Di Battista’s reflection on the role and function of printed architecture magazines in the context of the change in direction of «Domus», to which retorted a Michele de Lucchi who lent himself, along with Carlo Cracco and Lapo Elkann, to pose for the cover of «AD - Architectural Digest» (December 2017) in a new joint project designed by the same scion of the Agnelli family – *Garage Italia* – which transformed a post-war AGIP service station designed by Mario Bacciocchi in Milan’s Piazzale Accursio into an Italian-style hub: with food, cars, and design.

Battista argued that “a magazine must certainly be able to see and know the projects, products, and thoughts that our time produces but, above all, to tell the stories that make them possible, the stories that underlie them.”¹

That is what we have tried to do in this inaugural issue of «FAMagazine», which is not inaugurating the magazine – already born back in the distant 2010 – but its new graphics and Open Journal Systems platform, together with a new web address www.famagazine.it.

The story we wished to tell in this Issue 43, is that of certain Italian and US architecture magazines that determined the architectural debate in the final quarter of the last century, and the story of the transition from the world of magazines on paper to the digital ones, «FAMagazine» included.

The decision to open this new season of «FAMagazine» with an issue on architecture magazines is in itself an explicitly self-analytical reference. Among these are many “little magazines” so that, if initially the epithet was attributable mainly to the format and to a limited circuit of influence, which were often the outcome of independent, niche, or non-commercial publishing, with the passing of time it has ended up denoting some characteristics that make these magazines particularly interesting for architectural research as an im-

pulse to experiment, the leaning (or better, the bias) of the editorial board in directing the thinking, and in the desire to plough new research roads, give voice to new, less common, and avant-garde disciplinary languages. A sort of experimental laboratory of ideas.

The Little Magazine phenomenon, born in the 1920s in the context of the American literary current and much explored in the United States, especially after the Second World War, ended up intruding in a disciplinary sense – as often happens among the different arts – and affecting architecture, so that, as we were reminded by Claudio D’Amato, at the *Little Magazines Conference: After Modern Architecture*, 3-5 February 1977 organized by the IAUS New York, it was joined by many of the protagonists of the architectural debate who at that moment were proposing to relaunch deliberation on architecture, theory and criticism through the tool of the magazine: «Architese» (Bruno Reichlin, Stanislaus Von Moos), «Arquitectura Bis» (Oriol Bohigas, Federico Correa, Rafael Moneo), «AMC-Architecture Mouvement Continuité» (Jacques Lucan, Patrice Noviant), «Controspazio» (Alessandro Anselmi, Claudio D’Amato), «Lotus» (Pierluigi Nicolini, Joseph Rykwert) and many other interested parties starting from the organizer himself, Peter Eisenman, and friends of New York’s Institute of Architecture and Urban Studies such as Edith Girard, Mario Gandelsonas, Anthony Vidler, Stanford Anderson, Livio Dimitriu, Alessandra Latour, Lluís Domènech, Peter Blake, Kenneth Frampton, Robert Gutman, Colin Rowe, George Baird, Peter Marangoni, Diana Agrest, and Suzanne Frank.

Authentic “Little Magazines” in architecture were the avant-garde ones of the 1920s which attracted ideological currents and their groups of promulgators, when not born specifically as a tool to disseminate their values: «G» (1923-26) and «Bauhaus» (1928-1933) in Germany, «Sovremennaiia Arkhitektura» (1926-30), «Lef» (1923-25) and «Veshch» (1922) in Russia, «Wendingen» (1918-1931) and «De Stijl» (1917-31) in the Netherlands, «L’Esprit Nouveau» (1920-25) in France, and all the Futurist magazines in Italy such as «Valori plastici» (1918-21), «Lacerba» (1913-15), and «Noi» (1917-20 and 1923-25).

An analogous phenomenon was seen in the second half of the twentieth century when the historical conditions enabled a return not so much of the historical avant-garde, as an attitude of breakage, the neo-avant-garde, of course, which, between the Sixties and Seventies, produced the phenomenon of the second season of Little Magazines, with an exhibition organized at the Canadian Center of Architecture by Beatriz Colomina and Craig Buckley entitled *Clip/Stamp/Fold 2: The Radical Architecture of Little Magazines 196X-197X*.² It is interesting to note that the characteristic of the second season of the Little Magazines in architecture was that they emerged from inside the Schools of Architecture, where it was the students, rather than the teachers of the first season (suffice to think of Le Corbusier and «L’Esprit Nouveau») who represented the voice of cultural change. It is no coincidence therefore that «Perspecta» was a student magazine and that «Casabella» published, in that same period, the Florentine radicals who, still at their school desks, launched their offensive on conservatism, rather than the youngsters of the AA School, Rem Koolhaas, Zenghelis, Hadid, or Archigram.³

This phenomenon did not pass unnoticed by the intelligentsia of architecture of the period, who between 1966 and 1972 came out with articles on the topic by historians and critics, noting that also magazines which could not properly be defined as “little” had at that time gone through a “little” spell (as in the case of «Casabella» and «Architectural Design»)⁴. Among these, Denise Scott Brown in the «Journal of the American Institute of Planners» in 1968⁵, Peter

Eisenman in «Architectural Forum» in 1969 and in «Casabella» in 1970⁶, Chris Holmes in «Architectural Design» in 1972⁷, while Reyner Banham in «AAQ-Architectural Association Quarterly», commended the student zines, and Robin Middleton towards the end of his direction inaugurated the “little magazine” period of «Architectural Design»⁸.

The reason for the interest in little magazines was to be found in the climate of great cultural vivacity that was establishing itself in the worlds of art and architecture: Denise Scott Brown, in her *Little Magazines in Architecture and Urbanism*, wrote that “little magazines [...] provide good guidance with regard to new trends in the profession and are an indicator of what we can expect in subsequent years.”⁹ While Banham highlights that in those years rather than constructed buildings it was the projects published in some [little] magazines that marked architectural theory. In his opinion, these magazines, through the projects, were able to report a thinking about architecture that was constantly updated, unlike the buildings which rose already obsolete.¹⁰ That this was a period of great cultural change is indisputable as is the fact that the cultural climate and fervour managed to seduce even notoriously orthodox historians and critics.

The Little Magazines were the protagonists of a *little revolution*.

Starting off from this point of view, the best magazines could not help playing a polemical role, tried to keep their guard up and block the lethal blows that the world of profit and quantitative logic craved to throw, not so much against them – of no interest to them – but against architecture; which was able to respond with a few well-aimed salvos of its own made up of good ideas that sometimes even succeeded in exerting a beneficial influence on that same world.

Not without some forcing, we have gathered some of these magazines - «Zodiac», «Perspecta», «Controspazio», «Lotus», «Casabella», «Phalaris», «Oppositions» – under the common label of “little magazines” not just because they are directly attributable to the concept of the avant-garde or were all born within student movements – but for the courage, freshness and even unscrupulousness with which they advanced a speech on architecture that to them was coherent, more or less complacently franked by the logic of profit, while gathering around themselves affectionate communities of young architects, scholars, and readers.

Even if the relations of these magazines with the avant-garde and history, continuity and discontinuity, was quite different, especially between Italy and overseas, their degree of kinship, their entanglements and borrowings were so unexpectedly numerous that instead of foundations, we should speak of re-foundations and continuous re-emergences of points of view, themes, and architecture magazines. To the point that, in some moments, it seems to us that all of them belonged to a single great collective cultural adventure, one that encompassed authors, editors and – for Bataille, at least – the only possible community, that of readers.

Guido Zuliani tells us of Peter Eisenman’s passion for the “little magazines” of the European avant-garde – «De Stijl», «Mecano», «L’Esprit Nouveau», the «Casabella» of Pagano, Moretti’s «Spazio» – or his debt to British magazines of the ’60s such as «Architectural Design» and «Architectural Review» or the double number 359-360 of «Casabella», whose publication of the work of the Institute of Architecture and Urban Studies under the title of “The City as Artifact” anticipated the birth of «Oppositions». And of how the origin of the birth of «Oppositions» harboured a certain intolerance of a world of journalism that was rather intractable to ideas and somewhat subservient to

commercial practice.

Not very different were the motivations from which arose «Perspecta», nor was its debt to Italy any less. “The first reason,” wrote Norman Carver, one of the editors of the first number, «was our frustration due to the lack of exciting projects and the fatal absence of content that characterized the commercial architecture magazines of that time.» While «Perspecta» owed a debt to Italy for its historical-critical tradition while, more directly, its most famous issue – the no. 9-10, characterized by the well-known White/Gray debate – was inspired by Issue 281 of Rogers’ «Casabella Continuità» entitled “Architettura USA”. This ratio of continuous exchange, of *quid pro quo* between America and Europe, is also the theme as well as the title of Issue 13 of «Phalaris», “the architecture newspaper” – as it styled itself – directed by Luciano Semerani between 1988 and 1992. Semerani wrote in his editorial: “They come and go across and over the Atlantic from Europe to America and from America to Europe, flocks of migratory ideas, perhaps always the same ideas, but each time they return from a trip they have changed because they are not eternal ideas, or perhaps they are tracks, routes, and points of departure and arrival that are always identical, but the journey and the travel time, by themselves, will change them; in appearance at least.” And he published projects by Frank Gehry, John Hejduk, Steven Holl, plus an extraordinary article on the Elvis Presley myth.

Even Claudio D’Amato re-evoked the “little magazine” image to define the form of these journals of research, theory, and criticism, “produced outside the great editorial circuits” and advanced almost exclusively by university lecturers. «Controspazio» too, like «Perspecta», was born within the political passion of a student movement, and like «Perspecta», was the vivid reaction to a feeling of powerlessness in the face of the massacre that professional practice and urban speculation were inflicting on the suburbs of Italian cities. The polemical vein of «Controspazio» – directed by Paolo Portoghesi from 1961 to 1981 – was however already included in that “contra” accompanying the Italian term for “space”, which recalls another affiliation (or counter-affiliation), the one with the magazine «Spazio» directed by Luigi Moretti.

A blood relation of «Phalaris» and «Controspazio» – as Enrico Bordogna defined it – «Zodiac» also ranks among the research journals. In this case, the bond with America and New York is inscribed in the graphics of Massimo Vignelli. «Zodiac» too was a “re-emergent” magazine, or the fruit of a re-foundation, whose roots lay deep inside the Italian cultural tradition, starting from the «Comunità» publishing house of Adriano Olivetti and their first series of «Zodiac». This link with Olivetti was stated explicitly in the 1988 colophon which reads as follows: “New series. International architecture magazine founded in 1957 by Adriano Olivetti.” The Steering Committee too was the expression of a “trend” and a “continuity”, boasting figures like Carlo Aymonino, Ignazio Gardella, Aldo Rossi, Gianugo Polesello, Manfredo Tafuri and Francesco Dal Co and foreigners of the calibre of Richard Meier, Rafael Moneo, James Stirling, and Kurt W. Forster.

Some phases of «Casabella» can also be ascribed to this tradition of research journals, or at least to some of those preceding the rather bombastic dimension of the time. The «Casabella» that Gregotti directed between 1982 and 1996, for example, insisted on a radical programme, according to which the transformation of the city and territory should involve architects, planners, and engineers in a complex, integrated, multidisciplinary process. The magazine also sought to open a debate involving the world of professionals and lead them hand in hand towards a good practice of architecture. The important

thematic section dedicated to building innovation and sponsors is indicative in this sense, just as there is a significant difference between the concepts of “city as artifact” of Alessandro Mendini’s «Casabella», and that of the “architecture of modification” of Vittorio Gregotti’s «Casabella».

Lastly, «*Lotus* was of another kind still, designed as it was in 1963 by a car racing fan – Bruno Alfieri – as a yearbook of architecture. Starting from Issue 3 it too became an international magazine of critical investigation and its Issue 7 on “Architecture in the formation of the modern city” went down in history.

«FAMagazine» is not really a trendy magazine (perhaps we are not snobbish enough!). Without a doubt – as described even more clearly in the new blue masthead designed by Carlo Gandolfi – it is a magazine of research, on architecture and the city.

In terms of approach, its editorial staff is very much akin to those strange communities of gold miners narrated in National Geographic documentaries: whole communities who, with the help of ingenious and sometimes unlikely machinery, dredged tons upon tons of water and sand in those endless rivers of the Yukon in search of a few grams of gold. What comes out are issues and themes that are unexpectedly but unquestionably interesting, some more *à la page*, others extraordinarily *demodé*. In the period 2010-2013, «FAMagazine» published articles on/by figures of international architecture such as Asplund, Lewerentz, Mart Stam, Mendes da Rocha, Artigas, and Bogdanovic, and Italians such as Rogers, Samonà, Muratori, Quaroni, Aymonino, Semerani, Isola and Polesello. Schools of Architecture in Italy and Europe, the Brazilian “Paulista School” and some of its members, the relationship between architecture and crises, accounts of events like the 2010 Venice Biennale and the 2012 Biennial of Public Space in Rome, problems relating to the condition of the contemporary city, from the experiences of the INA-Casa neighbourhoods to today’s regeneration processes for historical cities (from densification to the valorizing of empty urban spaces) and the suburbs (the case of Tor Bella Monaca). In addition, more specific issues such as the restoration of the Modern, and the role of ruins in an architectural project. It has addressed topical theoretical issues in the disciplinary debate such as the role of morphology or infrastructures in the processes of transforming the land, and the theme of Designing the Built, applied to Italian and German cases (*Bauen im Bestand*). Starting from 2014, the issues became strictly thematic and the output quarterly. The titles are self-explanatory: *The Spectacularization of Dismission* no. 42, *Report on the State of the Former Psychiatric Hospitals in Italy* no. 41, *Amnesty for the Existing* no. 40, *Law and Heart. Analogy and Composition in the Construction of Architectural Language* no. 39, 2017; *Architectural Pedagogies. Worldviews* no. 38, *Building and/is Building Ourselves. The complex relationship between architecture and education* no. 37, *Character and Identity of the Work* no. 36, *Madrid Reconsidered* no. 35, for 2016; *University Campus and City* no. 34, *Smart Design for a Smart City* no. 33, *The Orderly City. Dispositio and Forma Urbis* no. 32 *Epiphenomena*, no. 31, 2015; *Six Italian PhD Research Works on Architectural and Urban Design* no. 30, *2004-2014 Ten Years of the Festival of Architecture* no. 29, *Impossible Research. Imagination in the Architectural Project*. no. 27-28, *Intensive Teaching for the Project* No 8. 26, *Oscar Niemeyer: Architecture, City* no. 25, for 2014.

But even in the digital field, not all that glitters is gold.

Since undertaking an online magazine today – certainly less burdensome and costly than a printed one – is fairly simple (just a web address, a director enrolled in the order of journalists, and an ISSN), we are seeing a certain

quantity of active magazines that is not less than those dormant or decommissioned ones within much shorter time-spans than in the past. Without speaking of the confusion generated by hybrid forms including simple websites, blogs, e-zines, and everything else in between, as demonstration of an attitude, that of architecture magazines, which is extremely variable though undermined on the one hand by a persistent and chronic lack of investment in scientific publishing (and more in general in research and in its instruments of dissemination) and on the other by the clumsy attempt of the ministerial bodies to regulate everything. Hence the basic misunderstanding of transferring the value of the container (magazine) to the content (single item) in qualitative evaluations.

We, who have always believed in this form of communication in architecture and its critical thinking, are preparing for a substantial revamp. In the Manifesto founding the magazine (which we invite you to read) we compared the magazine to a “free (and welcoming) space” for the comparison of different stances. Well this area, today, has a new guise. Since “you can’t judge a book by its cover”, the adoption of an international platform specifically designed for scientific journals allows many advantages: from workflow management (the steps that accompany an article from when it reaches the editors to the time of its publication are many and complex) to the final look, and the safeguarding of the archive with the relentless tracking of addresses and a guarantee of perennial consultation. If libraries were once the guarantee of preserving their valuable content of disciplinary knowledge over time (the famous public granaries to amass reserves against the winter of the spirit within Yourcenar’s meaning), today much of that “grain” travels in an immaterial inconsistency through the ether, in that World Wide Web which represents our greatest opportunity. If the task of «FAMagazine», referring once again to the Manifesto, is also that of a “mnemonic device to remember”, it is necessary that the memory is kept alive constantly, without any risk of “memory loss”. If Victor Hugo saw a great danger for architecture in Gutenberg’s revolution – the invention of the printing press and books as the killer of architecture, what might he write today in the face of this further revolution that sees on one side printed paper giving way to that far more volatile digital paper, and on the other those contemporary stone monuments (far less often in stone, and fewer and fewer monuments in Rossi’s sense of the term) witnesses of phenomena that are no longer secular but as short and transient as they are precarious? “In the form of printing, thought is more imperishable than ever; it is volatile, elusive, indestructible. It blends with the air. In the time of architecture, it became a mountain and took forceful possession of an age and a space. Now it becomes a flock of birds, scatters to the four winds and simultaneously occupies every point of air and space.”¹¹ Hugo’s metaphor of printed thought is now paying the price of a further revolution, the digital, one of whose greatest merits is the widespread dissemination of information, but among whose greatest defects is the multiplication of this so that it does not always readily make the information sought available, with the result that we rely on the most popularized, superficial information (waiting for the Big Data managers to invent agile information management systems).

Let us now turn to what lies behind the renewed guise of «FAMagazine». As always, a moment of transition is the occasion for a stocktake, in our case limited to the period 2014-2017: 4 years, 17 issues, 116 articles, (to be added to the previous 3 and a half years and a further 122 articles). If it is true that the numbers are not important (in an era in which even quality is reduced to a number, as demonstrated by the logic of the National Agency for the Evalua-

tion of University and Research – ANVUR) it is the contents that offer the scientific community a valid tool to critically evaluate the work of our magazine. Perhaps it is useful to summarize our story. The “Magazine of the Festival of Architecture” was born in September 2010: at that time ANVUR carried out its first VQR (in which «FAMagazine» did not appear among the list of scientific journals). In 2012, in the first suitable timeslot to apply for recognition, we explained our reasons, and in 2013 we received scientific recognition. In the same judgement, *excusatio non petita, accusatio manifesta*, ANVUR responded that initially «FAMagazine» was not deemed to be scientific but merely an informative newsletter. Glossing over this, by 2014-15, with ANVUR regulations in hand, we discovered that we possessed a score well beyond the threshold required to be in Class A.¹²

We awaited a suitable timeslot to present our second petition for recognition (this time for Class A) and just shortly before, thanks also to the debate on anomalies in the lists of scientific journals for those non-bibliometric areas, a new regulation was issued (Regulation for the classification of magazines in the non-bibliometric areas – Criteria to classify magazines for the purposes of national scientific accreditation) which tightened the screw to such a point that it cast doubt on the legitimacy of most of the journals already contained in the lists. As the saying goes, “closing the stable door after the horse has bolted”. Following the lively debate from those who had not seen the access door to Class A considerably restricted (especially when inside there were magazines that did not meet the criteria, or were no longer published, and so forth), ANVUR decided to caution the directors of scientific journals with the announcement of periodic checks on the requirements, and if unjustified, the revocation of the description “scientific” or of the magazine’s Class A status. Thus, indications on the frequency when a particular magazine was considered “scientific” began to appear in the final version of the list of scientific journals currently available.

We look forward to the next timeslot to make a formal application for Class A recognition, and in the meantime, we are continuing to “dredge” and accumulate numbers and themes thanks chiefly to a vast community of enthusiastic scholars, mostly young and extremely knowledgeable, and a no less extensive international community of readers. Whom we thank.

Notes

¹ *Congedo da Domus*, in «Domus» 1019, December 2017, p. X, XI

² Beatriz Colomina and Craig Buckley, eds., *Clip, Stamp, Fold: The Radical Architecture of Little Magazines, 196x - 197X* (New York, NY: Actar, 2010), 451.

³ In the summer of 1971, the magazine «AAQ» published the results of a survey of the “zines” of architecture schools, bringing to the fore the trends of the time from *Focus* to *Archigram*. See Neil Steedman, *Student Magazines in British Architectural Schools*, in the Architectural Association Quarterly, Summer 1971.

⁴ See Steve Parnell, *Architectural Design, 1954-1972. The architectural magazine’s contribution to the writing of architectural history*, PhD Thesis in Architectural History, University of Sheffield School of Architecture, 2011. Parnell defines by “littleness” this character that invests

⁵ Denise Scott Brown, *Little Magazines in Architecture and Urbanism*, in the Journal of the American Institute of Planners, Volume 34, 1968 - Issue 4 223-233, [published online on 26 Nov 2007 <https://doi.org/10.1080/01944366808977811>] DOI

⁶ Peter Eisenman, *The Big Little Magazine: Perspecta 12 and the Future of the Architectural Past*, in Architectural Forum, New York, October 1969, republished in «Casabella» 345 January 1970, p.

⁷ Chris Holmes, *Small Mags*, in «Architectural Design», September 1972. 80

⁸ See the article by Beatriz Colomina, *Little AD* (presented for the 80 years of AD (1930-2010), R.I.BA, London, June 29, 2010) and Steve Parnell, «Architectural Design», op. cit.

⁹ Denise Scott Brown, *Little Magazines in Architecture and Urbanism*, op. cit., p. 223

¹⁰ Reyner Banham, *Zoom wave hits architecture*, in *New Society*, 3 March 1966, now in Reyner Banham, *Design by Choice*, (Penny Sparke, ed.), Rizzoli, 1981

¹¹ Victor Hugo, *The Hunchback of Notre Dame* Translated by Isabel F. Hapgood

¹² Based on the regulation for the classification of scientific journals in force in 2015, «FAMagazine» possessed sufficient points to be included in Class A.

Enrico Prandi (born in Mantua, 1969), Architect; he graduated with honors in Architecture at the Milan Politechnic with Guido Canella with which he has performed research and teaching activity. He also received his PhD in Architecture and Urban Composition at the IUAV in Venice in 2003. He is currently an Associate Professor in Architecture and Urban Design at Department of Engineering and Architecture of the University of Parma and Director of FAMagazine.

His publications include: *L'architettura della città lineare* (FrancoAngeli, Milan 2016); *Il progetto di architettura nelle scuole europee* (in *European City Architecture*, FAEdizioni, Parma 2012); *Mantova. Saggio sull'architettura* (FAEdizioni, Parma 2005).

Lamberto Amistadi, architect; he graduated with honors in Architecture at the IUAV University of Venice with Luciano Semerani with which he has performed research and teaching activity. He also received his PhD in Architecture and Urban Composition at the IUAV in Venice in 2003. He is currently an Assistant Professor in Architecture and Urban Design at Department of Architecture of the University of Parma and Deputy Director of FAMagazine.

His publications include: *Convention and Symbols of the New England Masque* (in *Soundings: John Hejduk, Aión*, Florence 2015); *La costruzione della città* (Il Poligrafo, Padua 2012); *Paesaggio come rappresentazione* (Clean, Naples 2008).