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# English

Oliver Elser (pages 8–14)

English translation (abridged): Michael Robinson

## Calculated transparency

Frank O. Gehry's DG Bank in Berlin

Just as all the technical difficulties seemed to have been overcome and the building was complete at last, the opening is being postponed for longer and longer: the client, DG Bank, has run into difficulties. The contingency reserve for at-risk credits had to be raised by a billion DM in the year 2000, merger rumours were in the air and the chairman of the board resigned. So this was not a good time to take over a new building that carries a message that is as clearly articulated as an advertising campaign.

What is the DG Bank actually? The answer to this question is the key to understanding Frank Gehry's architecture, which really is tailor-made. His design fits in as precisely as it possibly could with the concern's image cultivated for a long time. It is therefore not surprising that now, with the company's image somewhat scratched, one is hesitating to inaugurate this building.

The DG Bank, Deutsche Genossenschaftsbank Frankfurt am Main, to give it its full name, is not a bank for the general public, with a network of branches, cash machines and everything else that one would expect in this context. It is the highest institution for the co-operative banks, and as such works as a kind of central bank for the roughly 2000 credit unions and Raiffeisen banks in Germany. Its peculiar position makes it a bank that is almost "invisible" in everyday terms because it cannot be localized anywhere, and so for years the DG bank has spent a great deal of money on a PR strategy intended to give it some sort of profile outside the banking world as well. Its activities are focused above all on building up one of the most comprehensive collections of contemporary photographs. This means that in cultural terms at least it is in direct competition with Germany's number 1, the Deutsche Bank, which also has a large art collection and recently presented the city of Berlin with a branch of the Guggenheim Museum.

### Branding in Berlin

In the early nineties the company made its mark with a building by the architects Kohn Pedersen Fox Associates, a spectacular exception to the customary high-rise buildings in Frankfurt, Germany's financial capital, where the DG Bank's head office is located. The 53-storey building did not just make a self-confident mark with its "crown" among the otherwise charmless architecture of the Frankfurt skyline, but was also the first high-rise building in the city that invited

public space into its base with an American-style atrium, offering the company a stage for self-presentation that it made very good use of. After the fall of the Berlin Wall the bank was able to make good its claims to a site in Pariser Platz that had been expropriated by the GDR, and it stepped up its previous architectural strategy while following the same principles: once more – after a competition – they chose an architect who was in demand internationally, and once more the architect was briefed to create an "open house". The choice of Frank Gehry is perhaps not due only to the fact that he was an architect who was already known to a broad section of the public. Anyone seeing the giant sculpture, by Claes Oldenburg and Coosje van Bruggen, of a tie fluttering up in front of the bank's headquarters in Frankfurt, will not be surprised that the firm wanted a touch of American cool for its next building, so that it could act out its role as a global player with an element of casualness. As well as this, Gehry and Oldenburg are linked by a very similar formal interest that has been expressed in their joint projects (Chiat/Day advertising agency in Venice, California) or in this case by a certain similarity between the curling fabric tie and Gehry's conference room cladding in the inner courtyard of the DG Bank in Berlin.

But at first it looked as though Gehry's architecture was not going to be able to make its effect as a distinctive feature: the Berlin Parliament issued a strict set of design regulations for Pariser Platz. The spokesman for "stone Berlin", the Social Democrat Building director Hans Stimmann, had persuaded people with his vehement plea against the "uninhibited and city-destroying individualism of today's architects", and insisted on closed masonry surfaces for the façades. While the rest of the architects rushed to accept the "Berlin architecture" postulated by Stimmann, and made frantic efforts to find models for their façades in Art Déco, rationalism or classicism, Gehry won the competition with a design that translated the requirements into architecture to the letter.

### A public space turned in on itself

Rather than justifying his solution by means of historical references, Gehry relies on the power of material. His façade adds a new facet to the concept of transparency alongside Slutzky and Rowe's ideas of "literal" and "phenomenal" transparency by allowing the means used to create it to show through: 50% glass and 50% sandstone were required, and so Gehry built something that is almost a rough fifty-fifty façade that makes nothing else "transparent" but the realization of this ratio. The glazed areas are opened up to the maximum that is seen as tolerable in an office building, and consequently the surrounding stone surfaces have to fill in a maximum area as well. Gehry shows himself to be a clever tactician in terms of this radical approach, able to juggle with the requirements, and he proves that he is a good architect in that he does not spoil the stone skeleton with

irritating joints, but uses the largest possible stone blocks.

There has not been architecture in Berlin celebrating material in this way since Mies van der Rohe's Nationalgalerie, except that here it is stone that is driven to the limits of what is possible in terms of construction technology. The windows counter the monumental gesture of the deep stone façade with a slightly curving figure that is recognizable only from the side. This is a subtle indication of the way that Gehry treats cladding in his other buildings.

The interior of the bank has been described in many of the critiques that have appeared so far as the place where the actual architectural spectacle is taking place, and the façade is interpreted as a tribute to the prevailing situation in Berlin. The restrictions are not particularly significant from the user's point of view. It could even be said that on the contrary they are a very welcome reason for drawing people's attention solely to the interior, as the public are supposed to be drawn into the Berlin building as they were in Frankfurt, so that the banking group itself becomes "transparent". The threshold at which visitors have to explain who they are is shifted well into the interior. There is a first, empty foyer that anyone can walk into, and it is only shortly before you reach the inner courtyard, which can be seen already from this point, that an ID card or an invitation to an event is required. Anyone who is an interesting member of the public from the bank's point of view will encounter enough venues for further penetrating the mysteriously appearing heart of the building.

The conference room under the curved metal skin and the large foyer on the ground floor are let by a separate operating company to firms like the Holtzbrinck media group, which holds conferences for journalists and other "disseminators" there. It is possible to be there every Sunday evening as a television viewer at least, when Lothar Späth, the former prime minister of Baden-Württemberg, now chairman of the board of Jenoptik AG and "Entrepreneur of the Year 1998" invites viewers to his chat show, which is broadcast on the n-tv news channel. At the beginning of the show and after every commercial break Späth greets the audience with the sentence "welcome to 'Späth am Abend' from the DG Bank building in Pariser Platz in Berlin." Last year Zweites Deutsches Fernsehen's five-hour "Millennium Programme" launched the building's media presence, also broadcasting from the foyer of the DG Bank.

### A communications tool

Gehry's handling of space is perfectly matched to the needs of various levels of prestige: the foyer is also used as a canteen, and is under a vaulted expanse of glass, which detaches it acoustically from the inner courtyard. The foyer itself is large enough to house the bank's annual general meeting. The conference room is equipped to a very high technical standard. It is the actual trade mark of the building, and the model



for a cup awarded by the bank. This room is reserved for a small, even more exclusive public, and it is difficult to look into it even from the offices. For really confidential meetings there is another bug-proof room in the exposed concrete base of the sculptural form, and this too is equipped with the latest conference technology.

Gehry also makes the ordinary offices, which are grouped around the inner courtyard behind broad wooden cladding, part of the "public quality" of the building. There is a little balcony in front of each of the classical cell offices. The idea could come from a play by Marthaler: a resounding bash on the metal skin of the conference room could bring all the employees on to their balconies, where they would all start to sing at the same time. Quite a number of the employees keep their blinds down in the face of so much community spirit induced by architecture, which is something that Gehry would rather have done without. The spaces for exclusively internal use are comparatively modest. The board offices on the fourth floor are distinguished by details of their decoration and furnishing, higher ceilings and a direct view of Pariser Platz, but the board members do not meet very often in this branch for Berlin and the eastern provinces. Decisions are made in Frankfurt, while the DG building in Berlin is a communications tool that can be used where needed, but can be held in reserve as well.

Oliver J. Domeisen  
(Original version of pages 28–35)

## Beyond the Mariachi

The JVC Cultural, Convention and Business Center in Guadalajara, Mexico

Eleven of the world's most famous architectural practices are descending on Mexico's second largest city with the mission to put it on the cultural world map. They have all been invited to contribute to the JVC Center, a curious hybrid of culture and business, which intends to re-define the scope and ambitions of corporate architecture. The significance of this urban scale project lies in the fact that it is not a public undertaking but the brainchild of a self-made billionaire, Jorge Vergara Madrigal, head of the Grupo Omnilife company, who aims to single-handedly catapult Mexico into the 21<sup>st</sup> century.

Guadalajara, capital of the Jalisco district northwest of Mexico City, is not what one would describe as a global hot spot. Like most other Latin-American towns it centers around a 16th century cathedral and the Zocalo, the principal public square, which together form the hub of urban activity. Its social calendar is dominated by the annual Feria (county fair), Mariachi music festivals and the traditional cockfights. But there

is a tangible sense of change in the air. A billboard outside the airport advertises Guadalajara as the Silicon Valley of Mexico, clearly expressing the ambitions of a nation on the verge of globalisation which last December shook the world's longest ruling party from power. Until now these ambitions have remained within the realm of politics but they are about to be given architectural form. Just outside the Periferico, the orbital motorway that separates Guadalajara's urban center from its rural periphery lies the 250ha greenfield site for the JVC Center. Within the next six years this agricultural land will be transformed into an urban park containing cultural, business and leisure facilities symbolising a new prosperous Mexico.

### The tycoon and his dream team

Everything surrounding the conception of the JVC Center seems unusual. On a local level it is the concept of suburban development which is entirely new to the area. But the true eccentricity of the JVC project reveals itself through its patronage. In a global climate of governments who steer clear of grand urban projects and private developers whose top priority are quick profits it comes as a real surprise to find a private investor who covers 80% of the \$460 million building cost out of his own pocket with a view to a 20 year recuperation period. But then 43 year old Jorge Vergara Madrigal is not your typical tycoon either. A former car mechanic without a college degree he turned his food supplement company Omnilife from a \$10,000 business in 1991 into a branching empire of \$600 million sales per annum. The Grupo Omnilife corporation today still researches, develops and manufactures nutritional drinks and health products but as part of its 19 companies it also includes cultural and educational institutions, film production companies as well as business parks.

Following the Omnilife slogan "people taking care of people", Vergara now seeks to re-invest some of his profits in his hometown and jumpstart Mexico's second largest city in the process. He has named the development JVC in honour of his late father Jorge Vergara Cabrera and, with the help of Ten Arquitectos' Enrique Norten, selected eleven of the world's most prestigious architects from a shortlist of 40. According to arqa.com casualties of this process include Frank Gehry, Peter Eisenman, Rem Koolhaas, Bernard Tschumi and Steven Holl, an impressive list in itself, but the ones who finally made it into the exclusive club are Daniel Libeskind (University), Zaha Hadid (Hotel), Thom Mayne of Morphosis (Palenque Arena), Carmen Pinos (Fair Grounds), Jean Nouvel (Grupo Omnilife Corporate Offices), Wolf Prix of Coop Himmelb(l)au (Entertainment and Shopping Center), Tod Williams & Billie Tsien (Amphitheater), Toyo Ito (Contemporary Art Museum), Philip Johnson (Children's World), Teodoro Gonzalez de Leon (Omnilife Staff Clubhouse) and Enrique Norten of Ten Arquitectos (Convention Center) himself. Assembling such a galaxy of stars is no small feat in itself but Vergara went

one step further. He instructed his designers to dream up projects without the restriction of initial budgetary restraints and he expected them to collaborate on a masterplan for the entire site in order to achieve a situation where the buildings communicate with each other. He did not want to create a museum of architecture but he wanted a city. After several meetings in the USA and Mexico the final designs and masterplan were unveiled in February 2001 and it seems that this highly unconventional approach has paid off.

### More than an office park, but not quite a city

It is undoubtedly the architecture of the individual components, which will have the biggest impact on the national psyche. Since the 1950s the design of Mexico's public spaces has been dominated by the sculpturally monumental tradition of Luis Barragan (himself a child of Guadalajara), Ricardo Legorreta or Teodoro Gonzalez de Leon. Despite the fact that de Leon, an ex-employee of Le Corbusier and architect of the famous Rufino Tamayo Museum in Mexico City, is involved with the project it is undeniable that the JVC's curvaceous, planar and transparent architecture marks a radical departure from Mexico's virile concrete tradition in an attempt to internationalise Mexican design culture as a whole. One might argue about the quality of some of the designs, but in the end they form a very convincing ensemble, not just formally but especially on a programmatic level. As Enrique Norten put it: "each of us brings our own tonality to the symphony". The close adjacencies of workplace, museum, leisure-complex and university promise exciting cross-fertilisation.

When asked which models he used for the JVC Center Vergara replied: "there aren't any". It is indeed difficult to find comparable projects on such a scale. The instant character of the development, its almost in-vitro conception, and its arrangement around an artificial lake conjure up associations with Celebration, the town which Disney built in Florida or even with theme park typologies themselves. But then the JVC does not include any permanent residential units nor is it entirely dedicated to leisure. From its heterogeneous architecture and the dedication of its patron one might deduce affinities to the Vitra compound in Weil am Rhein. But the JVC Center is more than just a corporate showcase, which houses the everyday functions of a firm. The JVC's peripheral location and the show-off character of its designs echo world exhibitions like Seville or Hanover. But the JVC is intended to be permanent and allows for growth. It is also intended to generate money.

Vergara is not a selfless patron of the arts, as a lot of the JVC's PR wants us to believe. He is first and foremost a cunning businessman and at closer inspection every aspect of the JVC Center is geared towards making profit. The choice of architects for example is influenced by several considerations. Vergara himself used to work in Bilbao and witnessed the phenomenal economic improvements that Gehry's Guggenheim



Museum unleashed in the area, the so-called Bilbao-effect. He is also a member of the foreign advisory board of the Museum für Angewandte Kunst in Vienna, which held highly successful exhibitions of several architects' work on the JVC shortlist. He is well aware of the free publicity and public interest, which the involvement of star architects generates, and there can be no doubt that he seeks to emulate the Guggenheim and Getty success-stories.

#### Culture attracts business, business supports culture

More importantly, Vergara has spotted another niche in the market which turns the Convention Center into the linchpin of the whole development. The convention market is very big business in the USA with 40% of all convention centers being booked for up to 7 years in advance. Just two hours away from Dallas, Texas by plane Guadalajara promises to be an ideal location to satisfy the demand for large convention venues. Based on Las Vegas, the most accomplished player in the convention business, which accommodates 38 million visitors per year (of which only 14% gamble), Vergara hopes to attract up to 25 million visitors per year, half of which would be pure convention tourism. While this is very good news for the economy of the region (the JVC will create 3 500 jobs) Vergara is making sure that some of the resulting profits find their way back into Omnilife's pocket. It is no coincidence then that the business account traveller can stay at the JVC five star Hotel, shop or watch a movie at the JVC Entertainment and Shopping Complex or even have a business lunch at Vergara's very own Coop Himmelb(l)au designed restaurant Mosku in downtown Guadalajara.

The high-end facilities and low living costs of the area will attract other international corporations who will find architecturally less ambitious Grupo Omnilife-owned industrial parks (e.g. Ecopark north of Guadalajara) ready and waiting for them. The JVC Center's low density also foretells plans to lease land to other companies to develop offices, hotels and restaurants on site. But this being the prestigious face of all its proliferating local investments, Grupo Omnilife reserves the right to review the architectural quality of any such developments.

Taking all of Vergara's far reaching interests into account one would expect a sceptical reaction from governmental bodies and the public at large. But Vergara seems to enjoy full support from all sides, including Mexico's new president Vicente Fox, for his endeavour. The secret of his success lies in his magnificent populist talent. His Omnilife company is built around a so-called pyramid sales approach, which turns his customers into distributors, a sales strategy previously employed by the highly successful Tupperware company. Up to now a total of 1.2 million distributors (1% of Mexico's population) have gone through Omnilife's finishing schools like the one in the coastal resort of Manzanillo, where they were led to believe that

consuming Omnilife's energy-giving and fat-burning drinks is an indispensable part of self-improvement.

Vergara himself claims that adopting a healthier diet has turned around his own life and who would want to dispute that claim in regard of his phenomenal success. When he asks his distributors to shrug of their fear of failure and raise their business creativity by losing weight and shaving off their moustaches he knows that a population riddled with social inequalities and poor education will obey gladly. When they sing in unison "yes, it can be done" they look at Vergara and see in him the future of Mexico, a nation on the brink of prosperity providing chances for everyone.

The first buildings of the JVC Center (Palenque, Entertainment and Shopping Center, Convention Center) are scheduled to go on site by the end of this year and the target for the completion of the first phase of development is 2003. It remains to be seen if the Mexican building industry can deliver the quality of architecture which the designs promise. But if the project should be successful it will most certainly put Guadalajara on the cultural world map; all thanks to the vision and bravura of a single man who is prepared to take risks (not least architecturally) which our governments shy away from.

Patrizia Bonifazio (pages 36–43)

Translation from German: Michael Robinson

## The Olivetti Case

Company culture and personal commitment to production and region.

The life work of Adriano Olivetti (1901–1960) was that of a successful entrepreneur and committed promoter of culture. Olivetti was outstandingly able to link the two, both as the owner of a company and as a private individual. He was looking for a "third way", though there was a distinctively paternalistic element present as well. Research having scarcely addressed the company's history until now, the author directs her attention at Olivetti's persona and initiatives as an entrepreneur. She outlines the unique experiment of negotiating the terms of production, civil society and the uncertain climate of post-war reconstruction in Italy, which was rich in ferment, and offered a whole range of initiatives for the country's modernization.

From 1934, the year in which he took over his father's company, until his death in 1960, the name of Adriano Olivetti was not linked with the policy of the world-famous typewriter manufacturing company alone. Olivetti also commissioned some of the most interesting buildings in the history of Italian architecture, and was involved in some

exemplary urban development projects that affected the whole of Italy, rather than just Ivrea – where Olivetti had its headquarters. Olivetti's experiment became so successful over time because of a unique production concept that was precisely tailored to fit Italy's situation, and also drew in the region around the centres of production.

The Olivetti family's rise in Ivrea started with the foundation of a factory that made precision instruments. Thanks to commissions from the army and later from the state, the number of employees rose from 200 in 1914 to about 500 after the First World War. By 1926 it was producing 8 000 typewriters per year. This quantity was remarkable for the Italian market, but it seems ridiculously small in comparison with the American competitors, Underwood, who were making about 850 typewriters per day at the same time. Adriano Olivetti joined his father Camillo's firm in 1926, and in subsequent years production rose from 13,000 (1929) to 24,000 units (1933) – a truly significant leap.

This change is linked not least with the fact that Olivetti introduced a Taylorist production model (the Bedeaux system). Like many Italian engineers, Adriano Olivetti visited the USA in 1925. Yet his journey did not take him to his competitors, but to General Motors and Ford, to the first moves to implement "River Rouge", to rural areas and small towns, which Roosevelt was in the process of industrializing through government instruments like the Federal Works Administration and the National Recovery Act, policies also aimed at eliminating social conflict.

#### General plant for the Aosta Valley, 1934–1941

The social facilities for industry that were built in Ivrea from 1934 f.e. Figini and Pollini's "Asilo Nido" children's day centre, 1939–1941) and the factory and its extensions give an almost physical sense of the changes in Ivrea, and of the central position that this experiment gradually acquired at national level. These buildings were realized by Figini and Pollini, working with the firm's Technical Office, almost without interruption over a period of twenty years. They can be seen clearly on the zonal plan of Ivrea initiated by Olivetti and drawn up in 1938 by Luigi Figini, Luigi Piccinato and Egisippo Devoti in 1938.

The plan illustrates the importance of this industrialization concept. It was based on a survey of the low-income Alpine population, and involved Ivrea and the Canavese region, as well as the Aosta Valley. It consists of four sub-plans which approve a type of industrialization for the valley that takes its suitability for tourism into account. One particular feature of the plan is that an economic factor is brought into the foreground of the area's development, and another is that architects are commissioned who address Modernism and the principles of the Charter of Athens at an international level (Piero Bottoni, Luigi Figini and Gino Pollini, and also BBPR with Gian Luigi Banfi, Lodovico Barbiano di Belgiojoso, Enrico Peressutti and Ernesto Nathan Rogers).



The plan differs quite considerably in its approach and graphic techniques from other urban development schemes that were drawn up in Italy at the same time. It included a series of references: production diagrams, production regions and statistical surveys. This is part of a quantitative and analytical approach that had been propagated by the magazine *l'Organizzazione Scientifica del lavoro*, the organ of the Ente Nazionale per l'Organizzazione Scientifica del lavoro (Enios). The plan for the Aosta Valley is obviously related to the kind of Italian industrialization culture that keeps an eye on international debate and is committed to the idea that the development of a region should be linked to its industrial upturn. It is familiar with discussions that have taken place at International Labour Organization conferences from Amsterdam to Brussels, addressing themes like regionalism as well as Taylorist and Fordist production models. It tries to define planning by drawing comparisons with experiments carried out in the Soviet Union, America and other parts of Italy, and it criticizes the kind of individualism that demands production in the name of Protestant values or the abstract notions of personalism. This was all in the hope of a new renaissance in the ethical sense. Olivetti himself was involved, as an entrepreneur and member of Enios, as well as being president of the Fascist Syndicate of Engineers in the Aosta Valley.

#### Regional Planning and the company agenda

The suggestion for regional planning put forward by the plan for the Aosta Valley, in theoretical terms as well, consists of an agenda that is absolutely unique for Italy as a long-term plan for Olivetti, at least until the Second World War. The above-mentioned magazine *Tecnica e Organizzazione* addresses industrial production (including Olivetti) and promotes the various possibilities that the companies have for enlargement and re-organizing themselves in terms of space, to illustrate the agreed timings for this hypothetical agenda: the contributions analyse the structure of each company, address production improvement, make suggestion for sorting out a company's internal organization "without bureaucracy", for social benefits, for industrial architecture and professional training, and also examine the relationship between industry and the market. All these postulates were conscientiously implemented by Olivetti in Ivrea.

#### "La comunità", 1943–1960

While the plan for the Aosta Valley stresses the need to consider the region and its production organization, it was up to the region and its political and social facilities to implement the proposals in the text "*L'Ordine Politica delle Comunità*" – written by Adriano Olivetti, revised in 1843 during his compulsory stay in Switzerland (being half-Jewish and an anti-Fascist), and published in 1945 by Nuove Edizioni Ivrea. The text recommends improvement of public facilities and is also concerned with defining the

"*comunitas*" as one of the locations determined by nature and history at which social conflicts arise and that exert pressure on both general and higher values, i.e. on the *comunitas* that furthers the brotherhood of mankind.

The text acquired almost radical significance in 1945 as a critique of the prevailing political situation. Finally, the movement called the "*Movimento Comunità*" was formed, as part of the political thinking relating to community as a result of the efforts of the 1948 constitutional assembly in Italy. The movement was concerned with modernizing the country. It did not just throw itself behind establishing a *comunità*, but was particularly concerned to point out the necessity of economic and social planning. Planning as an instrument for bringing the diversity of the social classes back in to equilibrium was the key feature of Olivetti's text and the proposals put forward by the *Movimento* – more on an ethical than a political level. It was this ethical interest that wanted to harmonize planning and market priorities. From the point of view of the *comunità* proposal, regional planning suggests renewal both on the level of production and also of social institutions, i.e. a response to the crisis brought about by the Second World War. But this socially oriented strategy found the greatest level of support among intellectuals from all sorts of education backgrounds and political allegiances.

The *Movimento di Comunità* had a finely branching structure. The movement's aim was to be a forum in which the problems of Italian society could be debated, and that could rise above party politics. In the case of the centres of population financed by the company and led by the *Movimento*, which were scattered over the Canavese and the whole of Italy, the point was to implement the political consensus reached by the *Movimento*. They were concerned above all with the "education" programme, with actions and measures that are necessary to understand the on-going political debate. In order to bring this about, the *Movimento* organized discussions about party politics, about regional planning, about the economy, about the disadvantages of cities, about architecture and art.

#### Company and cultural policy

The activities promoted by Adriano Olivetti have always to be seen from two points of view: that of the Olivetti company and that of the *Movimento Comunità*. The activities concerned are Olivetti's work as member or president of various institutions – like the UNRRA-Casa or the Istituto Nazionale di Urbanistica – after the war, participation by these institutions and the *Movimento Comunità* in exemplary urban design projects – like those for La Martella (1951–1954) and Ivrea (1954) –, the policy of renewing small urban communities (the I-RUR, Istituto per il rinnovamento urbano e rurale, was founded by the *Movimento Comunità* in 1954), but also the various buildings that were erected in Ivrea.

The company financed Olivetti's political, cultural, urban and architectural initiatives. The policies of the *Movimento Comunità*, whose aim is to create a "model community" that would provide a concrete example of the ideas behind the movement, attracted the greatest response in Ivrea – where many of the social initiatives set up by the company were already under way, but also where the social bonds between the company and the region are already very strong.

#### Architecture as a demonstration of ideas

And so planning was seen as the most important instrument of renewal, and the social institutions at the heart of company policy and of the *Movimento* were the most explicit device in the fifties for rethinking the organization of society and its ability to put new ideas into practice. Architecture, on the other hand, is given the task of providing concrete examples for the community project. The industrial landscape around Ivrea was considerably enriched by the new buildings erected after the war: Luigi Figini and Gino Pollini's ICO workshops (1934–1942) were joined by the Ignazio Gardella's canteen (1951–1956), the Nuova ICO by Figini und Pollini (1956–1958), Mario Ridolfi's kindergarden (1956–1963) and building for the Montalenghe I-Rur agricultural co-operative by Giorgio Raineri (1957–1958), to name but the most important and best-known examples. A company policy that was worked out down to the last detail, under the direction of the Ufficio Dipendenti Case Olivetti (from 1950), directed by the local architect Emilio Tarpino, contributed to the creation of a modern industrial landscape. In the workers' housing estates or the villas erected for senior management, building of international distinction makes its local impact.

The buildings in Ivrea are not tied to particular typological solutions or formal handwriting. If one ignores slogans invoking Adriano Olivetti as a lover of "rationalistic" and later "organic" forms, and if one considers the individual projects, then it is clear that every building in Ivrea is much more an embodiment of a step within a biography than a representation of a decision made by a client. This also applies to Figini and Pollini's workshop block, which perhaps relates most closely to the symbolism involved in the location. What we have here are experiments that have condensed into buildings, architectural languages in a nutshell. They are explained by a culture that was in a state of upheaval, as was the case in Italy after the Second World War, and their ambiguity in terms of the international debate is directly linked with a particular cultural and professional situation: that of an international élite hovering between the profession and political commitment, between duty and ethics. This experiment was made possible only through Adriano Olivetti's own commitment.