



Studi e ricerche di storia dell'architettura

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Studi e ricerche di storia dell'architettura is the open-access journal of the Associazione Italiana di Storia dell'Architettura (AISTARCH). Founded in 2017, **SRSA** publishes biannual issues, it is indexed in ERIH PLUS and recognized as a “Classe A” journal by ANVUR (<http://www.aistarch.org/rivista.php>). Official languages are Italian and English, but in exceptional cases we also accept papers written in other major European languages.

SRSA welcomes contributions that deal with the history of architecture in the broadest terms, without chronological or geographical limitations. We are looking for essays dedicated to projects and processes of construction – but also of use, reuse, and transformation – of spaces, buildings, and entire urban complexes, whether made of stone or paper, real or merely imagined, as long as they are investigated in their historical dimension, with critical awareness and concern for the peculiarities of each context. Case studies are welcome, especially if aimed at discussing methodological or historiographical issues, in a perspective open to comparison and cross-disciplinary exchange. Priority will be given to manuscripts marked by originality, a problem-oriented approach and that offer food for thought that goes beyond academic boundaries and raises questions that challenge us not only as researchers but also, and above all, as citizens of the world.

Call for abstracts 1 – Collaborations / Collaborazioni

Any work of man, no matter how spontaneous,
individual, original it may be, is always the result
of a long and extensive, even if hidden, collaboration.
(Arturo Graf, 1908)

Architecture is a collaborative activity. A poet only needs pen and paper to compose a poem (Homer did not even have those), while Giotto only needed a chipped stone to show Cimabue his ingenuity. The situation is different for someone who has to construct a building: ideas and savoir-faire are not enough; they also need a lot of hands, a lot of money, a lot of time, a lot of skills... a lot of contributions from a lot of different people. Of many of these we will never know the name, nor the specific role; of many of those we will never be able to grasp all the efforts, the nuances, the implications. However, it is probably not (only) because of their elusive nature that collaborative practices have been, and often still continue to be, rather underexplored by historiography. Doesn't their opacity somewhat

obscure the image of the architect as *deus ex machina* of construction projects, that for centuries in Europe architecture practitioners have sought to propagate? In this issue of **SRSA**, we invite you to challenge that image, exploring the figures, processes, and relationships that often remain indistinct in the shadow cast by the myth of the architect as absolute ruler of their own means. Here are a few hints, that can be freely developed.

1. If the awareness of architecture's collaborative nature is as old as architecture itself, the conceptions that have arisen from it have greatly changed over the centuries and can only be historicized. Aristotle, and before him Herodotus, used the word ἄρχιτέκτων in reference to the figure of the superintendent or coordinator of building works (this is the etymological meaning of the term), whose role was particularly complex, and therefore appreciable, in the case of large-scale construction undertakings (Holst 2017). The very apologue of the primitive hut, in Vitruvius' *De architectura*, translates into a founding myth this idea of building activity as a collective endeavour, in which different occupations and various skills, precisely because they are plural, make the direction of the *architectus* necessary (Payne 2019).

This ancient concept was overshadowed in the Renaissance by an entirely different image: that of the architect as an inventor of forms, comparable in this respect to other artists such as painters or sculptors, who like them expressed their ingenuity through the art of drawing (Merrill 2017). Generations of architects saw themselves reflected in this image, simplified, seductive and legitimising as it was; and from Brunelleschi to Michelangelo, from Bernini to Le Corbusier, the idea that the authorship of a work of art belonged only to the person who had conceived or designed it gradually took root in European culture, culminating in the 19th century in the romantic myth of the designer-demiurge, the exclusive author of one's own creations to the point of giving them one's name, as happened to Gustave Eiffel.

How has this constellation evolved over the last century? The signals are contradictory: on the one hand, one could point to the phenomenon of starchitects and their branding; on the other hand, one could mention instead the many experiences that have made a manifesto of their collaborative creed, from the Bauhaus to The Architects Collaborative (and indeed the phenomenon of associated architects' studios has spread from the United States to the rest of the world). Indeed, the idea of the project as a form of 'assemblage' and the question of the 'power of collaboration' seem today to be at the centre of the theoretical debate on the nature of architectural practice and its relationship to social, political and economic contexts (Yaneva 2018; Fiehn et al. 2023).

If it is true that each of these concepts has clearly influenced the way in which each period has interpreted not only its present, but also its past, we might then ask ourselves: on which theorems has the historiographical tradition to which we are heirs relied, more or less consciously? In what directions is it heading, and to what extent is it influenced by the changes taking place on the contemporary scene? Is it a coincidence that today the issue of collaboration is gaining ground not only in the field of professional practice, but also in that of architectural historiography (Aggregate Architectural History Collaborative 2021)?

2. Intellectual synergies – like and perhaps even more than love ones – remain almost always inscrutable from the outside: they are exchanges that are made up of reciprocity, sharing, correspondences that are often impalpable even to those who experience them. How can we precisely distinguish Bernini's ideas from Borromini's in the collective undertaking that was the construction of the Vatican Baldachin? How can we distinguish the specific contributions of Charles Percier from those of Pierre Fontaine in a partnership of life rather than work that lasted over forty years? Even when documents allow us to follow step by step the genesis of a joint work – as in the extraordinary case of the so-called Letter to Leo X by Raphael and Baldassar Castiglione – the authorship of ideas remains an open question, or at least the subject of very subtle distinctions (Settis-Ammannati 2022).

In this context, what does it mean to attribute a complex and inevitably collective undertaking such as the construction of a building? In fact, the practice of attribution originated in a field – the art market – quite distinct from that of architectural history, and to meet a precise need: identifying the precise author of an artefact in order to assess its quality and thus its market value. However, when it comes to shared practices based on the involvement of many subjects – such as architecture, or cinema – this approach shows all its limits: does the director's leading role in any way diminish the individual relevance of the actors and their personalities? Can any of them claim a more authorial role than the producers, or the scriptwriters? Indeed, none of these figures, on their own, can claim authorship of a film: on the contrary, it is only from the quality of their interaction – of their collaboration – that the value, if not the very existence, of a film depends. To what extent can this paradigm also be applied to the study of architecture? What consequences could we draw from it in terms of renewing our historiographical questionnaires, and of deepening our understanding of architectural works?

3. Reflecting on the collaborative dimension of architecture prompts us to shift our focus from the fish to the waters in which they swim, to the currents that propel them: it invites us to turn our gaze away from individuals and to direct it towards contexts, schools, groups, networks of relationships and forms of communication. Within this framework, the typical objects on which architectural historians have traditionally focused – projects, drawings, engravings, treatises, manuals, etc. – undoubtedly play a key role. However, we know that cultural exchange is not limited to written communication, even less to printed matter, and that it takes very different forms and modes over time. Each generation develops its own practices, adapted to contingencies, to share experiences, to keep up to date, to exchange ideas and knowledge. These practices are often informal, fluid, mediated by interpersonal relationships, journeys, glances, objects, not to mention the primary means that humans have always used to relate and collaborate with their peers: the spoken word, exchanged in the most diverse places and circumstances (Bloom 1993; Elet 2023).

To what extent can these practices be the subject of historiographical investigation? Certainly the possibility of making them the subject of an 'ethnography of architecture' (Yaneva 2009; Yaneva 2022) becomes all the more difficult the further we move away from the present time; but is this reason enough to neglect them? Perhaps some uses, or fields, are better

documented than others? In which directions, on which sources, should we focus our attention?

4. When Philarete said that every building has a father and a mother, beyond his encomiastic intentions, he was also referring to a fact: in the dynamics of construction, not only architectural factors come into play, but also wills, needs, motivations entirely alien to the *res aedificatoria*. Patrons, owners, financiers and ‘technicians’ of all kinds are just some of the many co-protagonists fully involved in the building process, often with their own agendas and therefore potentially inclined to think with Flaubert that “l’architecture est trop sérieuse pour être laissée aux architectes”. Architectural historians have often tended to underestimate such concerns, or to interpret them as obstacles to the free expression of the architect’s thought. And yet, we can assume that the opposite has often been true, and that it is precisely by collaborating with people from different backgrounds – and responding to their demands – that architects have been driven to broaden their horizons, explore new paths, and experiment with novel solutions. Isn’t it said that Abbot Suger’s neo-Platonic studies played a crucial role in guiding the work of the master builders who carried out the first Gothic choir in the church of Saint-Denis? One may suppose that throughout history there have been many other examples of collaboration that crossed – or even operated outside of – established professions and their respective traditions, which could today make the subject of interesting and paradigmatic case studies.

5. The collaborative dimension of architecture raises not only intellectual questions, but also social and professional issues related to working conditions and the resulting statuses. So far, we have emphasised collaborations that could be described as ‘horizontal’, between people working on an equal or at least reciprocal basis. But there are also ‘vertical’, asymmetrical collaborations, founded on more or less institutionalised forms of subordination. There is the relationship between master builder and apprentice, governed by guild statutes; there is the relationship between mentor and student destined to take over one day; between the architect and the designers employed in their studio; between the husband and the wife who supports him in anonymity; and then there are the relationships of exploitation that, from the time of the pyramids to the present day, have also relied on forms of slave labour or similar.

In 2000, the US Congress sponsored a study aimed at recognising the prominent role played by African American workers in the construction of the Capitol in Washington (Antista-Loi 2022). It would be unfair to dismiss this measure as a mere tribute to political correctness, ignoring its potential historiographical relevance. What we have here is an apparent paradox: many of the most representative monuments of the young American nation, overtly conceived as “temples of freedom and democracy”, were in fact materially built by enslaved black people, who were then – and for a long time afterwards – excluded from the rights and values to which these monuments referred (Cheng et al. 2020). In fact, the paradox is only apparent: this contrast between slogans and reality rather confirms the contradictions of a nation that has long been reluctant to conform to the principles proclaimed in the

Declaration of Human Rights for a long time. Perhaps, however, this apologue also contains a more general truth: architecture is a mirror of the society that produces it, not only (sometimes not so much) in the appearance it adopts and the values it seeks to embody, but also and above all in the concrete ways in which its working - and 'collaborative' - practices are managed, regulated, and (ab)used. This is not a comforting observation in a country like ours, where work-related deaths and illegal construction continue to be, if not the rule, at least a daily reality.

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Terms and deadlines

Authors are invited to submit an abstract (max 1,000 words/7,000 characters) together with a concise bibliography, 5 keywords and a short CV to direzione.srsa@gmail.com (please indicate in the subject line: Call 16 - Rootless). If the proposal is accepted, the author will be asked to write a text of 20,000-50,000 characters (3,000-7,500 words), including spaces and

footnotes, accompanied by 10-12 images, carefully following the journal's guidelines. The texts will be double-blind peer-reviewed and the final decision on each publication will be made by the Editor-in-Chief, who may also seek the advice of other experts.

- Deadline for abstract submission: **October 20, 2024**
- Notification of abstract acceptance or refusal: **October 27, 2024**
- Deadline for paper submission: **March 16, 2025**

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Call for abstracts 2 – Open topic papers

SRSA also welcomes the submission of abstracts on various topics that may be relevant to the journal, which should fall into the following two categories:

- **Essays** on broad topics, with a length of 20,000-40,000 characters (3000-6000 words), including spaces and footnotes, and up to 12 illustrations. between 20,000 and 40,000 characters, including spaces and footnotes, accompanied by 10-12 images
- **Short articles** focusing on unpublished or little-known sources, written or iconographic, with a length of 10,000-15,000 characters (1500-2200 words), including spaces and footnotes, and up to 2-3 images

Proposals – consisting of an abstract (up to 7,000 characters / 1,000 words), a concise bibliography, 5 keywords and a short CV – can be submitted to direzione.srsa@gmail.com (please indicate in the subject line: Call 16 - Open topic). In case of acceptance, authors will be asked to write their texts carefully according to the journal's guidelines. The texts will be double-blind peer-reviewed and the final decision on each publication will be taken by the Editor-in-Chief, who may also seek the advice of other experts.

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