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Carlo Mollino died in Turin aged 68 years on August 27, 1973. I remember reading about him that August. I had not long turned 22 that year. Mollino died with a certain amount of fanfare. At the time of his death Carlo Mollino was perhaps best known, widely, as the architect responsible for the rebuilding of Turin's Teatro Regio opera house. Opened first in 1740, the Teatro Regio was nearly completely ruined in 1936 by fire. This was during the Fascist era in Italy. All that survived of the Teatro Regio was its façade. Carlo Mollino redesigned and had the opera house rebuilt, except for that façade. This was between 1965 and the year of his death, 1973. The opera house reopened in 1973 "with a functional, if slightly garish, modern auditorium" (Loomis, 2014) as one *New York Times* writer unkindly judged.[1]

Carlo Mollino had trained as an engineer, just like his father, but he switched as he grew up to architecture (he was born on May 6, 1905). He was remunerated well for his architectural work, I believe, but his father, Eugenio, had apparently left enough money in his will for work not to be a necessity for Mollino, but rather a choice. As far as I know he lived in his hometown, Turin, throughout his life. He doesn't appear to have had a dependent family. Mollino died, still working, on August 27, 1973.

Carlo Mollino had other skills, I came later to learn. These days he is sometimes better remembered as a furniture designer than as an architect. The magazine of the art auction house, *Christie's*, reported, "a wood-and-glass table designed by Mollino in 1949 sold [in 2005] at Christie's New York for $3,824,000 — then a record for a single piece of 20th-century furniture" (Marshall, 2021). In 2024—and I apologize for getting a bit ahead of myself here—another one of Mollino's tables from the 1940's was to be put on sale by Christie's in London at a starting price of £1,200,000–£1,800,000. The table had originally been designed, according to a report in *The Times*, as a "centrepiece of a Turin apartment he was furnishing for friends, which included sliding doors and giant etchings of natural landscapes" (Kington, 2024). The British auction was subsequently blocked by the Italian government. The Italian culture ministry had ruled that the loss to Italy of Carlo Mollino's table and chairs was a threat to "the integrity and completeness of the cultural patrimony of the nation."

All of this happened much later than when I first learned about Carlo Mollino. But it did nothing to change my earlier estimation of the remarkable man. As the years have passed, I have learned a little more about Carlo Mollino's very strange, but gifted life. Mollino had other interests, other than, that is, architecture and furniture design. He wrote a small narrative, his autobiography, at the age of 28, forty years before his demise. It's entitled *Vita di Oberon* (*A Life of Oberon*). The book (no, I haven't read it, though I'd certainly like to) is composed in the third person and purports to be the biography of a young architect from Turin who had, tragically, died young. Mollino also took time away from architecture, furniture design, and autobiographical writing to become a skilled skier (documented in 1950 when he published a manual on the sport entitled, *Introduzione al discesismo* [*Introduction to Downhill Skiing*] that detailed his own personal skiing techniques). After he completed this book, he apparently became bored with skiing and moved on to other hobbies. He swapped from skiing to fast cars ("always a fast driver," *Christie's* explains, "[Mollino the engineer] soon turned his attention to cars, designing the aerodynamic fuselage of a revolutionary racing car in the shape of a double torpedo — hence

[1] Mollino is not mentioned.

its name, Bisiluro — that competed in the Le Mans 24-hour race in 1955" [Marshall, 2021]). And, as well, he became an avid aviator. He gained is private pilot's licence in 1956. I've read that he was requested to represent Italy in 1962 at the Budapest World Aerobatic Championships.

Once I'd learned as well about Carlo Mollino's engagement with autobiography, technical writing on skiing, car racing, and aviation, a different picture began to emerge of him. My little insight from Mollino's life was boredom. I thought to myself that I knew how he felt, despite my lacking any of his talents. And it wasn't just mere boredom that I thought I could recognize. It was chronic boredom. That's what seems to have dogged his tracks.[2] Why else keep on swapping throughout much of his life from one bracing pastime to another? His chronic boredom was something I believed that I deeply empathized with. It was something that I was sure, rightly or wrongly, dogged my tracks as well. I kept and keep on swapping from one thing to another too. I came to reckon, though not at that moment of the completion of the Teatro Regio in August of 1973, that if I worked on this chronic emotion by reading about it and writing about it and by contemplating other victims like Mollino, then maybe I could expunge it from my system. I should say here that perhaps the Teatro Regio opened later that August 1973—or earlier? Perhaps, I sometimes wonder, I am boredom-wise projecting my knowledge of Mollino back to that August of 1973. Anyhow, just like Mollino's death, it will always be August for me.

But are there other victims of Mollino's malaise? Here could be one who offers another strange and unexpected link between Carlo Mollino and my month of August. Cesare Pavese, the renowned Italian fiction writer, poet, translator, literary critic, journalist, and essayist was born three years after Mollino. Like Carlo Mollino he was brought up in Turin before the war. And Pavese has a surprising link with August. He died on an August 27 in Turin too, just like Mollino. But his year was 1950, 23 years earlier than the elder architect. Pavese covers a broad range of intellectual activity as well, if not as flamboyantly as Carlo Mollino. When I learned sometime after my 22nd year of Pavese's varied avocations I wondered if chronic boredom was a problem for him too? He certainly had a pronounced interest in boredom and maintained, famously, "there is mercy for everyone, except those who are bored with life." Chronic boredom? Who knows? But Cesare Pavese died in Turin aged 41 from a deliberate overdose of barbiturates and he was prone to depression (Piroué, 1976). Pavese's predisposition to depression and the manner of his death suggests that the version of boredom in which he was interested in, may easily be confused with or linked to major depressive disorder (hard not to think of Primo Levi here as well, who was perhaps also and understandable prone to depression, and died of suicide like Cesare Pavese in Turin but on April 11, 1987). The confusion between chronic boredom and depression is something I learned from August as well, and from the strange conjunction between Carlo Mollino's death-date and that of his fellow Torinese, Cesare Pavese.

But I am getting too far away from my focus, the strange life of Carlo Mollino. Now let's hear a little more from that article about Carlo Mollino in the *Christie's* magazine. This time it concerns, again, his furniture making and what I take to be his chronic boredom. "Mollino had no interest in industrial design and the attendant constraints of material costs and packaging," the Christie's writer explains. "His independent wealth allowed him to pick and choose projects."

[2] You can read about chronic boredom in Josefa Ros Velasco's eloquent *The Disease of Boredom: From Ancient Philosophy to Modern Psychology* (2026; this is a revised version of Josefa Ros Velasco's *La enfermedad del aburrimiento*, 2022).

Most of his designs were done by the Turin joinery firm Apelli & Varesio and "apart from a coffee table that he designed in 1950 for the American company Singer & Sons, his furniture never went into production." It's as if, once he had designed a piece of furniture for a house on which he was working, Mollino became bored with the endeavor and rapidly moved on to something else. This is just as he did with skiing. It seems that the "scarcity [of his furniture] (Mollino only made several hundred works in his lifetime), [and its] exquisite craftsmanship […] has rightly placed Carlo Mollino in the highest tier of twentieth-century design collecting." But his mind was too restless to allow him to linger over the commercialization of his designs. He had to move on. Did chronic boredom, August's curse, made his furniture accidentally bankable? "Even in his day job," Lee Marshall (2021) in that *Christie's* article explains,

> Mollino operated on fast forward. Years after his death, an assistant recalled how he was always 'racing about like a young deer,' and he was famous for his ability to draw with both hands at the same time — sometimes sketching two entirely different projects on separate pieces of paper.

Carlo Mollino, as you can now see, liked to run a number of activities all at once: building design, furniture design, skiing, car-racing, aviation, writing, and photography (I'll get to that soon). There are doubtless other things that I don't know about that he did. Sometimes, he abandoned some of these activities, skiing, flying, race car designing, but took up new ones instead such as photography. I've sometimes thought that Mollino's mind was a bit like a gallon jug. When the jug was full, he was at rest and not bored. But if it was not full then he seems to have been agitated, in a hurry, and, it appears, chronically bored. It feels as if no single activity had the capacity to fill that thirsty gallon jug. So, he had recourse at the one-time to a variety of activities and, with them mixed together and poured in, he managed, more or less, to fill his gallon jug of a mind and to keep away from it the chronic boredom. It looks as if the jug needed to be as close to 100% capacity as possible and that's what building design, furniture design, photography, and periodically all the others, such as skiing, car-racing, aviation, and writing did for it.

It didn't always work. In Carlo Mollino's last years, his mid 60's at work in his office, it's as if he was failing in this attempt to drive away chronic boredom. He still worked hard, but his nights became filled with pornographic photography, though pornography, it's said, of a mild sort. It's hard to believe that this creepy activity helped his troubles much, especially as this pastime seems to have spiralled. Mollino has become well known, not just for his architecture and for his furniture, but also for a large collection of erotic photography that was discovered after his death. These photos, all taken by Mollino himself, "consist of around 2,000 Polaroids discovered in an antique cabinet by Mollino's executors after his […] death […]. They depict individual women, none particularly glamorous, some clothed, some partly disrobed, some entirely naked" (Marshall, 2021). Mollino in his last years apparently picked up Torinese street walkers in the late night in his Porsche and arranged partly chaste photoshoots back at home. That same *Christie's* article suggests, "it was typical of Mollino to infuse even his homemade erotica with the eye of a relentlessly curious architect, draughtsman and engineer — and typical, too, that he seemed compelled to create small narratives in each carefully composed shot" (Marshall, 2021). Even with his pornography he was doing more than one thing at the same time—aimed presumably at moderating that chronic boredom.

Perhaps I should not be bold enough to draw a conclusion from Carlo Mollino's last years. But they show Carlo Mollino did not always choose well. But I, and perhaps you too, could view this disquieting revelation as another disquieting phase in my on-going education concerning boredom. This is it. The lesson? The danger in remedying chronic boredom with unceasing, seemingly satisfying activity (and it never is satisfying is or the chronic boredom would be banished), easily becomes a lurking, uncaring amorality that seems to show itself in Mollino's choice to create his pornography archive. Chronic boredom is the most painful of conditions, I have always believed from personal experience. Incessant activity helps. But a cure through incessant activity can perhaps blunt propriety—and Carlo Mollino's choice of the pornography archive maybe shows how the cure becomes more important than the remedy. Maybe chronic boredom makes it harder and harder to choose well. Is that another of my lessons from August in 1973?

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