Italia 61: The *Padiglione Delle Fonti di Energia* by Studio G.P.A. Monti and Lucio Fontana. For the Reconstruction of the Architectural Context Behind Fontana's Environmental Installation

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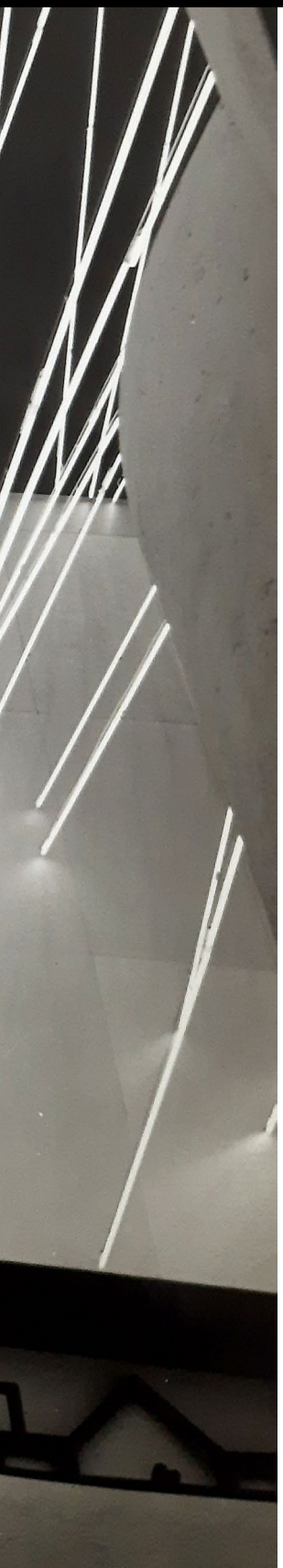
Keywords:
Centenary of the Unification of Italy, Gianemilio, Piero and Anna Monti, Lucio Fontana, Ephemeral exhibitions, Environmental art.



ABSTRACT:

On the centenary celebrations of the unification of Italy (1961), the Esposizione Internazionale del Lavoro (E.I.L.) or International Labour Exhibition, was organized in Turin to celebrate work as a foundational value of Italian identity and the highest expression of progress, creativity, and human dignity. The exhibition featured international contributions and a central Italian pavilion set up by different architects overseen by the architect Gio Ponti. During this event, artist Lucio Fontana conceived *Fonti di energia, soffitto di neon per Italia 61 (Sources of Energy, Neon Ceiling for Italia 61)*, a composition of seven layers of neon tubes, designed specifically for the section curated by architects Gianemilio, Piero, and Anna Monti (Studio G.P.A. Monti). Although Fontana's work has been extensively studied, the architectural context within which it was situated has not been sufficiently examined, resulting in a partial erasure of the spatial context and an inadequate recognition of the contributions of Studio G.P.A. Monti. This essay addresses these historiographical gaps by analysing unpublished documents from the G.P.A. Monti Archive, now in the Archivi Storici del Politecnico di Milano (Politecnico di Milano Historical Archives).

In occasione delle celebrazioni del centenario dell'unità d'Italia (1961), a Torino fu organizzata l'Esposizione Internazionale del Lavoro (E.I.L), che celebrava il lavoro come valore fondante dell'identità italiana e massima espressione di progresso, creatività e dignità umani. La mostra comprendeva partecipazioni internazionali e un padiglione centrale italiano, le cui sezioni erano affidate a differenti architetti coordinati da Gio Ponti. In questa occasione, Lucio Fontana realizzò *Fonti di energia, soffitto di neon per Italia 61*, una composizione di sette livelli di tubi al neon, ideata per il Padiglione delle Fonti di Energia allestita dagli architetti Gianemilio, Piero e Anna Monti (Studio G.P.A. Monti). Sebbene l'opera di Fontana sia stata ampiamente studiata, il contesto architettonico in cui era inserita non è stato sufficientemente indagato, portando a una parziale cancellazione del contesto spaziale e a un mancato riconoscimento del lavoro dello studio G.P.A Monti. Questo saggio tenta di colmare questi vuoti attraverso un'analisi di documenti inediti dell'archivio G.P.A Monti, ora presso gli Archivi Storici del Politecnico di Milano.

Opening Picture:

Fig. 01: Studio G.P.A. Monti, Source of Energy Pavilion for Italia 61, detail of the Neon Ceiling by Lucio Fontana, view from the spiral staircase, Archivio G.P.A. Monti, photo by Casali, Servizio Archivi Storici e Attività Museali. Politecnico di Milano ACL.

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The ephemeral nature of the project, whether a work of art, a temporary installation, an exhibition, or an event, always involves a partial cancellation of its original components. As is well known, the ephemeral implies innumerable problems: how to recount what is no longer there? Or how to revive the original experience of the work or event? How do we analyze the media change in documenting the work (e.g., from environment to photography, performance to video)? The study of installations and their history represents a particular case concerning these issues, as it allows us to study the category of the ephemeral and transience in an environmental, spatial, and architectural dimension. An architecture, albeit with some variables introduced by modernity, is made to last. However, the durability fades in the case of set-ups for temporary exhibitions: temporary museum spaces, events, and urban settings are categories of projects that pose questions about the preservation, realization, and historicization of their ephemeral features. The traditional approach of studies on the history of exhibition design often invites the investigation of archives to make it possible to reconstruct a space and its characteristics through the design and documentation materials. However, at the same time, these materials, even if detailed and correctly analyzed, describe only partially a situation that is, on the whole, unrepeatable due to the overlapping of different aspects that make up the atmosphere of a specific exhibition moment. Regarding the atmosphere of an art exhibition, art historian and curator Henry Urbach observed:

"The atmosphere of an exhibition includes works of art, sure; we can even admit they are the main event. But it really does include everything else, and is not limited to these: the architecture of the gallery; lighting and decor; interpretive furniture elements; the activity and comportment of people including security guards and other visitors; the ideas an affects that fill the air [...] Smells and sounds, too. The atmosphere of an exhibition is, simply, its vibe. It is something to be felt a inhabited, not only seen, and it can be remembered."[1]

An interesting case study to reflect and analyze these topics is Lucio Fontana's work *Fonti di energia, soffitto di neon per Italia 61* (Sources of Energy, Neon Ceiling for Italia 61)[2], one of the artist's best-known environmental works [Fig. 1]. This work was conceived on the occasion of *Italia 61*, an event held in Turin to celebrate the centenary of the anniversary of the unification of Italy. It was located in the *Sources of Energy Pavilion*, designed by architects Gianemilio Monti, Piero Monti, and Anna Monti née Bertarini, members of Studio G.P.A Monti. The Pavilion was part of the Italian section of the Esposizione Internazionale del Lavoro (E.I.L.), or International Labour Exhibition. Fontana's work has been restaged several times: in 1972, at Palazzo Reale (Milan);[3] in 1998-1999 at Palazzo delle Esposizioni (Rome) for the centenary of Fontana's birth;[4] and in 2017 at the Pirelli Hangar Bicocca in the exhibition *Lucio Fontana. Ambienti/Environments* (Milan),[5] dedicated exclusively to spatial environments. This exhibition extensively

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used in-depth archival sources to present philologically accurate reconstructions of Fontana's works. Nevertheless, despite the accuracy of the reconstructions and the attention paid to the interpretation of the archival sources, the work encountered an inevitable mutation because it was deprived of its original context, which was not only architectural-environmental but also cultural. The spatial dimension, understood as the work's architectural context, was profoundly relevant in its original location because Studio G.P.A. Monti's Pavilion was not a museum space generated for the work of art but rather an exhibition space. In that context, the work was the culmination of an emotional, scenographic, and conceptual exhibition itinerary about the topic of energy production [Fig. 2]. Videos, images and documentaries, dioramas, and machines were arranged in the original Pavilion. These artifacts coexisted in the same space, mutually influencing the visitor's perception of the space and the artwork. The changes occurring in the rearrangements are certainly not due to the curators' oversight or a partial misinterpretation of the documents but rather to the complexity of the rearrangement of the ephemera. Moreover, the studies so far carried out on Fontana's work can be placed within the contemporary art debate and have focused on the work of art itself, while there are almost no investigations in the field of architecture or design focused on the "container" (the Pavilion) rather than on the "object" (the artwork). It is relevant that the architects, the actual commissioners of the work, are often only mentioned in passing, and the *Sources of Energy Pavilion* is rarely the subject of the investigations, even if it is inseparable from Fontana's installation.[6] This contribution intends to investigate the architects Monti's work, the architectural context where the artwork was inserted, and the organizational system of the general exhibition to situate Fontana's work more precisely in its original context and further focus on its complexity and attempt to return a theoretical reconstruction of its general atmosphere.

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Fig. 02: Studio G.P.A. Monti, Source of Energy Pavilion for Italia 61, detail of the Neon Ceiling by Lucio Fontana, view from the staircase, Archivio G.P.A. Monti, photo by Casali, Servizio Archivi Storici e Attività Museali. Politecnico di Milano ACL.

Italia 61. The Centenary of the Unification of Italy and the International Labour Exhibition

The occasion that allowed Studio G.P.A. Monti to realize the Pavilion was the celebration of the centenary of the Unification of Italy (1961), accomplished through a wide-ranging series of celebrations, conferences, and exhibitions under the gener-

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al title of *Italia 61* that took place in Turin. The choice of Piedmont's main city as the venue was a tribute to the history of the Risorgimento (Italian Resurgence), but it was also a celebration of the city's productive potential, which in those years had become Italy's main industrial center as well as a nerve center of cultural connection with Europe and the rest of the world.[7] For these reasons, the city of Turin was intent on giving the event an international character, which took on the proportions and cultural impact of a world exhibition, reaffirming the city's historical role in national history and more broadly as a national driving force: "The city thus celebrated, in 1961, not so much and not only a centenary but also and above all, essentially, the definitive exit from a strong and contradictory post-war period".[8]

The centenary celebrations had a complex genesis that, in today's perspective, allows us to retrace many of the entanglements between politics, business, and members of the design culture of the time, but which will be briefly summarized here.[9] The event began in the autumn of 1956, when the city mayor, Amedeo Peyron, commissioned a committee to draw up a plan for the celebration of the first centenary of national unity. The following year, the project received the High Patronage of the President of the Republic, and in 1958, the organizing committee planned three main exhibitions: the Mostra Storica (Historical Exhibition), the Mostra delle Regioni (Exhibition of the Regions of Italy)[10] and the Labour Exhibition. The Labour Exhibition soon took on international proportions, becoming the International Labour Exhibition a "resounding event that was already destined to become one of the symbols of Italy at the height of its economic boom".[11] The exhibition topic was "Man at Work – A Hundred Years of Technical and Social Development: Achievements and Prospects", a theme of interest for the participation of other nations and international organizations. The opening epigraph of the E.I.L. catalogue helps to understand better the meaning of "work" and "labour" that underpinned the exhibition, which was far from any commercial purpose: "On the centenary of its unification, Italy dedicates this display to the wonderful possibilities which work offers for the life, the enterprise, and the civilization of all mankind".[12] Labour was therefore seen as the highest expression of Man's moral, technical and scientific development; even architect Gio Ponti, again in the catalogue, reflects, "In this word, in its human meaning of commit-

Fig. 03 : Studio G.P.A. Monti, Source of Energy Pavilion for Italia 61 aerial view of the pavilion, photo by Casali, Archivio G.P.A. Monti, Servizio Archivi Storici e Attività Museali. Politecnico di Milano ACL.

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ment, sacrifice and hope, science, culture, technique, social order can be summed up today, in the course of the exceptional transformations and rapidity of developments, in a dimension and unity never reached until now".[13] The theme of Labour, as remarked by scholar and academician Giampiero Bosoni,[14] also alludes to the Constitution of the Italian Republic, which in its first article places "labour" as the foundation of the Republic.

Fig. 04: Studio G.P.A Monti, wooden maquette for the Source of Energy Pavilion for Italia 61, photo by Ballo & Ballo, Archivio G.P.A. Monti, Servizio Archivi Storici e Attività Museali. Politecnico di Milano ACL.

Nervi and Ponti. The Palazzo del Lavoro and Design Constraints

From the earliest executive stages, the organizing committee of *Italia 61* commissioned architect Gio Ponti to supervise the exhibition's layout with the role of "curation and architectural and artistic supervision". Ponti assumed the task of conceiving the general layout of the exhibition, designing the Italian Pavilion, and supervising the artistic direction of all the sections within it. Ponti was a crucial figure in the whole set-up process and, more generally, in the success of *Italia 61*. He began elaborating on the general exhibition design rules based on his fascination with the architecture created to house the E.I.L.: the Palazzo del Lavoro, or Labour Palace. Engineers Pier Luigi Nervi and his son Antonio undertook this project, which was impressive for its dimension and structural innovation. The building had a static structure consisting of sixteen large, reinforced concrete pillars (each pillar is a static element, indented one from the other). The pillars terminated in radial beams supporting the building's roofs, which were made of metal and independent of each other [Fig.3]. This monumental building became the symbol of E.I.L., and more generally, of the spirit of the exhibition: "The Palazzo del Lavoro, the heart of *Italia 61* and the purpose-built neighborhood, is a building conceived from the outset as an emblem of organization and efficiency. Its technologically innovative construction site considers the values of speed and planning typical of the industrial tradition".[15]

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Architect Gio Ponti's appreciation for this building was deep. From the catalogue pages, he defined Nervi's work as "masterful" architecture, "which is a marvelous example of a modern building, representative of the Exposition".[16] Ponti then designed the general layout of the exhibition,[17] which had as a cardinal principle the exaltation of the vision of the building through perspectives: "No pavilion in the Italian section must have ceilings that can limit the view of the ceiling and pillars, the rhythmic and visual 'con-

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stant' of the whole exhibition".[18] Ponti also invited the architects of the Italian section to develop their projects vertically rather than horizontally. From a compositional point of view, these aspects are the main constraints imposed on all architects and artists participating in the exhibition. Studio G.P.A. Monti accepted Gio Ponti's conception and guaranteed that the artwork commissioned to Lucio Fontana would also respect this indication. For Fontana, these will be the primary design constraints, and perhaps even the only ones, because there are no archive materials testifying indications of the architects to the artist nor traces in the correspondence with the suppliers concerning specific constraints. Therefore, it is crucial to consider that the design of the *Neon Ceiling* was conceived from the outset to establish a spatial relationship not only with the *Sources of Energy Pavilion* but, most importantly, with Nervi's Palazzo del Lavoro. Ponti's decision profoundly influenced this choice. Studio G.P.A. Monti's design of the *Sources of Energy Pavilion* represents a mediation on spatial constraints, aiming to create a space that respects its context while allowing creative freedom for Fontana's work [Fig. 4].

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G.P.A. Monti and Lucio Fontana. Energy, Space and Light

According to archival documents, architects Gianemilio, Piero and Anna Monti (née Bertarini), members of the Studio G.P.A. Monti, directly commissioned Lucio Fontana's involvement.[19] These architects, little known today, were members of that "second generation" of architects who, born at the turn of the 1920s, graduated in the immediate post-war period and actively participated in the reconstruction of the city of Milan and the establishment of the design system. Architects who participated in the cultural debate of their era were defined by the academician and architecture historian Fulvio Irace as the "Polar Star of Milanese professionalism".[20] Gio Ponti's commission for the design of the *Sources of Energy Pavilion* at *Italia 61* was proof of the quality of their work and the esteem they received in the cultural environment of their time.[21]

Fig. 05: Lucio Fontana, Picture of the sculptural sketch for Source of Energy Pavilion, Neon Ceiling for Italia 61, iron wire mounted on the pavilion maquette, photo by Ballo & Ballo, Archivio G.P.A. Monti, Servizio Archivi Storici e Attività Museali. Politecnico di Milano ACL.

The Pavilion was financed by national organizations aiming to promote their activities by engaging with and informing the public about technical and scientific advances in the energy production industry. The work of Studio G.P.A. Monti was, first and foremost, to create links between the industrial world and a largely non-specialized public. For these reasons, the first step of Studio G.P.A. Monti was to research how

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to deal with the exploitation and industrialization of natural energy sources (fuels, wind, geothermal, water, etc.) and the distribution and accumulation of electricity as a fundamental step in the affirmation of modernity and progress. The first "narrative" proposal developed by Studio G.P.A. Monti was a didactic pavilion, "an encyclopedia of energy sources".[22] However, the architects opted for another solution:

"[such narrative attitude was] rather impersonal, besides copying with less personality and authority a subject that will be dealt with in the foreign sections, it leaves very little emotion in the visitor's mind and is useless to anyone. In fact, the visitor with specific expertise can no longer be interested, while to the masses, it can only bring boredom, as it is very difficult to express such complex concepts (such as the concept of energy, for example) in a pleasant and fairly didactic manner."[23]

Therefore, Studio G.P.A. Monti, with the collaboration of designer Albe Steiner,[24] articulated a path focused on three particular aspects: the distribution of energy, to which "groups of men and even nations collaborate continuously with each other, in a work of profound human solidarity";[25] the accumulation of energy; raising awareness to consider energy, now used without any amazement, as the sum of natural resources, transformed through technical-scientific knowledge.

This final aspect of the Pavilion's program suggests that the decision to involve the artist Lucio Fontana was obvious for Studio G.P.A. Monti. Fontana's exploration of fantastical light effects and environmental innovations since the late 1940s aligned closely with the themes and objectives of the Pavilion. Moreover, Fontana was fascinated by scientific and technical innovations and their influence on art; he certainly shared the idea of human progress that animated the cultural and theoretical program of the E.I.L. as art historian and curator Luca Massimo Barbero notes, "he was linked from the very first Spatialist manifestos to that optimism aimed at progress and the evolution of man and science in a joint way".[26]

It has yet to be possible to trace direct correspondence between Studio G.P.A. Monti and Fontana. However, it is certain that Gio Ponti had contacts with Fontana[27] and the Monti architects were aware of the artist's work, as he had collaborated on numerous occasions with different architects. This aspect has been extensively investigated in the literature. It is worth mentioning some

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Fig. 06: Lucio Fontana, picture of the Sculptural Sketch for Source of Energy Pavilion, Neon Ceiling for Italia 61, iron wire mounted on the pavilion maquette, photo by Ballo&Ballo, Archivio G.P.A. Monti, Servizio Archivi Storici e Attività Museali. Politecnico di Milano ACL.

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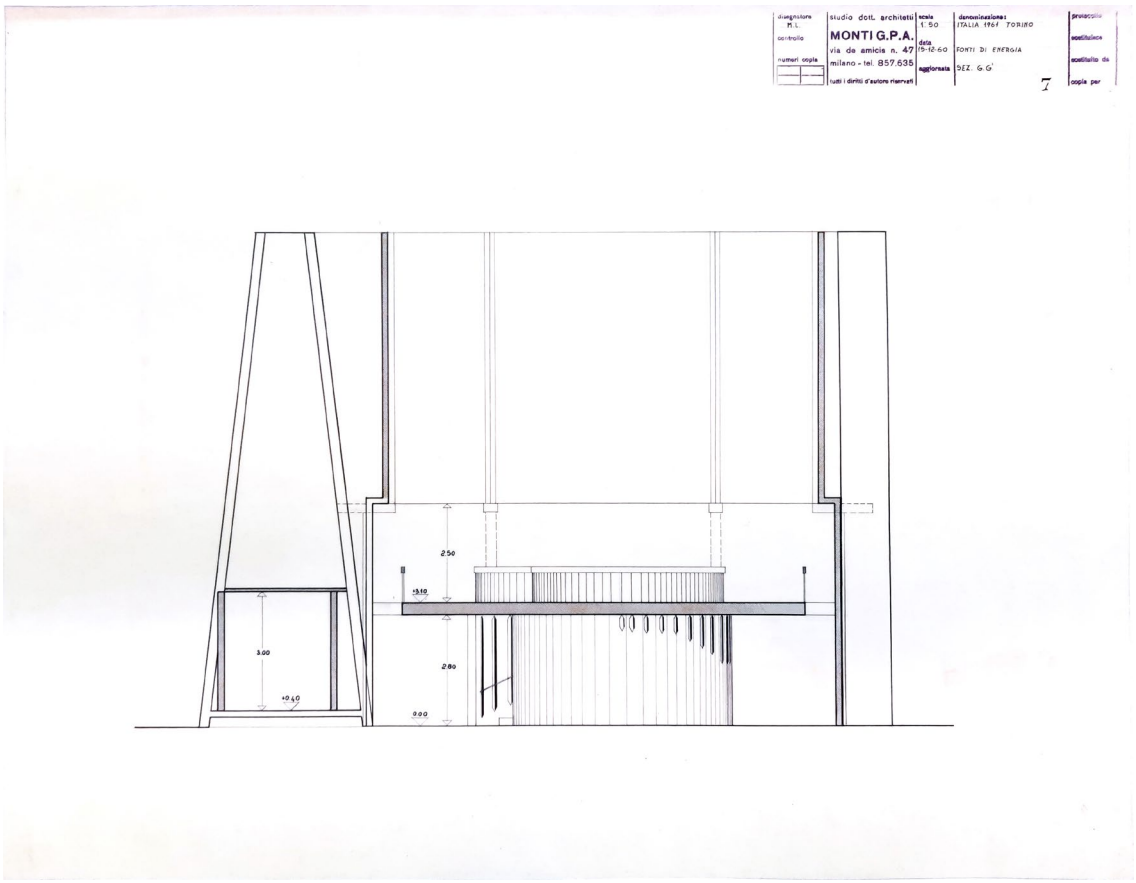

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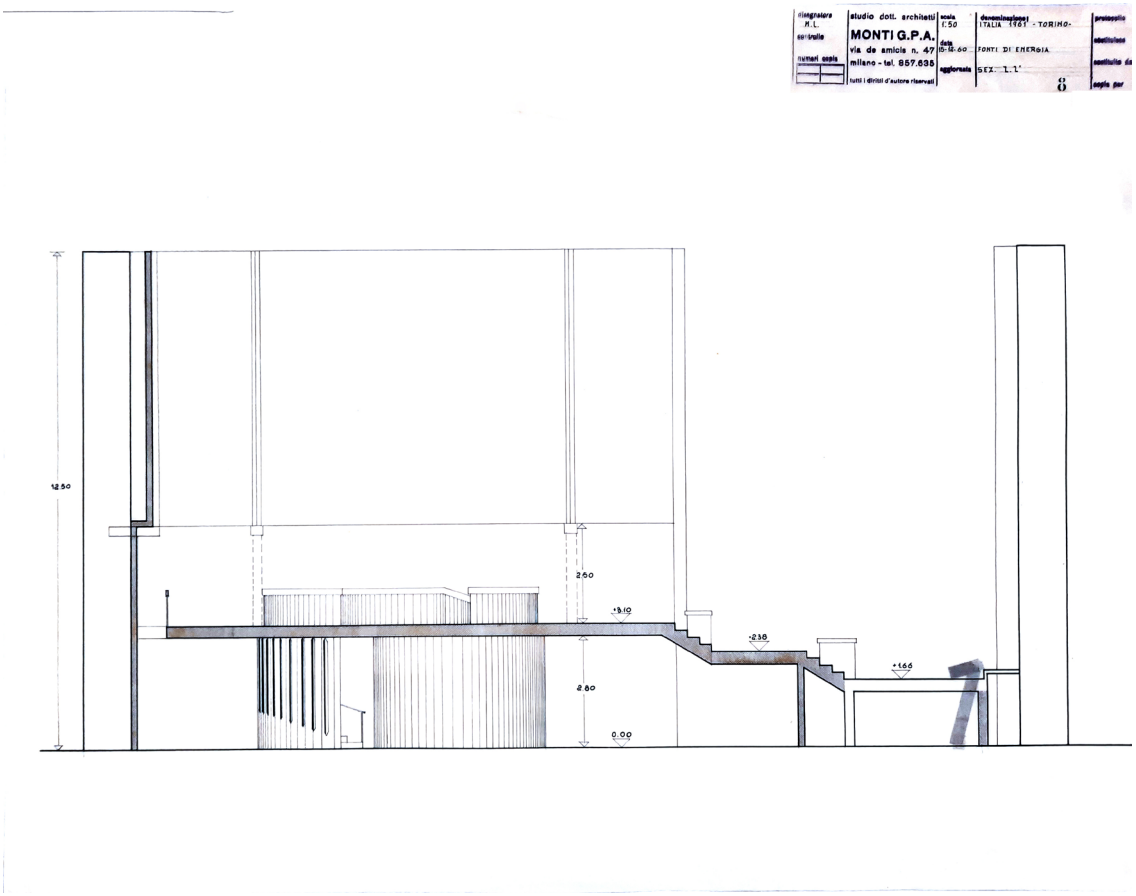

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Fig. 07:
Studio G.P.A. Monti, Cross Section of the Source of Energy Pavilion for Italia 61, copy on photographic paper, Archivio G.P.A. Monti, Servizio Archivi Storici e Attività Museali. Politecnico di Milano ACL.

Fig. 08:
Studio G.P.A. Monti, Longitudinal Section of the Source of Energy Pavilion for Italia 61, ink on tracing paper, Archivio G.P.A. Monti, Servizio Archivi Storici e Attività Museali. Politecnico di Milano ACL.

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of the collaborations and, above all, that "Fontana's history of contact with architects is evidence of a denial and undermining of the design essence of architecture as a science of predictability".[28] In fact, as early as the publication of the *Manifiesto Blanco* (1946) and the subsequent *Manifesto Tecnico dello Spazialismo* (1951) or *Technical Manifesto of the Spatialism,* Lucio Fontana reflects on the nature of space and time as a precondition for overcoming the traditional architecture, towards new scenarios where neon light, wood light, and cinema can unhinge the common idea of architecture as a box.[29] Architectural culture, for its part, was very attentive to Fontana's research, not only in the desire to commission his works but also in the positive reception of the innovations in his research. An interesting example is the enthusiastic reception that the Milanese architectural *milieu* reserved for the presentation of *Black Light Environment* in 1949 at the Galleria del Naviglio, Milan.[30] This work is the first spatial environment and a pivotal point in Fontana's career, as it demonstrated that the experimentation of Spatialism could exist in an environmental dimension without architectural commission. Despite this outcome, Fontana experimented with the environmental dimension of his poetics mainly through collaborations with architects throughout most of the 1950s. In 1951, the partnership with architect Luciano Baldessarri led to the surprising outcome of the *Neon Structure* for the Scalone d'Onore at the IX Triennial Exhibition, a relevant case for the innovative use of neon light, an innovative medium that Fontana would use in many other contexts such as private interiors in collaboration with architect Osvaldo Borsani, trade fairs in partnership with Luciano Baldessarri for whom Fontana produced the installations of two *Spatial Ceilings* (the first for the cinema of the Sidercomit company at the 31st Milan Trade Fair in 1953, and the second for the cinema of the Breda company pavilion, at the Milan Trade Fair in 1954).[31] Finally, mention should also be made of the light installation *Light Cube* for the atrium of the Cinema Duse in Pesaro, 1959-1960, a chandelier consisting of linear neon tubes arranged on the ideal perimeter of a cube and suspended in the entrance hall. This work is the least famous of those mentioned, but it is relevant because "Fontana had consolidated a more structural solution of using neon, which is almost an obvious anticipation of the environmental neon solutions adopted by some North American artists, including Dan Flavin, years later".[32] This solution, which employs a more linear geometric construction, seemed to anticipate the *Sources of Energy, Neon Ceiling for Italia 61*.[33] In fact, Fontana covered the vast space (about 120 square meters) of the first floor of the Pavilion with a sequence of linear neon tubes of blue and green light arranged on seven levels. The room's walls were covered with aluminum sheets, which reflected the light, adding an interaction between light and matter typical of Fontana's experimentation since his first installations of ceramic walls or sculptural elements in architectural settings [Figg.5,6]. Fontana did not give the composition a regular rhythm, nor did he use a modular scheme: "The rigidity of the layout is, however, betrayed by the choice of spacing

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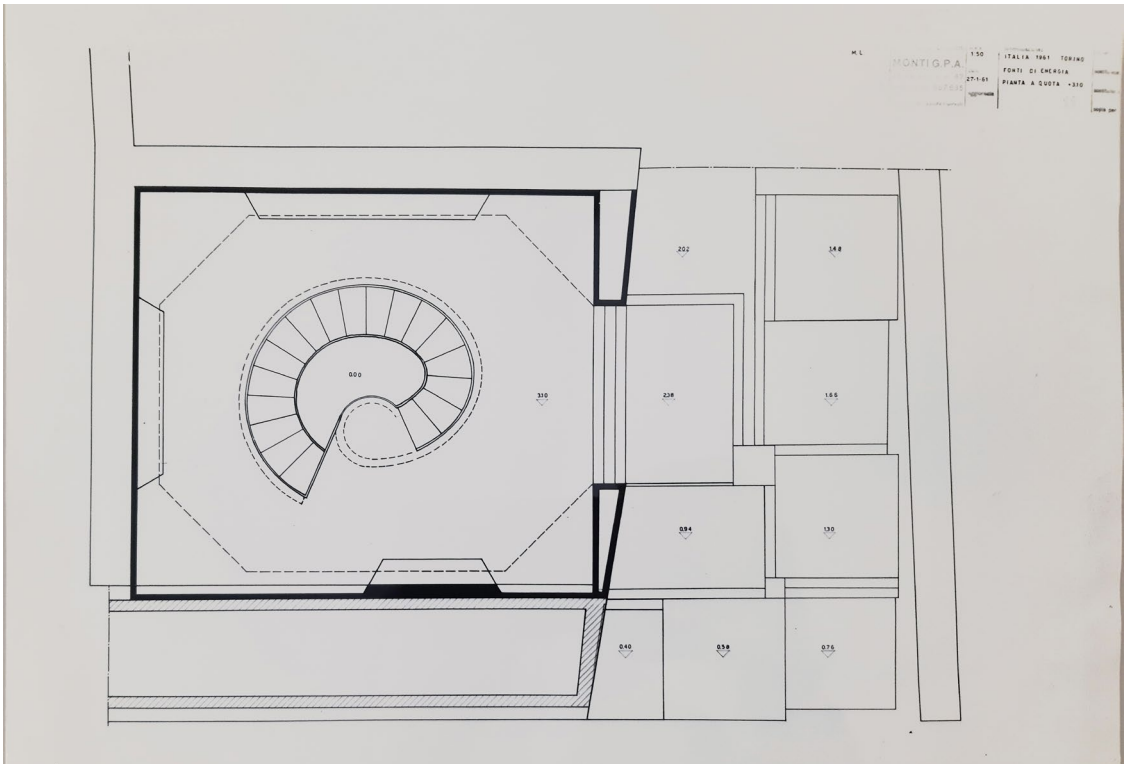

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the neon lights unevenly to guarantee the viewer crossing the room and pointing his eyes to the sky a shattered perception of space".[34] The composition appeared as a set of zigzagging lines constantly recomposed into new configurations through the observer's movement. As required by the general conditions of the installation, however, the neon tube stratification did not completely obstruct the view of the Palazzo del Lavoro ceiling, producing an effect of superimpositions. The contemporary photographs in the G.P.A. Monti Archive allow us to appreciate these effects: the images show the overlapping of the Pavilion's lighting elements, the radial beams of Nervi's ceiling, and the linear skylights which together create an abstract composition. Such a layered and complex spatiality cannot be merely the fulfillment of the client's requests; on the contrary, it was the affirmation of the spatial concept, the negation of the traditional architectural space as a geometrically defined envelope, and a springboard toward new perceptive and spiritual dimensions.

The Movement. The Spatial Analysis of the Pavilion to Reconstruct the Atmosphere of the Work.

Fontana recognized the fundamental importance of movement in his poetics, as we read in the *Manifiesto Blanco*: "Movement, the property of evolution and development, is the basic condition of matter: it exists now in movement and not in any other form, its development is eternal".[35] The *Manifiesto Blanco* introduced the idea that the "fourth dimension" could only be realized by synthesizing various elements, including "color, sound, movement, time, and space".[36] These concepts were further emphasized in the later manifestos of Spatialist Art and were evident in Fontana's artistic practice. Examining the *Neon Ceiling*

Fig. 09: Studio G.P.A. Monti, Source of Energy Pavilion for Italia 61, floor plan (height of 3.10 m), copy on photographic paper, Archivio G.P.A. Monti, Servizio Archivi Storici e Attività Museali. Politecnico di Milano ACL.

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Fig. 10 : Studio G.P.A. Monti, Source of Energy Pavilion for Italia 61, detail of the spiral staircase and Neon Ceiling by Lucio Fontana, in the background the pylon emerging from the ground floor, photo by Casali, Archivio G.P.A. Monti, Servizio Archivi Storici e Attività Museali. Politecnico di Milano ACL.

solely through period photographs, sketches, sculptures, and existing literature provides a clear understanding of the work and its origins. However, this approach inevitably lacks the depiction of movement in terms of the viewer's movement and the sequence of environments within the space. Additionally, the concept of "atmosphere", which involves the coexistence of various elements such as colors, sounds, and movement and represents a projection toward the fourth dimension, diminishes. Focusing on the architectural context can serve as a methodological tool to theoretically reconstruct these elements, thereby enriching the interpretation of the work.

The documents from the G.P.A. Monti Archive provide insights into the layout of the Sources of *Energy Pavilion*, detailing the sequence of rooms and visitor movements [Figg.7,8]. The architects designed the Pavilion on two distinct levels. Visitors entered through a dark corridor, where several videos depicted the primordial exploitation of energy sources before the industrial era. Upon exiting the corridor, visitors encountered a wide staircase with multiple pathways. This area also served as an exhibition space highlighting scientific advances in exploiting energy sources from 1861-1961[37] [Fig.9]. The octagonal hall featured photographs along its walls depicting the industrialization of energy sources. The floor was interrupted by three balconies, allowing visitors to observe parts of an electric pylon, a wind turbine, and a hydroelectric turbine, each strategically placed to extend across the ground and first floors [Figg.10,11,12]. A spiral staircase then led down to a room dedicated to the theme of "energy in the service of man". Before exiting, visitors could watch films about cooperative energy exploitation and potential peaceful uses of nuclear energy.

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This detailed description of the project by G.P.A. Monti seems necessary to understand the relationship between the various environments and Fontana's work role played in the overall narrative. The *Neon Ceiling* appeared through a large portal as the culmination of human progress in using natural sources and producing energy. Fontana's work symbolized the present and future, aligning with the exhibition's concluding themes of future scenarios, progress, cooperation, and scientific development. The description of the various materials arranged throughout the exhibition also clarifies that the artwork was part of an exhibition program in which different artifacts centered on the theme of energy production coexisted. Some of these (mainly films, documentaries, and slide shows) contained references to technology and illustrated scientific concepts and industrial processes, thus presenting a positive idea of progress, topics of interest, and inspiration for Fontana. Furthermore, it can be assumed that the films (some with sound) produced an environment pervaded by various sensory stimuli, enhancing the artwork's strong scenic and emotional impact. The *Neon Ceiling* should not be interpreted as an object of contemplation, abstract and isolated, but as an integral part of the space and a symbolic element of the whole narrative.

Reviewing the documents and reconstructing the space allows us to imagine the paths and trajectories taken by viewers observing the artwork. First, the path can be understood as a perceptive alternation of closed spaces in shadow, gradually becoming more open until reaching the first floor, where Fontana's work represented the maximum conceptual expansion towards a space beyond the boundaries of perception. The staircase to the first floor created an ascending linear movement that alluded to elevation through progress, science, and art. On the other hand, the exit path was via a helicoidal staircase, involving a circular movement.

If the unveiling of the work took place gradually, with a frontal appearance in ample space, its disappearance from the field of vision occurred in a circular, accelerated movement in a reduced space.

Fig. 11:
Studio G.P.A. Monti, Source of Energy Pavilion for Italia 61, ground floor, photo by Casali, G.P.A. Monti, Servizio Archivi Storici e Attività Museali. Politecnico di Milano ACL.

Fig. 012:
Studio G.P.A. Monti, Source of Energy Pavilion for Italia 61, detail of a hydroelectric turbine before assembly, on the top detail of the balcony between ground and first floor, photo by Casali, Archivio G.P.A. Monti, Servizio Archivi Storici e Attività Museali. Politecnico di Milano ACL.

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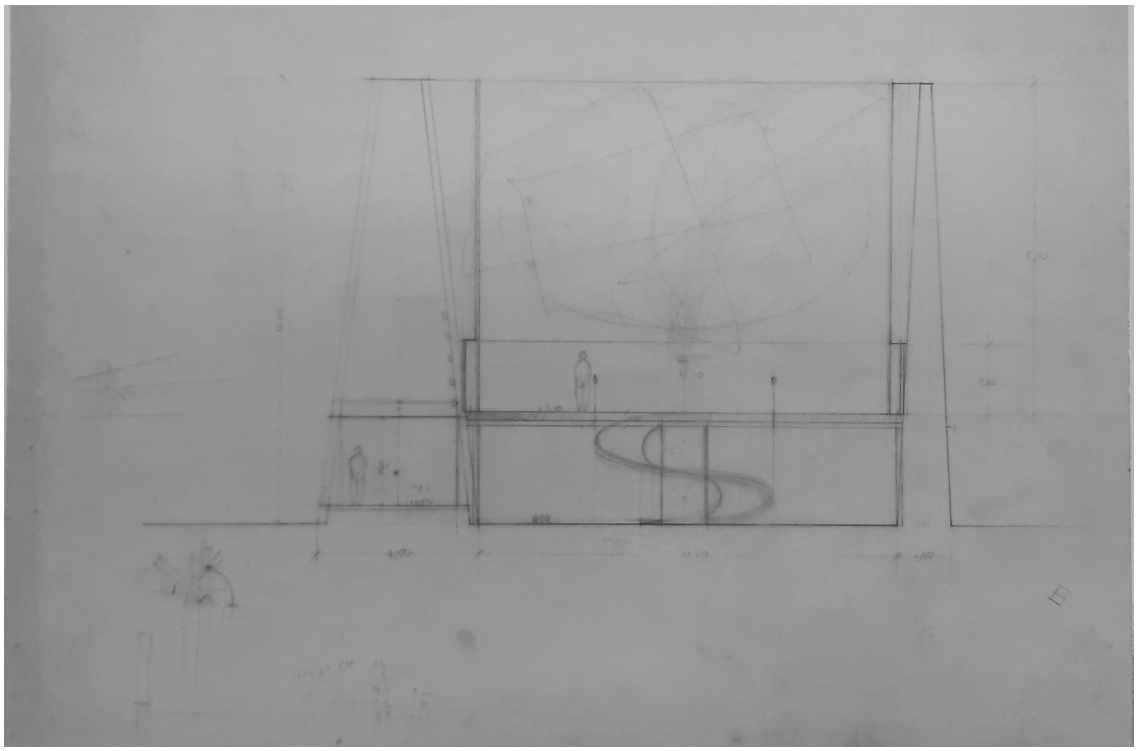

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This interpretation is corroborated by two sketches in the G.P.A. Monti Archive,[38] where Fontana traced some pencil marks on the section and plan. What one reads is a sort of vortex of lines, which finds its point of generation (or conclusion) in the helicoidal staircase, as if this architectural element determined a movement that considers conceptually its natural expansion in space and then beyond, towards a more abstract and immaterial dimension [fig. 13].

Conclusion

The analysis conducted here aimed to explore aspects of Fontana's work that have been previously overlooked, with a greater emphasis on the architectural, organizational, and structural context rather than viewing the artwork in isolation. This approach provides a nuanced perspective, highlighting the seamless integration between the artwork and its architectural environment as a significant strength of Studio G.P.A. Monti's Pavilion and Lucio Fontana's work. The close connection between Nervi's architecture, the general formal elements established by the architect Gio Ponti, and the G.P.A. Monti Pavilion restore the character of the work. This investigation does not seek to subordinate Lucio Fontana's work to the spatial and design constraints imposed by the exhibition, reducing it to mere decoration. Instead, it aims to highlight its innovative nature in interacting with architecture, elevating and transcending traditional Cartesian spatial boundaries to achieve a new perceptual level. Gio Ponti's introduction in the catalogue underscores an interesting reflection on the spaces of the E.I.L.:

"After the millennial use of corporeal materials and energies that man materially knew, and employed with his arms, man has intellectually discovered and aroused incor-

Fig. 013 : Lucio Fontana, Source of Energy Pavilion, Neon Ceiling for Italia 61, pencil on tracing paper, 55x62.5 cm, Archivio G.P.A. Monti, Servizio Archivi Storici e Attività Museali. Politecnico di Milano ACL.

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poreal energies and scientifically employed them. After the miracle of prolonging life, after the geographical conquest of the entire Earth – finis terrae – and that of flight, a millennial dream of mankind, after the prodigious and simultaneous extension of seeing, hearing and knowing even beyond the sensible, an astral gateway to infinite dimensions is now open to man, before which only poetry and scientific calculation can be conceived."[39]

The expression "astral gateway to infinite dimensions" while not directly referring to Lucio Fontana's work, aptly describes it, its intentions, and its principles. Ponti's vision suggests that the architectural culture was interested in experimenting with new scenarios that, drawing on artistic experience, reaches unprecedented possibilities previously deemed impossible. This theme significantly impacted the cultural context of the period in architecture and design. Various experiments with light and the integration of different media in spatial dynamics and movement yielded diverse results. For instance, architect Vittorio Gregotti's installation at the XIII Milan Triennale's introductory section on "leisure time" (1964) featured a long corridor with a triangular section covered in mirrors, creating a giant kaleidoscope effect through reflections. Although this installation doesn't directly reference the formal elements of Fontana's work or Studio G.P.A. Monti, it exemplifies how Italian architectural culture embraced the exploration beyond traditional limits, exploring dimensions of sound, sensation, movement, and time (considered the fourth dimension by Fontana) toward innovative outcomes.

In the art world, various developments can be observed. The case of Dan Flavin is notable not only for his use of neon within geometric compositions but also for the way these works interact with their surrounding space. More broadly, the spatial environments created by Fontana's works are founded on the relationship between "man-object-environment"[40] and no longer on geometric-mathematical characteristics, an innovation that "more than sixty years later, this environmental approach is still alive and very frequently practiced in the work of the most radical contemporaneity".[41] The work of celebrated contemporary artists such as Anish Kapoor, Olafur Eliasson, Thomas Saraceno, and Carsten Höller can find a theoretical reference in the work of Lucio Fontana.

Finally, as previously noted, the concept of "movement" serves as a crucial connecting element between "matter", "space', and "time", a topic that literature has partly overlooked in the analysis of the *Neon Ceiling*. Yet, it was a fundamental focus of Fontana's experimentation. The study of the archival documents in the G.P.A. Monti Archive provides an opportunity to understand the space around the work, thus outlining a theoretical reconstruction of both the "atmosphere" and the "movement". The essay thus outlines a possible theoretical approach to the reconstruction of the context of an artwork in which the spatial, architectural and exhibition contexts are an integral part of understanding the work and its values.

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Endnotes

1 Urbach 2010, p. 14.

2 Crispolti's catalogue raisonné (2006) identifies the work with reference 61 A 2.

3 The first rearrangement was for a monographic exhibition on Fontana, designed by architect Luciano Baldessarri. The exhibition reconstructed a version of the *Neon Ceiling* in the Sala delle Colonne of the Palazzo Reale in Milan. A general plan with pencil sketches by architect Baldessarri (inv. ALB_ALF_D182) is present in the Archivi Storici del Politecnico di Milano. Heliographic prints of Baldessarri's 1972 restage in the Studio G.P.A Monti Archive testify that Baldessarri had the opportunity to deal with Studio G.P.A Monti.

4 Curated by Enrico Crispolti at the Palazzo delle Esposizioni in Rome, this exhibition restaged Fontana's work. The G.P.A. Monti Archive contains a copy of the contract and a letter from Crispolti testifying Studio G.P.A. Monti's direct involvement in rearranging Fontana's work.

5 Curated by Marina Pugliese, Barbara Ferriani and Vicente Todolì in collaboration with the Lucio Fontana Foundation. The exhibition presented different environments reconstructed philologically as the outcome of extensive research into the possibilities and methods of recreating Fontana's spatial environments.

6 Studio G.P.A. Monti 1960, p. 2. Project Report: file preserved in the Studio G.P.A. Monti Archive: Dossiers of exhibition and design projects - Padiglione delle Fonti d'Energia, Italia 61, Torino, box 11, folder 124.

7 Barbero 2010a; Bosoni 2015.

8 Barbero 2010a, p. 13. Unless otherwise indicated, translations are by the author.

9 For the analysis of these events, we mainly refer to *Italia 61 – Identità e miti nelle celebrazioni per il centenario dell'Unità d'Italia*, by Pace, Chiorino, Rosso (2005), with an in-depth analysis that reconstructs the genesis of the exhibition and its political and organizational scenarios.

10 The Historical Exhibition took place at Palazzo Carignano, The Regions of Italy Exhibition held in the specially designed exhibition area parallel to the Po River.

11 Bosoni 2015.

12 Comitato Ordinatore dell'Esposizione Internazionale del Lavoro 1961, p. 5; original text in English.

13 Ponti 1961, p. 28; original text in English.

14 Bosoni 2015.

15 Barbero 2010a, p. 14.

16 Ponti 1961, p. 28.

17 Ponti defines a general layout organized into three distinct areas: on the perimeter of the building are the pavilions of the international participants, free from Ponti's formal indications; in the center is the section designed by Ponti (the perimeter walls, and the partition into different pavilions); finally, the ring, a free space for connection and circulation between the two main areas. The volume designed by Ponti is an unusual construction called "the castle"": a polygonal architecture with sloping walls covered in reflective steel. The castle is not enclosed by a roof and, and in some places, opens up to allow a perspective view of as many pillars as possible. Ponti's choice of material emphasizes the contrast between the temporariness of his architecture and that of Nervi's architectural stability: the castle is covered in thin sheets of reflective steel, while the Palazzo del Lavoro is a concrete and steel building.

18 *Pro-memoria dell'Arch. Ponti per gli Architetti della Sezione Italiana*, 1960, p. 2. Typewritten dossier preserved in the G.P.A. Monti Archive: Dossiers of exhibition and design projects - *Padiglione delle Fonti d'Energia, Italia 61, Torino*, box 11, folder 124,

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Archivi Storici del Politecnico di Milano.

19 The studio was run by brothers Gianemilio (1920-2002) and Pietro Monti (1922-1990, always signed Piero in documents concerning the studio), and Anna Bertarini (1923-2022), Gianemilio's wife. They became partners in 1948 after Gianemilio and Piero graduated in architecture (Anna had graduated the previous year). From 1954 to 1960, the members of the firm were part of the Movimento Studi per l'Architettura (Movement for the Study on Architecture) and the Istituto Nazionale di Urbanistica (National Institute for Urban Planning); the two brothers were also founding members of the Associazione per il Disegno Industriale (Association for Industrial Design, A.D.I.).

20 Irace 1996, p. 214.

21 As coordinator of the exhibition, Gio Ponti involved different Milanese architects in the design of the pavilions, including renowned figures on the international scene, such as the architects Franco Albini, Achille and Pier Giacomo Castiglioni, Marco Zanuso, and artists like Bruno Munari and Fausto Melotti.

22 Studio G.P.A. Monti 1960, p. 2, Project report, file preserved in the G.P.A. Monti Archive: Dossiers of exhibitions and design projects - Padiglione delle Fonti d'Energia, Italia 61, Torino; box 11, folder 124, Archivi Storici del Politecnico di Milano.

23 Studio G.P.A. Monti 1960, p. 2, Project report, file preserved in the G.P.A. Monti Archive: Dossiers of exhibitions and design projects - Padiglione delle Fonti d'Energia, Italia 61, Torino; box 11, folder 124, Archivi Storici del Politecnico di Milano.

24 Albe Steiner (1913 - 1974), a graphic and communication designer, was involved with Studio G.P.A. Monti from the earliest stages of the project, as evidenced by several letters and notes in the G.P.A. Monti Archive. Steiner's role is to curate the Pavilion's contents, particularly the entire apparatus of images, films and artefacts that illustrated the management and industrialization processes of the mining and energy industry. Some sketches are interesting for understanding and reconstructing all the media that coexisted with Fontana's Work and the architecture by Studio G.P.A Monti. Among this material is a plate (a long paper roll) that, through the use of the collage as the primary technique, shows all the internal walls of the Pavilion into a single overall view and gives precise indications of all the artefacts on display, the proportion between them and the environment in a sort of three-dimensional page layout, with a solid communicative value. This document is the sole element that allows us to have a precise idea of the exhibition because, to date, no color photos are available except for a series that depicts only Fontana's Installation and not the rest of the space. Archivio Albe Steiner e Lica Covo Steiner: Dossiers of project studies, working drawings and prototypes - Italia '61. Esposizione nazionale del Lavoro, location: box, ST - b. 20, 5; file G.F. – 04, Archivi Storici del Politecnico di Milano.

25 Studio G.P.A. Monti 1960, p. 3, Project report, file preserved in the G.P.A. Monti Archive: Dossiers of exhibitions and design projects - Padiglione delle Fonti d'Energia, Italia 61, Torino; box 11, folder 124, Archivi Storici del Politecnico di Milano.

26 Barbero 2010b, pp. 188-189.

27 There are numerous letters between Gio Ponti and Lucio Fontana and Articles that Gio Ponti, editor of Domus magazine, dedicated to Lucio Fontana over the years, see Nobili 2023, pp. 428-430.

28 Campiglio 2023, p. 56.

29 Barbero 2010b, p. 204.

30 Pugliese 2017, p. 21.

31 For further information on the use of neon lights and their variations in Fontana's production, see Ferriani 2023, p. 389.

32 Barbero 2010b, p. 206.

33 Setti 2023a, p. 252.

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34 Setti 2023a, p. 253.

35 *Manifiesto Blanco*, 1946, quoted in Zanchetti 1999, p. 165.

36 Setti 2023b, p. 341.

37 Along the path of the staircase, small projectors displayed films and slide sequences. The structures were placed on the floor and rose a few centimeters, allowing viewers to watch the content standing. These structures facilitated viewing without the space being overly cluttering the space with vertical elements, which could obstruct movement or the view of the surroundings. The intuition behind this installation element came from Albe Steiner, whose archive contains sketches illustrating the displays and their use.

38 The G.P.A. Monti Archive contains two drawings on tracing paper with some pencil strokes. We know from the architects' correspondence that these drawings were sent on loan to the Milan Triennale for the exhibition *Lucio Fontana, La Triennale, La Luce* (Lucio Fontana, The Triennale, The Light) curated by Luciano Caramel. In the exhibition catalog, these works are attributed to Fontana as pencil drawings on a drawing by Studio G.P.A. Monti (pencil on tracing paper, 55x62.5 cm). However, from an analysis in the catalogue raisonné of the drawings, these do not appear. See: Crispolti 1999; Barbero 2013. G.P.A. Monti Archive: Dossiers of exhibitions and design projects - Padiglione delle Fonti d'Energia, Italia 61, Torino; box 129, folder 454, Archivi Storici del Politecnico di Milano.

39 Ponti 1961, p. 29.

40 Villa 2017, p. 91.

41 Villa 2017, p. 91.

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