

Collana di architettura  
nuova serie

# BRUNO ZEVI

History, Criticism and Architecture  
after World War II

edited by  
Matteo Cassani Simonetti and Elena Dellapiana



FrancoAngeli

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Nuova Serie

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after World War II

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Architettura contemporanea

**FrancoAngeli**

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BAP



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# FOREWORD

*Ron Fuchs*

This volume originates in the scholarly papers presented at an international conference, “How to Narrate the History of Architecture, Centenary Conference in Honour of Bruno Zevi (1918-2000)”, held at the Technion – Israel Institute of Technology, Haifa, on 7-8 May, 2018, to celebrate the centenary of the birth of the renowned architectural historian Bruno Zevi.

Zevi was more than an architectural historian. He was an architect, critic, and an educator. Furthermore, he was also an Italian statesman and Jewish activist.

As an architectural historian, Zevi holds a key place in mid-20th century architectural discourse. Significantly, some scholars such as Panayotis Tournikiotis have credited him with the earliest reformulation of the tenets of the modern movement in architecture in the post-WWII era. Some of his observations on the architecture of the past are still cited today in general architectural history surveys. Zevi never shied away from ‘operative’ writing, voicing outspoken views both in Italy and worldwide.

Zevi always displayed a close interest in Israel and was actively involved in the Israeli architectural scene. Two of his books were translated into Hebrew. Perhaps his most important role in the Israeli context was his participation in an international committee set up after 1967 by the Mayor of Jerusalem, Mr. Teddi Kolek, for consulting on the planning of the city and the preservation of its historic heritage. In 1994 Zevi was awarded an Honorary Doctorate by the Technion. It was only appropriate that Israel should be one of the countries in which his centennial should be celebrated.

With this in mind, and with the blessing of the Fondazione Bruno Zevi in Rome, the Dean of the Faculty of Architecture and Town Planning in the Tech-

nion, Prof. Iris Aravot, initiated an international conference in his honor. The event was to mark the first among annual international conferences envisaged by the Avie and Sarah Arenson Built Heritage Center at the Faculty of Architecture and Town Planning, the Technion.

The conference was held in the historic Technion building in Haifa (now Ma-daTech, Israel National Museum of Science, Technology, and Space). It opened with the distinguished presence of His Excellency Gianluigi Benedetti, the Italian Ambassador to Israel. Congratulatory opening speeches were made by Dr. Maurizio Dessalvi, Director of the Italian Cultural Institute in Haifa, Prof. Boaz Golan, Technion Vice President for External Relations and Resource Development, Prof. Iris Aravot, Dean of the Faculty of Architecture and Town Planning, Mrs. Sarah Arenson of the Avie and Sarah Arenson Built Heritage Research Center, and Dr. Adachiara Zevi, President of The Bruno Zevi Foundation. Also present were members of the Zevi family.

Fifteen scholars from around the world presented papers, with keynote speeches delivered by Prof. Donatella Calabi, Università IUAV di Venezia, Prof. Ita Heinze-Greenberg, gta, ETH Zürich, and Prof. Paolo Scrivano, Xi'an Jiaotong-Liverpool University.

The scientific committee of the conference included Prof. Iris Aravot, Dr. Matteo Cassani Simonetti, Dr. Marina Epstein-Pliouchtch, Dr. Tzafirir Fainholtz, Dr. Ron Fuchs, Prof. Ita Heinze-Greenberg.

The organizing committee included Prof. Iris Aravot, Prof. Shamay Assif, Dr. Matteo Cassani Simonetti, Dr. Marina Epstein-Pliouchtch, Dr. Tzafirir Fainholtz, Architect ArieH Sonnino, Mr. Elad Horn, Ms. Karen Gal, and Dr. Ron Fuchs, who also chaired the conference.

The conference was generously supported by the President of the Technion – Israel Institute of Technology, the Faculty of Architecture & Town Planning, Technion, the Avie and Sarah Arenson Built Heritage Research Center, the Municipality of the City of Haifa, and the Italian Cultural Institute.

I wish to thank all the participants who came all the way to Haifa and presented the fruits of their research and their insights, and all the individuals and institutions that contributed to the success of the conference.

The two editors of this volume should be applauded for bringing its publication to fruition.

# INTRODUCTION

*Fabio Mangone*

It is well known that Bruno Zevi, as an intellectual and as a man, has looked at two worlds outside his country of origin, and for different reasons. His interest in the United States – as a democracy, as a place of action of his *Lieber Meister* Wright, and as a model of reference – is a theme that has been widely explored. No less significant, however, is the link with the land of Israel, made up of different components: the – secular – interest for the country that welcomed the international Jewish community during and after the barbarity of WWII and the architectural interest, not limited to the more emblematic figure of Mendelsohn, for the developments of the Modern Movement in a context that was peripheral to the places of the international debate.

This last cue is the trig that prompted the colleagues at the Technion in Haifa and the Zevi family to organise a conference dedicated to the figure of Zevi in 2018 and that allowed for the dialogue among many views from prestigious international scholars: the authors focused on aspects that were somehow “lateral” with respect to the established literature, characterised by depth and quality of research and results and that served as an indispensable basis for the further insights that we present here.

The result, which in our opinion is rich in unprecedented paths, is the definition of a network that – while profitably extending the one identified in the exhibition *Gli architetti di Zevi* (Maxxi, Rome 2018, curated by Pippo Ciorra and Jean-Louis Cohen), and at the same time offering ideas to integrate the fine biographical-intellectual profile outlined by Roberto Dulio – touches points of contact with less-

er-known or less explored areas that open up, in turn, new directions for research.

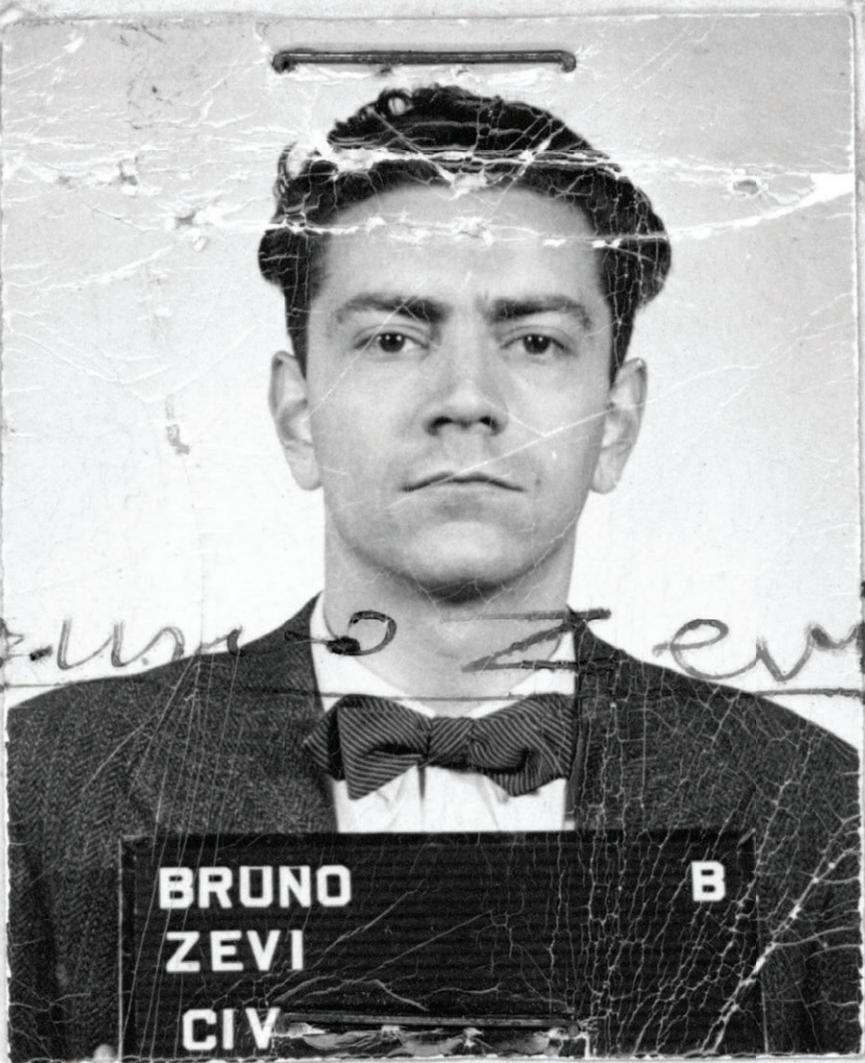
What has emerged is the attention to the urban dimension, which anticipates much of the Global History (Calabi), the relationships with “other” cultural contexts that have declined alternative nuances to the Zevian adage of Organic Architecture (Prencipe, Cassani Simonetti, Daufenbach, Cassuto), the connections – including the personal ones – with giants of architectural design and historiography (Mangone, Heinze-Greenberg, Cattabriga), the contacts with disciplines that do not exactly coincide with the consolidated concept of architecture (Delapiana), and the operative effects on the practice of architecture and history (Zinguer, Guido, Baciú). The result is a Bruno Zevi as a Transnational Cultural Mediator, as happily summarised by Paolo Scrivano.

This is not a monograph, therefore, but a meeting point for different, not necessarily homogeneous, perspectives, which seems to us to be of international interest, not only European, and useful for outlining further facets of Zevi’s contribution to the culture of design.

Internationality is also the characteristic that has prompted us to keep the English language in the publication of the contributions, that the authors and organisers of the conference generously “moved” from Israel to Italy. This is a sort of closing the circle that brings back the networks and baggage collected by Zevi in his extremely rich series of experiences to the place where his magisterium and his apostolate have certainly been most influential.

It is no coincidence that these studies are published with the commitment of Italian universities, in continuity with that tradition of critical revision of the historiography of the “modern”, and of the major protagonists, a trend successfully inaugurated by Maria Luisa Scalvini, whose memory is enlivened by the present study opportunity.

## ESSAYS



*Bruno Zevi*

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**B**

# QUESTIONS AND A MYRIAD ANSWERS: COMING TOGETHER AND DRIFTING APART IN THE HISTORICAL SCIENCES

*Dan C. Baciu*

There is no end to the questions you can ask, and no end to the answers you can give. Where then, in this space of endless possibilities, can research begin; and how can researchers be expected to reach any consensus on what are useful question-answer-pairs? This present article recounts the story of Sigfried Giedion and Bruno Zevi. *Space, Time and Architecture*, a book printed at Harvard University, ties the fates of the two Europeans. Giedion is the author, Zevi is a reader surrounded by a transatlantic group of followers.

Initially a strong promoter of Giedion's book, Zevi later changed his mind and went on to propose his own, divergent theory of space and architecture. Zevi and Giedion's story of coming together and drifting apart is not unique. We all live in a world in which ideas spread and diversify as people search for questions and a myriad answers.

## **1. Students in Chicago**

Two charming Harvard students walk down the streets and avenues of Chicago. One of them is only an undergraduate, but he is local in the city. He finds delight in the fresh feel of the wind that comes down from Lake Michigan'. Yet, when the wind passes through the center of the city, it encounters towering skyscrapers that break with the gently curved horizons of the Great Lakes and Plains. The wind swirls. The air masses begin to rotate and rise between hundreds of identical windows. During occasional windstorms, countless eyes watch this spectacle in amazement. Sharp reflections on the glass both veil and reveal urban life, while withered brick walls convey a sense of time. Something

surprising is then observed. Older skyscrapers, through their large, shiny windows and simplicity of design, often appear more modern than their newer neighbors that are more heavily clad in ornate terracotta. It could seem that a mighty storm in this Windy City has also turned architectural history upside down: the oldest buildings shine with modernity, while newer buildings appear withered and antique. The convoluted history that has given rise to this architecture fascinates our two students. Let me also say that the year they visit the city is not just any year; it is 1941. World War II has just shattered everyone's identity. And so, our two protagonists are in search of their own origins. Along the way, one of them rediscovers his own city; the other is about to rediscover the history of modern art.

Art is all about crafts and possibilities, or at least, that's what the word's etymology tells us. Art is different from science. A scientist tells you, «Look what I know based on experience». The artist replies, «Look what I can do, it might broaden your experience». This also means that art and science work best in unison. Together, art and science create new possibilities and new knowledge, and they break the ground for new ways of life. America and Chicago are relevant in this context. America is still known as the land of unlimited possibilities, and Chicago is one of the places where these possibilities were most openly tested. The American way of life and Chicago's skyscrapers thus entered the history of modern art.

Already towards the end of the 19th century, Chicago's skyscrapers were celebrated as unique artistic expressions. Western architects and journalists witnessed the birth of a distinctive movement they called the «Chicago school», but appreciation for the architecture built in the West could also come from some of the greatest architectural centers of the East, for example from New York City. When Columbia University opened a school of architecture in New York, A.D.F. Hamlin was the first professor to teach architectural history, and he became commonly recognized as one of the founding figures of architectural history in the United States. Hamlin published the first American textbook of architectural history. In this book, he discussed the «Chicago school» in one of the concluding chapters<sup>2</sup>.

In Hamlin's textbook, the «Chicago school» epitomized «the untrammelled freedom of art in a land without traditions». With the term «traditions» Hamlin referred to Egyptian, Greek, and Roman art. In line with other historians, he described how an entire sequence of ancient Mediterranean empires copied each other's buildings and art; and the Italian

Renaissance and the French *École des Beaux Arts* later copied this art and architecture, as well. However, Hamlin wished to see the West free from this millennia-old tradition.

There can be no doubt that Hamlin appreciated ancient Mediterranean art and architecture. As an American professor born in Constantinople, he loved the Mediterranean, and he kept traveling east. His many watercolors show his fascination with what he saw in old traditions. Nevertheless, Hamlin understood that architects in the West were free to inspire themselves in local, vernacular architecture. They were free to start something new; and they were free to be proud of scientific advancement. In Chicago, small vernacular houses evolved into skyscrapers. For Hamlin, this evolution meant something important: The United States was leading the way in both art and science. Hamlin also spoke of the «American school» as something that had come out of the developments in the West<sup>3</sup>. However, Hamlin's book and articles date from around 1900. By 1941, history had been utterly rewritten: American historians no longer used the term «Chicago school» for skyscrapers but for suburban mansions. The skyscrapers continued to evolve, and they evolved into suburban sprawl. As one could expect, the Europeans who immigrated during World War II had not quite gotten so far. They believed that a search for the roots of modern American art could not leave Chicago's tall buildings unseen.

John A. Holabird, who guides us this unforgettable day of 1941, takes the role of a local who rediscovers his own culture<sup>4</sup>. He was born in a legendary family of architects. The Tacoma and Marquette buildings, the Gage group, and the southern half of the Monadnock block are only four of his grandfather's earliest achievements. These buildings united art and science and reinvented Chicago's urban life. In contrast, later designs opted for more abundant decoration and smaller windows. That's when the «art deco» took over. But grandfather Holabird died when John was three years old, too fragile an age to understand and remember the whole history of architecture. Yet, John remembered that his grandfather called him «starry eyed»<sup>5</sup>. The stars would still show at a later age. Beginning with 1941, John would be surprised to witness how Europeans and Americans alike rediscovered his grandfather's skyscrapers<sup>6</sup>. They rediscovered Chicago's central district, the «Loop». They all rediscovered the history of modern art.

The search for the identity of the student whom John Holabird guided through Chicago leads us deeper into student life at Harvard. Our eyes open

to an entire transatlantic community held together by the ardent desire to re-think art and architecture. In this context, it must be remembered that Harvard had ties to Chicago early on. In 1903, William James, a famous philosopher and Harvard professor, asserted the existence of a «Chicago school of thought»; and in the 1920's, his student Ezra Park eventually became a founding figure for the «Chicago School of Sociology». The ties were never lost, but in 1941, they were breathing new life through an entirely new source. European immigrants found much fascination with the West, and in a voluminous book printed just then, a Swiss historian boldly titled one of his chapters «The Chicago School». At Harvard, fascination with this book was spreading through word of mouth. What's nice is that any student who liked this book could have been the one to follow John Holabird through Chicago. For certain, it is known that an Italian immigrant read and liked the text. He had short, dark hair, a sharp nose, brown eyes, and thick, alluring eyebrows (FIG. 1). You heard his name, by now: he is Bruno Zevi.

As an Italian speaker, Zevi could have liked Chicago's Italian neighborhoods and newspapers. However, he found most interest in the Chicago school – although the Chicago school was never destined to become a film legend comparable for example to Chicago's notorious gangster Al Capone. Why did the Europeans wish to see the Chicago school, in particular? John Holabird was at first surprised at his friend's wish. He frankly did not know what the Chicago school was. His friend said, «here I have a book about the Chicago school». Only then, they went to see the buildings.

In their hands, the two youngsters weigh a first edition of a now legendary book they've brought from Boston. What makes them look somewhat odd is that John is a likeness of his father, a well-known local architect, but he comes as a tourist. In addition, their book is not the kind of possession you would normally like to carry along while touring a city. With its heavy, glossy paper, even the first edition was rather bulky. Admittedly, the book featured a chapter on Chicago, or more specifically, on the Chicago school. But what makes this chapter so special for the two visionaries?

Our two students, local and foreign, would walk down narrow street canyons and come to stand in front of steel giants of the machine age. Vertical lines guide their marveled eyes up into the sky. Their hands wish to touch the hidden steel skeletons. Other people feel dwarfed in front of such edifices, and too often, steel is associated with mechanization, weapons, and war. Right as our two protagonists walk and talk, all steel goes into human self-destruction.

tion, which is an imminent threat to young men like them. For John, America would enter the war by the end of the year, and his father and grandfather were both military men. John himself would become one of too many smiling faces of young Americans most of whom passed away in mid-September 1944. They parachuted and were shot in something that historians later called no more than a failed war maneuver. In contrast, John was proud his entire life of having brought back a silver star. He thought he was honored simply because he survived. But he, Zevi, and their Harvard friends saw something quite different in the steel giants. Their book portrayed Chicago's skyscrapers as meaningful achievements, calling them by their old and true name «Chicago school». These edifices had been built during the Gilded Age that began after the end of the Civil War. Historically, that's when the Great Fire left Chicago in ashes. The skyscrapers of the ensuing two decades were meaningful achievements because they showed that steel could be used in a constructive way. Once World War II was over, it was Zevi and Holabird's generation who would rethink Europe and modernize the United States. For them, the Chicago school was a school one could learn from. In 1941, not everyone agreed.

The book that led John Holabird and his Harvard friend through Chicago could seem an odd choice for a city tour not only because it was bulky, but also because it was written by a foreigner who did not actually know the city. Was «Chicago school» really the best name for the skyscrapers? Local historians opposed this view. Why did John not simply ask his father to tour them? True, their bulky book was published by Harvard University Press, but Sigfried Giedion, the book's author, barely knew the city. He was offered a one-year position in English at Harvard, which first brought him to the United States in 1939. And Giedion did not stay long. In 1941, when his book was printed, he was already back in Switzerland. What then made the content of Giedion's book better than, say, entertaining oneself with the 1933 production of King Kong climbing the just-completed Empire State Building?

Giedion may have been a foreigner to the United States, but when it came to his research in Chicago, he was both resolute and lucky. At age forty, he visited Chicago in January 1939. The long journey from Boston did not stop him; the icy lake wind did not frighten him. He visited Thomas Tallmadge, the historian of the suburban «Chicago school». He nicknamed him Tom. He also visited Holabird & Root, the company once founded by John's grandfather. There, Giedion directed his main attention to an elderly architect, Frank Long, who had joined the company in its early heydays, during the construc-

tion boom of the 1880's. Long was a sensation for a foreign historian. He lived just long enough to tell Giedion a story he would never forget. In the opening chapter of *Space, Time and Architecture*<sup>8</sup>, Giedion's book of 1941, one can find some of Long's words. They are only gently reformulated. The most important contribution that Giedion made to the story he heard from Long is that he integrated it into the admittedly broader context of his magnum opus<sup>9</sup>.

The story of the Chicago school, as pictured in *Space, Time and Architecture* is dramatic. Two fronts clash. On one side is the Chicago school; on the other is revivalist architecture. The Chicago school stays for an entire generation of Western architects who wish to unite art and science. They inspire themselves in vernacular architecture and in the balloon frame, an American type of wooden construction. Along the way, plain vernacular decoration is elevated to art, and the balloon frame becomes the steel frame of early skyscrapers (FIG. 1). In contrast, revivalist architecture brings European traditions to the United States. Revivalist architecture is a surrogate of ancient Mediterranean art now ruthlessly displacing more local artistic expressions on a new continent. Hamlin, the Columbia professor mentioned before, portrayed revivalism as heartless display of decoration<sup>10</sup>. The clash between Chicago school and revivalism ended in drama, and a drama that was painful to modernists such as Giedion and Zevi. The Chicago school was shattered whereas revivalism emerged victorious. In the aftermath, advocates of the early Chicago school became isolated. Their voices went unheard.

In *Space, Time and Architecture*, Giedion recounts an encounter he had in Chicago with one of these lonely, unheard voices. He described the rather ironical behavior of this isolated architect who had been part of the catastrophic clash between Chicago school and revivalism back then, in the 1890's. Now, this old practitioner was limited to citing the philosopher William James from memory rather than building actual buildings. This lonely architect, mentioned in Giedion's *Space, Time and Architecture* is no fictional character. His real name is Frank Long<sup>11</sup>.

The final demise of the Chicago school came only a few months after Giedion visited the city. When he returned to Harvard, the first thing he found on his desk was a long letter from Long (a letter he would later copy from); and he would rush to answer this letter. However, Long would no longer respond. He passed away. Only shortly thereafter, historians who believed that the Chicago school never built skyscrapers attacked Giedion. However, Long would

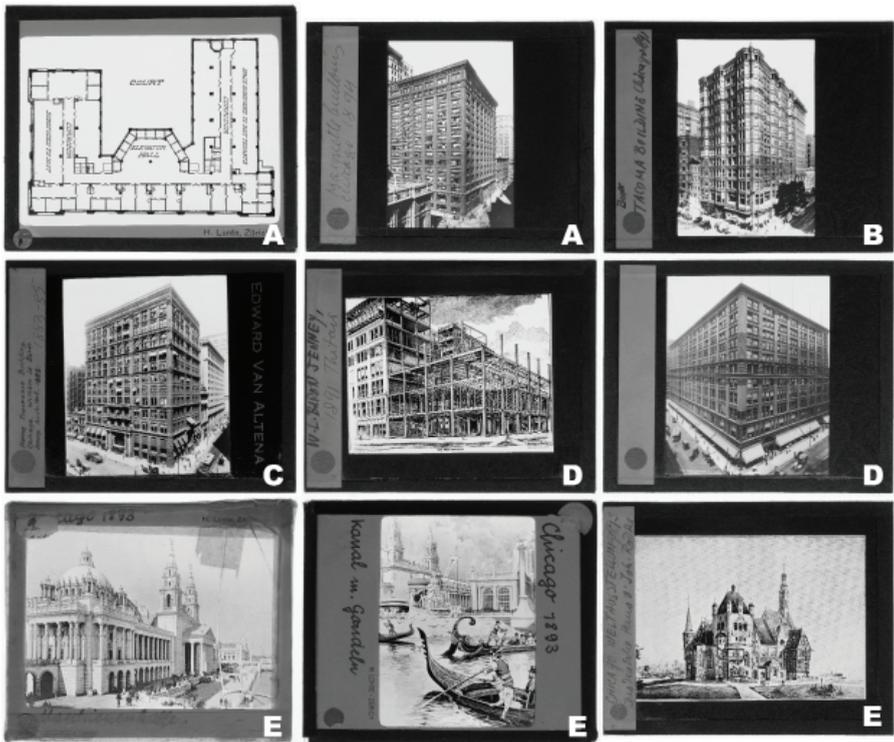


Fig. 1 - Sigfried Giedion's Chicago school lecture slides. A&B Holabird & Roche, Marquette building, 1895, and Tacoma Building, 1889. C&D William Le Baron Jenney, Home Insurance Building, 1885, The Fair Building, 1891. E Revivalism, Buildings of the Chicago Fair, 1893. gta Archives, Sigfried Giedion Estate

no longer be on his side as a witness of the old ways. Giedion would eventually be denounced as someone who forged history fitting it into a narrative tweaked to serve his own agenda but devoid of historical evidence. Already in 1939, the National Council of Architectural Registration Boards wrote Giedion, warning that his idea of the Chicago school was a «monumental error»<sup>12</sup>. Ironically, Long was older than the National Council of Architectural Registration Boards. This makes Long a better historical source. Thus it comes that, in 1941, Giedion's book was unique because it drew on the oral history that Long had shared. *Space, Time and Architecture* returned to the historiography of the Chicago school once put forth by A.D.F. Hamlin and remembered by old practitioners who had been part of the events. Giedion cited Hamlin, and he mentioned Long and William James, but it was all to no avail. The old Chicago school was pictured as a «myth». Almost a century later, Giedion's book

is unique again, because it provides a window into the history of the old and true Chicago school, the Chicago school that has been forgotten and erroneously denounced by vociferous historians who had the advantage of being somewhat more local to the city.

Zevi was one of the architects who rarely questioned the authenticity of Giedion's sources. Maybe, he simply trusted, or maybe, his and Giedion's stories were too tangled, anyway. Giedion was at Harvard between 1938 and 1939, Zevi from 1940 to 1942. Giedion was a lecturer, Zevi a student. In 1941, when *Space, Time and Architecture* was published, Giedion was gone, but Zevi had arrived. Eventually, Zevi returned to Europe, as well. He served as translator on the side of the allied forces. This experience must have given him a sense of purpose. After the war ended, he did not let go of the past. Indeed, he made a statement that unites his education at Harvard with his service as translator and with his new work as architectural historian. In a magazine article, he stated that he had begun his first big book by «translating»<sup>13</sup> Giedion's *Space, Time and Architecture* into Italian. When contextualized within Zevi's biography, these words make a bold statement: Here comes Bruno Zevi, a freshly minted historian, a winner of the war. He is a student of Sigfried Giedion's.

It is possible that Zevi's motivation for stepping behind Giedion was of complex nature. Likely, this position allowed him to advertise for his new book as a better version of *Space, Time and Architecture*. Zevi's exuberant approval of Giedion was sometimes paired with equally strong objection, if not resentment. The tension in Zevi's mind could not be stronger. In one essay, he managed to crown and behead Giedion in no more than two sentences:

All of us always have in mind [Giedion's] *Space, Time and Architecture*, and we continually find in it elements and data useful to our research, but to recognize its superior scientific qualities does not mean that we agree with its historical theses. *Space, Time and Architecture* is a splendid book, but a misleading one<sup>14</sup>.

This tension is also felt when it comes to historiography. Giedion's book chapter «The Chicago School» and Zevi's Italian «La Scuola di Chicago» are very similar in terms of content. However, Zevi placed his text into a book that had a rather different outlook. This difference is best recognized in the book titles. Zevi's title *Storia dell'Architettura Moderna*<sup>15</sup> comes closer