

**57/  
58****Forms of ritual,  
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**Magazine del Festival  
dell'Architettura**

ricerche e progetti  
sull'architettura e la città

research and projects on  
architecture and the city

## **FAMagazine. Research and Projects on Architecture and the City**

Publisher: Festival Architettura Edizioni, Parma, Italy

ISSN: 2039-0491

### **Segreteria di redazione**

c/o Università di Parma  
Campus Scienze e Tecnologie  
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For the purpose of the publication, the contributions sent to the editorial staff are evaluated with a double blind peer review procedure and the evaluations of the referees communicated anonymously to the proposer. To this end, FAMagazine has set up a special [Register of reviewers](#) who operate according to specific [Guidelines for article reviewers](#).

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From the foundation (September 2010) to the number 42 of October-December 2017 the FAMagazine articles are published on the website [www.festiva-larchitettura.it](#) (Archivio Magazine). From January 2018 the magazine is published on the OJS platform (Open Journal System) at [www.famagazine.it](#)

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- a) short essays between 12,000 and 14,000 characters (including spaces), which will be submitted directly to the double blind peer review procedure;
- b) long essays greater than 20,000 characters (including spaces) whose revision procedure is divided into two phases. The first phase involves sending an abstract of 5,000 characters (including spaces) of which the Direction will assess the relevance to the theme of the call. Subsequently, the authors of the selected abstracts will send the full paper which will be submitted to the double blind peer review procedure.

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n.	Id Code	date	Type essay	Evaluation	Publication
1	695	gen-21	Long	Peer (B)	Yes
2	712	gen-21	Long	Peer (B)	Yes
3	704	gen-21	Long	Peer (C)	No
4	707	gen-21	Long	Peer (A)	Yes
5	706	gen-21	Long	Peer (B)	Yes
6	696	gen-21	Long	Peer (A)	Yes
7	660	gen-21	Long	Peer (A)	Yes
8	703	gen-21	Long	Peer (B)	Yes
9	709	gen-21	Long	Peer (A)	Yes
10	691	gen-21	Long	Peer (B)	Yes
11	692	gen-21	Long	Peer (A)	Yes
12	722	gen-21	Long	Peer (B)	Yes
13	710	gen-21	Long	Peer (B)	Yes
14	700	gen-21	Long	Peer (B)	Yes
15	711	gen-21	Long	Peer (A)	Yes
16	697	gen-21	Long	Peer (A)	Yes
17	705	gen-21	Long	Peer (C)	Yes
18	701	gen-21	Long	Peer (A)	Yes
19	708	gen-21	Long	Peer (A)	Yes

## NEXT ISSUE

### 59 january-march 2022 Drawing and Project edited by Chiara Vernizzi and Enrico Prandi

The aim of this call is to encourage the exploration – by scholars and researchers of Italian or foreign universities engaged in their research in an as yet unstructured condition – of the relationship between Project and Drawing, understood, the latter, in its multiple meaning as a tool. for the elaboration, development and expression of the project idea, first, and then as a final means of communication of the technical and formal data of the project.

The call aims to stimulate a reflection on the meaning of the drawing of the architectural project, on its intrinsic value of figurative expression, on its being a tool for study, foreshadowing, evaluating and communicating the design results, but also (and above all) on its meaning. as an instrument of reflection and expression of the poetics, not only architectural, of those who use it to express themselves.

The selected contributions will go alongside the interventions proposed by some renowned scholars and architects who have dealt with the topic.

# 57/ 58

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Enrico Prandi  
**Starting from the (sad) reality**

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Abstract

An architecture magazine has to deal with disciplinary issues also starting from the contingent reality. In this period, deeply marked by the SARS-CoV-2 Pandemic, it appeared right, after the double issue *Coronavirus City Architecture. Perspectives of the architectural and urban project*, to go back to doing something.

A consequence of the pandemic documented by images that have traveled around the world was the cancellation of the funeral rite of death which took place in many countries. From this reflection (and from the sharing and discussion of the theme with the editorial staff) this issue is born which aims to underline (and remember) that architecture is inherent in death and the rituality connected to it no less than many other central spaces in the life of the individual.

Keywords

Funerary FAM — Cemeteries — Architecture and ritual — Ritual of death

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An architecture magazine has to deal with disciplinary issues also starting from the contingent reality. In this period, deeply marked by the SARS-CoV-2 Pandemic, it seemed right after the substantial double number of a call that attracted over one hundred and fifty scholars around the world N. 52-53 (2020): *Coronavirus City Architecture. Architectural and Urban Project Perspectives*, released in November 2020, get back to doing something.

About two years ago, when the pandemic began, everyone was struck by the image of the army's military vehicles loaded with coffins parading through the streets of Bergamo on their way to the crematorium.

Faced with a very high number of deaths, and unable to provide for normal burials, the coffins were stacked in the available spaces awaiting cremation induced by sanitation reasons.

That photograph, like other well-known ones from a very painful past, in addition to bearing witness to a serious problem in progress, symbolized the cancellation of the ritual of death and the impossibility of taking care of our loved ones.

Other images had gone around the world like that of the dead on the side of the roads and left and burned to avoid contagion in Ecuador and China rather than the mass graves of Brazil.

From a private family rite it was transformed into a collective rite.

This issue, edited by Renato Capozzi and Claudia Pirina, arises from that reflection and from sharing the theme with the editorial staff. Starting from the initial point, it is interesting to emphasize (and remember) that architecture is inherent in death and the rituality connected with it no less than many other central spaces in the life of the individual.

Since his death is the culmination and the end of the journey, it deser-

ves particular attention. Ignazio Gardella recalled how the entire human journey takes place in contact with architecture. He said: «one is born in an architecture, one lives in architecture and one dies in an architecture». To the latest architecture of the journey of the man, FAM (confidentially renamed for the occasion "Funerary FAM" in analogy to the famous monographic issue of "Lotus International", 38, 1983 entitled "Funerary Lotus"), the magazine wanted to give space to this issue is as important as it is too often forgotten.



**Fig. 1**  
March 2020. The military vehicles of the Italian Army intent on transferring the coffins to the Crematorium in Bergamo.

**Fig. 2, 3**  
Dead on the streets in Ecuador and China.

**Fig. 4**  
A mass grave for burial in the Amazon, Brazil.



Renato Capozzi, Claudia Pirina  
**Forms of ritual, forms of architecture**

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Abstract

The aim of this issue is to solicit the exploration of the meaning - by scholars and researchers from Italian or foreign universities engaged in their research in an unstructured condition - of the relationships between the condition of the transition from life to death and the forms of architecture. The call, using as an opportunity recent images and reflections highlighted by the particular condition of the current pandemic, will select a series of contributions that will complement the interventions proposed by some scholars and architects of renown who, in recent years, have dealt with the theme. Participants to the call can propose contributions related to each of the two sections (rites that accompany, rites that pass on) illustrated in the text below.

Keywords

Architecture — Rites that accompany — Rites that pass on — Forms

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Asking about the permanence and change of forms, in *L'eterno presente: le origini dell'architettura* Sigfried Giedion identifies religion as the key to understanding the attitude of a people towards its destiny, but above all to expressing that «unquenchable and universal human desire [...] for a longer life, for survival after death» (Giedion 1969, p. 7). Religion, in its broadest sense, is therefore understood as that «complex of beliefs, feelings, rituals that bind an individual or a human group with what it considers sacred, in particular with the deity» (Eliade 1982), whatever that may be. The historian identifies its genesis in «man's aspiration to make contact with supernatural forces in order to know the future» (Giedion 1969), tracing a relationship between this aspiration and the primordial forms of art and architecture.

During the months of the Covid-19 pandemic, the images of mass graves, of coffins piled up waiting to find a decent burial, or of long lines of military trucks driving them away from their loved ones, prompt a new reflection on the tragic but entirely human condition of the transition from life to death, and on the appropriate forms capable of reifying, in a hierophany that is also secular, the sacredness engendered by abandonment and detachment from earthly transit. The contingent condition has made it impossible for us to carry out our «funeral rites». But what are funeral rites? As Alain (1975, p. 109-110)

warns us «[...] when the stick wounds us, nature, which dies without knowing it, is not enough to call us back to our job as men, and we need other things, human things [...] well planted in the ground, equal on both sides, and proceeding according to a rule. [...] There is, however, a common reason, a child of the earth like us, but which is the most beautiful fruit of the earth and the true God, if we really want one, according



**Fig. 1**

Bas-relief known as the "death of Meleager". Marble, 2nd century AD, possibly from a Roman sarcophagus. Borghese Collection of the Musée du Louvre. [https://commons.wikimedia.org/wiki/File:Death\\_Meleager\\_Louvre\\_Ma654.jpg](https://commons.wikimedia.org/wiki/File:Death_Meleager_Louvre_Ma654.jpg).

to which courage bends together with the body, and whereby each one knows that he must stand up and look far beyond his own pains. Not lying down, nor on one's knees. Life is a work that is done standing up.

"Funeral rites" are therefore rites which, in keeping us human, must project us beyond, while architecture, through its appropriate forms, must take on the task of setting in *place* and *in scēna* the repeated sequences of acts linked to remembrance, detachment, memory, passage, the sacred and the symbol.

Can the role of architecture in essence lie in its capacity to ferry, through memory and the sacralisation of the passage, the transient human condition into a permanent and lasting one? And in the task of overcoming the trauma of death, which is both wonder and terror (*Thaûma*), by staging the ritual?

The initial proposal for this issue was to solicit a critical and propositional reflection on the one hand on the ways, places and architectures dedicated to the rites of passage from life to death, and on the other hand to focus attention on the places of representation of memory, on those architectures which, according to Étienne-Louis Boullée (1967, p. 121), «require, in a more particular way than others, the Poetry of architecture». In the first case, in order to promote possible responses to new secular instances as well as to the specific needs dictated by the contingent moment, questions were posed regarding possible themes of architectural invention or reinvention, or new typologies and models such as "halls of farewell" or *funeral homes*. In the case, on the other hand, of places devoted to the representation of memory, a reflection was launched on the condition of the "cemeteries of the poor", of "monuments" to memory, of the cities of the dead, frequently built looking at the cities of the living, making different but comparable cultures and traditions evident. If in northern Europe cemeteries in the form of parks and gardens refer to the archetype of the *Giardino dell'Eden*, in southern Europe it is the *Città di Dio* that is welcomed in burial places as a reference and model for "streets" and "squares". Elementary and symbolic forms, on a domestic or monumental scale, immortalize memory in the solemnity of places, one example being Aldo Rossi's Modena Cemetery.

**Fig. 2**

The tomb of Caio Cestio in Rome. Photograph by Claudia Pirina.

Even in these spaces, however, recent re-semantisations and experiences aim to respond to new needs and requirements resulting from the multi-ethnicity and multiculturalism of the population.

Spaces for secular burials, or for burials of different religions, require a profound and progressive rethinking of the places and forms of burial.

In addition to the private dimension of mourning, there is also the social (and sometimes political) dimension of “collective memories”, as Halbwachs would put it, staged in shrines, memorials, mausoleums or monuments, which convey the iconic memory (which is remembered with fixity) of specific events such as the one that has involved the world in the months that have just passed and, unfortunately, is still ongoing.

Compared to an initial hypothesis of organization of the issue into two precise sections – rites accompanying the deceased in the passage from life to death, and rites handing down the memory –, the contributions received and selected showed how, on many occasions, the two distinct moments of ritual, in architecture, correspond to organic systems or architectural complexes expressing the coexistence and correspondence of the two times. This degree of complexity prevented the essays from being forced into such a binomial, and led to a consequent operation of reconfiguration according to a more complex order and index, grouping the essays according to similar themes or categories.

In his opening text, Renato Rizzi explores the theme of the “rite of Architecture” or the «*ritual* of the Project». According to the author, the profound sense of the project guides (or should guide) the architect in that «ritual that pervades, in any case and everywhere, the acts of our daily life as well as our innermost thoughts» and that must be understood by focusing attention on three fundamental points: «A- first of all on the semantic structure of the name Architecture; B- on the paradigm of our time; C- on the overcoming of western philosophy».

Following this, Renato Capozzi articulates the essay in an initial reflection that retraces some philosophical and theoretical studies (Ragon e Byung-Chun Han) on the general theme of the *sacer* and on the concepts of death and rite in relation to architecture, and which constitutes the prodrome of the subsequent comparison of two works that exemplify, respectively, the

rite of passage and the rite of memory: the *Tempio di cremazione* in Parma by Paolo Zermani and the *Cimiterio de Fisterra* by the Galician architect César Portela. Recognizing the «extreme evidence» that distinguishes the two projects, the text reveals «thematic and formal differences», but also «subtle links of meaning». Zermani's skill in rendering «in form the difficulty of transforming [...] the impalpable matter of the sacred into an *architecturally constructed space*» is juxtaposed with the recognition of the settlement qualities of Portela's project, which revolutionize «in no small measure the consolidated idea of the cemetery as a separate, marginal place» to transform it into «a happy place, teeming with life, where the memory of the dead can be celebrated in the presence of nature». It is in the capacity to «sacralise death and, at the same time, life» that the intention and goal underlying these two works lie.

Studio Monestiroli's projects for the enlargement of the Cimitero Maggiore in Voghera and the one on the island of San Michele in Venice form the core of Tomaso Monestiroli's reflections in his essay. In the project of these architectures the author recognizes the founding role of some preliminary questions: what is «the deep sense of the funeral rite»? And what are «the appropriate architectural elements to represent it»? By reading the elements of the two projects, their composition, or the declination of the relationship between nature and architecture, Monestiroli intends to propose answers to these questions, highlighting peculiarities or differences. On the one hand, in fact, the relationship with the place plays a primary role in defining the “responsive form”, taking up the legacy of Nordic cemeteries «in which the place of peace and eternal rest is represented by the forest, where nature is the protagonist of the sense of place». On the other hand, the architectural elements, and once again the place, in the two projects contribute to defining that dual character – private and public – which, according to the author, must coexist in the «place of farewell and the custody of memory».

A similar interest in the cemetery space is expressed in Paolo Giordano's reflections on the history of the *Cimitero delle 366 fosse* and the *Sepolcreto dei Colerici* in Naples, with an eye to the present and future of these extraordinary spaces that define a part of the city. The close relationship between the architectural configuration, the morphology of the site on which they are located, and the natural element characterizes these burial spaces which, in their different features, «well express the different attitudes towards death and burial in the pre-Revolutionary monarchical society of the 18th century and in the post-Revolutionary bourgeois society of the 19th century». Against the architecture of Enlightenment reason of Ferdinando Fuga's *Cimitero delle 366 Fosse* «based on a rigorous anonymity incapable of recalling stories of lived life» Giordano contrasts the romantic park of Leonardo Laghezza's *Sepolcreto dei Colerici* «of irregular shape and dotted with tall trees, in whose enclosure various types of tomb are scattered». Proposals for the restoration and spatial reconfiguration of the entire system aim at a new order which, starting from the study of the ancient layouts and the subsequent selection of the one identified as most effective, would make their different characters manifest.

Uwe Schröder broadens the concept of sacred space by proposing an interpretation of «Simon Ungers' *Seven Sacred Spaces* from a sensual and symbolic perspective» taken from Étienne-Louis Boullée's work. To the categories identified and transposed in the terms Poetry, Object, Measure, Proportion, Light, Character, Sublime, Schröder directly associates the seven types of sacred spaces examined by Ungers: the Basilica, the Cathedral, the Synagogue, the Mosque, the Church and the Chapel. These binomials substantiate Schröder's

conviction, echoed by Boullée, that «buildings are designed to capture our senses and [...] awaken feelings in us», and that borrowed from Ungers that «to think sacred space is to think architecture in its purest form».

The mystery of permanence is the theme investigated by Claudia Pirina in the forms of the sacred and in those architectural devices capable of relating man to the divine. This aspiration can be found in a series of primordial archetypal forms of architecture which demonstrate that «in the infancy of time, art was prayer» (Parmiggiani 2010, p. 4). However, these forms are perpetuated over time, in a circularity that becomes essence, stimulating reminiscence. «Memory [in fact] does not mean past but thought. Bringing together distant forms, in time and in the mind, bringing together one time with another time, creating short circuits; another idea of time» (Parmiggiani 1995, p. 170). Two works can be used as examples for their ability to express another idea of modernity, between archaic forms and new figuration: Jože Plečnik's Garden of the Dead in the Žale cemetery in Ljubljana and Edvard Ravnikar's Kampor Memorial on the island of Rab.

The idea of time permeates the contribution by José Ignacio Linazasoro, who entrusts the description of the Valdemaqueda church project with the task of exemplifying «the character that a sacred space should have when seen through contemporary eyes». The Basque architect recounts the genesis of the work, borrowed from his own world of ancient and contemporary references, juxtaposed with retroactive considerations aroused by the finished work (useful for understanding its underlying reasons), and the description and declination of those architectural devices that allow him to give «the maximum intensity to the space with the least number of means possible». The modulation of light and the conformation of space through careful control of its structure, according to Linazasoro, are those elements capable of transforming sacred space into symbolic space.

The first part of the issue closes with two contributions which, complementing each other, narrate the project for the double hypogeum of *Cattedrale di Caserta* by Francesco Venezia through the different perspectives of the architect and the photographer. The laconic and intense writing used by the Neapolitan architect to accompany the project is flanked by the work of photographer Mario Ferrara who, through a very short text and a series of photographs, demonstrates how fertile the relationship between the two disciplines can be. Ghirri, Basilico, Guidi are just some of the photographers who have had the ability to weave relationships with architects, building an artistic rapport with them and contributing to offering new looks at their work. The hypogeum of Caserta icastically expresses many themes dear to Venice, which, in Caserta, models space and modulates light, accompanying the visitor along a route that becomes a transit to the world beyond. The spatial sequence is articulated according to a downward trend which, through light, then leads to an ascent towards the outside. «The architecture, as you walk through it, reveals itself as a rhythm of shadow, light and penumbra», interpreting «syracusan» sections «a distant memory of a descent into the depths of the latomie of that city».

Forms of the hypogeum and architecture of hollow spaces return in the opening text of the second section devoted to articles selected through *call for papers*, in which Giuseppe Ferrarella uses the concept of space as a place «carved out of the solid» to propose a view that investigates analogies and differences between Agrippa's Pantheon (Apollodoro), the basilica of Sant'Andrea in Mantua and the sacred mountain of Tindaya in Fuerteventura. According to the author, the three projects can be understood

as spaces «produced by massive forms and the logic of subtraction of volumes» useful for triggering a reflection on the sense of space in places dedicated to the sacred and to ritual.

Adriano Dessi's text also deals with the act of quarrying, investigating the essential identity between ritual and space in the Sacred Well. The propitiatory rain rites present in the Mediterranean give rise to such chthonic architectures, understood as spaces «of catharsis, linked to the rite of descent, of the return to the 'source' as a return to the 'origins'». The text reflects on the analogies between this world and the themes and projects of Francesco Venezia and Aldo Rossi, who by their own admission draw direct inspiration from that world. Aldo Rossi, with his extension of the San Cataldo cemetery in Modena, designed with Gianni Braghieri, is also the field of exploration of Claudia Tinazzi's essay, which opens a series of essays centred on a number of cemetery projects in which archetypes, the relationship with ritual, with nature and with the city and its distinctive forms are differently declined. If in the Chacarita cemetery by Clorindo Testa, examined by Federica Conte, «the endless path, where plays of light and labyrinthine corridors animate the 'eternal' space underground» refers to previously mentioned themes, in the project for the new cemetery in Pesaro, analysed by BoKyung Lee, Luciano Semerani and Gigetta Tamaro conceive and develop a symbolic space in which the forms of the project resort to «the analogy between the forms of the 'city of the living' and the forms of the 'city of the dead'». «The city of the dead always relates to the city of the living through morphological analogies and contrasts, in line with Islamic cosmology» also in the ancient cemeteries of the Islamic Mediterranean world in Eliana Martinelli's text. Enclosures, the relationship with the topography and urban structure are compared with those of European cemeteries in order to bring out singular analogies and differences.

The theme of the route is instead declined in the Nou cemeteries of Igualada by Enric Miralles and Carme Pinós analysed by Carlo Palazzolo and in that of Muda Maé in Longarone studied by Andrea Valvason.

In the Catalan cemetery «the themes of the descent into hell, the decomposition of bodies, the resurrection [...] are evoked [...] by an architecture suspended between construction and ruin [in which] personal and collective memories are stratified to give life to a landscape which is not only geographical but also cultural». This dual relationship also constitutes a founding element of the Muda Maé project, which «takes the form of an ancient necropolis rediscovered, a symbol of memory and rebirth following the dramatic events caused by the Vajont disaster in October 1963». Excavations and trenches that strongly mark this place are a counterpoint to the shape of the furrow engraved by the cemetery on the ground that recalls memories and wounds that have not yet healed.

The core of Alessandra Carlini's essay, on the other hand, is the theme of the re-semanticisation of the modern cemetery in order to give architectural form to the new practices of burial and dispersal of ashes. The projects analysed, although at first glance they may seem distant or even extraneous to the cases previously dealt with, redefine the space of the enclosure and the relationship with the landscape and nature, demonstrating that «as has already happened in history, rethinking burial places means renewing the cultural values of the community that creates them», proposing «new archetypal forms» for ancient and unchanged instances.

A series of articles deal with remembrance in monuments or mausoleums. Claudia Sansò sharply turns her attention once again to the Islamic

world and to the settlement principles of the Islamic tomb in relation to the public space of the city transposed in Marc Barani's Memorial Rafic Hariri in which «the tomb/mausoleum thus participates in the construction of collective space, [...] to the point of becoming an occasion for the re-definition of a public space, offering the places of death to the unfolding of life»; the essays by Giuseppe Tupputi and Gaspare Oliva respectively propose an interpretation of the Ossuary of the Slavic Fallen of Barletta which «appears in the distance, leaning on the edge of a slight slope facing the Adriatic» and of the three Italian monuments post-Fascist regime by Aldo Rossi, Gianugo Polesello and Luca Meda for Cuneo, by Giorgio Grassi and Luca Meda for Brescia, and by Costantino Dardi with Giovanni Morabito, Michele Reborra and Ariella Zattera for Milan. The collective dimension of mourning expressed in these works contrasts with the private dimension of the Brion Tomb designed by Scarpa and analysed by Fabio Guarrera who «on the basis of the theoretical arguments developed by Vittorio Ugo with reference to the problem of architectural archetypes» proposes an «archaeo-logical» reading of the sepulchral complex, «with the aim of carrying out a 'classification' of the forms within the monument». Moving on to a different type of sacred space, Alberto Calderoni and Luigi Emanuele Amabile propose an interpretation of Neviges Cathedral by the German architect Gottfried Böhm, which «brings together and amplifies the representative need to celebrate the rite in a strongly evocative formal expression that characterizes the urban space, capable of weaving renewed relationships between the internal space of the church and its exterior». The sacred space of the Chapel type is the focus of Francesca Addario's article, which deals with the «sacredness of nature and interiority of forms» through the analysis of some chapel projects in the woods. The ancestral archetype of the sacred wood «deeply rooted [...] in the imagination of man and the architect» is recognized by the author as a «topical space in which architecture reveals its presence» and in which the ideas of Vitruvio, Alberti, Loos, Asplund and Tessenow find form. Lastly, the issue closes with four articles that interpret the proposed theme from different and original perspectives. From Carlotta Torricelli's reflections on the city, memory and monument that investigate the form of absence in Luigi Snozzi's project for Braunschweig, attention shifts to Roberta Esposito's contribution that «analyses the form of the *mundus* as a foundation pit of the Roman city and, at the same time, an architectural dimension capable of establishing a connection between the infernal world of the dead and the supernal world of the living». Gennaro di Costanzo, on the other hand, intends to reflect on the archetype of the labyrinth and the cave «around which the discourse on the Palace of Knossos is articulated, a work built to accommodate the rites of passage between life and death» and finally Susanna Piscicella's text critically retraces some reflections introduced by Renato Rizzi in the opening text, which investigate the concepts of 'limit' and 'death' in various works and texts by John Hejduk. Finally, to return to the themes proposed for the construction of the issue, we believe and we reiterate that it is precisely the forms of representation and evocation of the absent and unattainable object that are at the center of the architect's interest through the inescapable and inexhaustible educational and of *monère* capacity of architecture as a *nova sed antiqua* appropriate and recognizable representation of the memory of man's life in the motionless fixity of stones.

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Renato Rizzi  
**Heresy of the rite\***

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Abstract

The ritual as a deep contemplation of the binomial that makes up the word *Architecture*: τέχνη (*Téchne*) and ἀρχή (*Archè*) *Architecture*, in this sense, is understood as an art where all material and immaterial things converge, in a continuous comparison/clash between eternal and present.

Our time, however, is dominated by technique alone, which distances us from the profound reason for things. The Project of architecture (with a capital 'P' when it belongs to distant times and therefore to the *Archè*) therefore describes the rational structure dictated by the architectural paradigms - linked to the origin - with the aim of rediscovering that shared meaning which is proper to the discipline of architecture and which aspires to the search for truth.

Keywords

Rite — Arché — Téchne — Architectural project

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The main ritual, the life. The minor ritual, the days. The pulse of existence beats with the same formula in the binomial of *Architecture*. *Arché*, the main ritual. *Téchne*, the minor ritual. An epistemic similarity feared like the plague. It will not be difficult to understand the causes. In fact, the first root, *archè-*, has been severed from its name as one cuts the head from a body. It was not so much an execution as a sacrilege that continues to be repeated, even today, in the most unsuspected place. In the presumed sanctity of university rooms.

However, this would not have been a scandal if the name *Architecture* had been replaced by *Building*. At least no crime would have been committed. Instead the aura of the word *Architecture* had to remain intact in the prestige of its effigy, while its content had to be completely emptied. Replaced by other. But in order to understand the deception perpetrated by the knowledge of our age, we must pay attention to at least three points:

A- first of all, on semantic structure of the name *Architecture*;

B- on paradigm of our time;

C- on overcoming Western philosophy.

Only in this way the radical difference between main and minor ritual will be able to emerge. Because the rite however and wherever pervades both our daily acts and our innermost thoughts.

**A- The semantic structure of the name “architecture”.**

The binomial *archè-téchne* brings to the stage of the world the pairs of principles in opposition to each other: *non dominable*-dominable; *unchangeable*-changeable; *eternal*-becoming; *invisible*-visible, etc.



**Figg. 1 a-b**

Renato Rizzi whit Susanna Piscicella and Marco Renzi e Stefano Gobetti, La Cattedrale di Solomon a Lampedusa. Overhead view and cross section of the gully crossed by the project slope. Cardboard model, scale 1:500, size 42x42 cm.

All the powers from the *non dominable* horizon (the *appearance* of the whole, the *aesthetic*) converge in the name *Architecture* and They cannot in any way be subjected to our rational or irrational will. More explicitly, the *indissoluble bonds* (the *aesthetic*) belonging to cosmic laws converge in the semantic structure of the name *Architecture*. To the *indissoluble bonds* that govern each smallest part with the whole. The *dogmas* of the *form*.

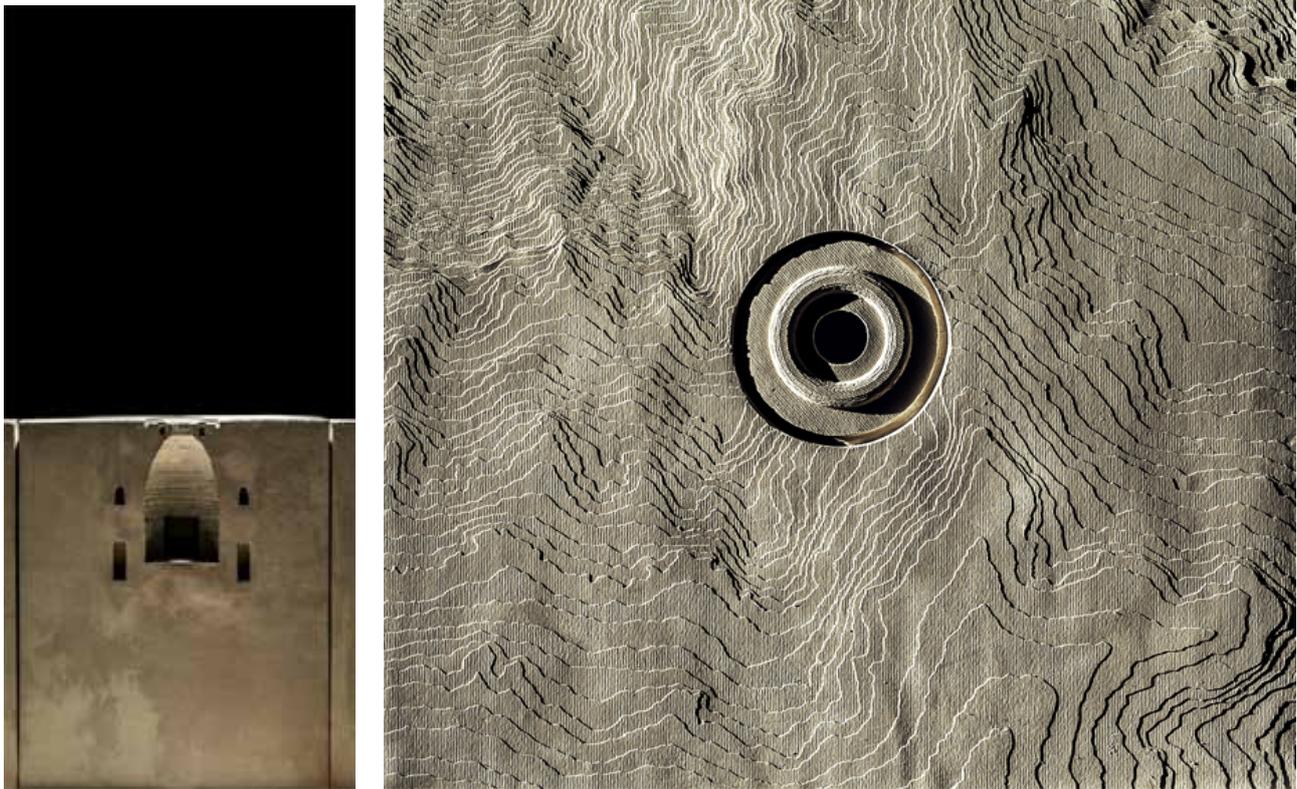
### **B- The contemporary paradigm.**

The technical-social-scientific culture of our time has based its power on the opposite principle. All the things (the bodies) are unrelated, unconnected, and separate from the whole. This is the domain of the *technique*. The paradox and extreme contradiction of our time. An impossible thing. Only our faith (of atheists) believes this is possible.

### **C- Overcoming the Western metaphysics.**

If we compare the three millennia of Western thought, to which the horizon of the name *Architecture* belongs, with the paradigm of contemporary culture, the drama clearly emerges. The radical epistemic contradiction between the *Great Past* (the all tied) and the *Great Present* (the all untied). But, as already mentioned, since it is impossible for a *non dominable* to be overpowered by a *dominable*, it means that our time continues to believe within a negative faith. And a negative contradiction can only produce *violence*. Despite everything, we do not want to *see*. The evident proof is for all to see. The immense *formless* plagues of our megacities or of any other urbanisation or *periphery* (*peri-pherein*, carry around without a scope). The loss of form in the *formless* envelops by now the entire planet Earth in its cultural and factual stranglehold. In fact, we have forgotten that in the synonym for *formless* another removed word resonates (for superstition or hubris?): *death* (another *non dominable*).

We can address the authentic meaning of the word *Architecture* and of the new ritual that accompanies it only with this awareness: only within the horizon of the all times and histories, only by going beyond the Western Greek metaphysics that has brought the project of the technique



**Fig. 2 a-b**

Renato Rizzi with Susanna Piscicella and Marco Renzi e Stefano Gobetti, La Cattedrale di Solomon a Lampedusa. Section and zenithal view of the cathedral. Plaster model, scale 1:500, dimensions 360x31,4x165 cm.

to completion in our time (metaphysics and technique are now two overlapping terms). In fact, these considerations move the cultural axis from the exclusive pole of the techniques towards the centre of gravity of the name *Architecture*. This moving has semantic repercussions with respect to: our name (A1); our responsibility (B2); the sense of the project (C3).

#### **A1- Our name.**

The word *person* (from *prosopon*, the mask: an external face turned outwards; an internal face turned towards the individual's interiority) bears an extraordinary structural similarity to the name *Architecture*. Soul, *arché*. Body, *techné*. Soul, what is in common, what binds and constrains us (not only socially). The body, what is not in common, what distinguishes and separates us individually. To the soul belongs *zoè*, eternal life. To the body belongs *bios*, the chronological life (inseparable entities). For the Greeks it is the necklace of eternal life: the *zoè* thread holds all the *bios* pearls together. Therefore, we are the living example of this *non dominable* mystery (that we should celebrate with our works). The analogy with *Architecture* is stronger than any other law, however. Yet, at the same time, we are also referred to as *subject*. A word separated from its remote origin. *Sub-iacere*, from the Latin; *ipokeimenon*, from the Greek. However: "what is under". But this condition of "being under" is not a preclusion, nor a condemnation, nor even a punishment. (While for the technique we are those who are above, those occupying the command position, even if this assumption is based on a faith in which we believe blindly!). Thus, far from it. Rather, this is the *gift* that is freely offered to us by the appearance of the worlds, by the appearance of the whole. From the infinite horizon of the eternities

of the starry sky. We received a special privilege: *to contemplate* the spectacles of the worlds.

We are the spectators of enchantment, of wonder, of astonishment, as well as of terror, of fear, of the anguish for a universe that welcomes us, protects us, questions us, troubles us. And at the same time it scrutinises us, more curious than we are to be mirrored in the enchantment of the works we are supposed to create.

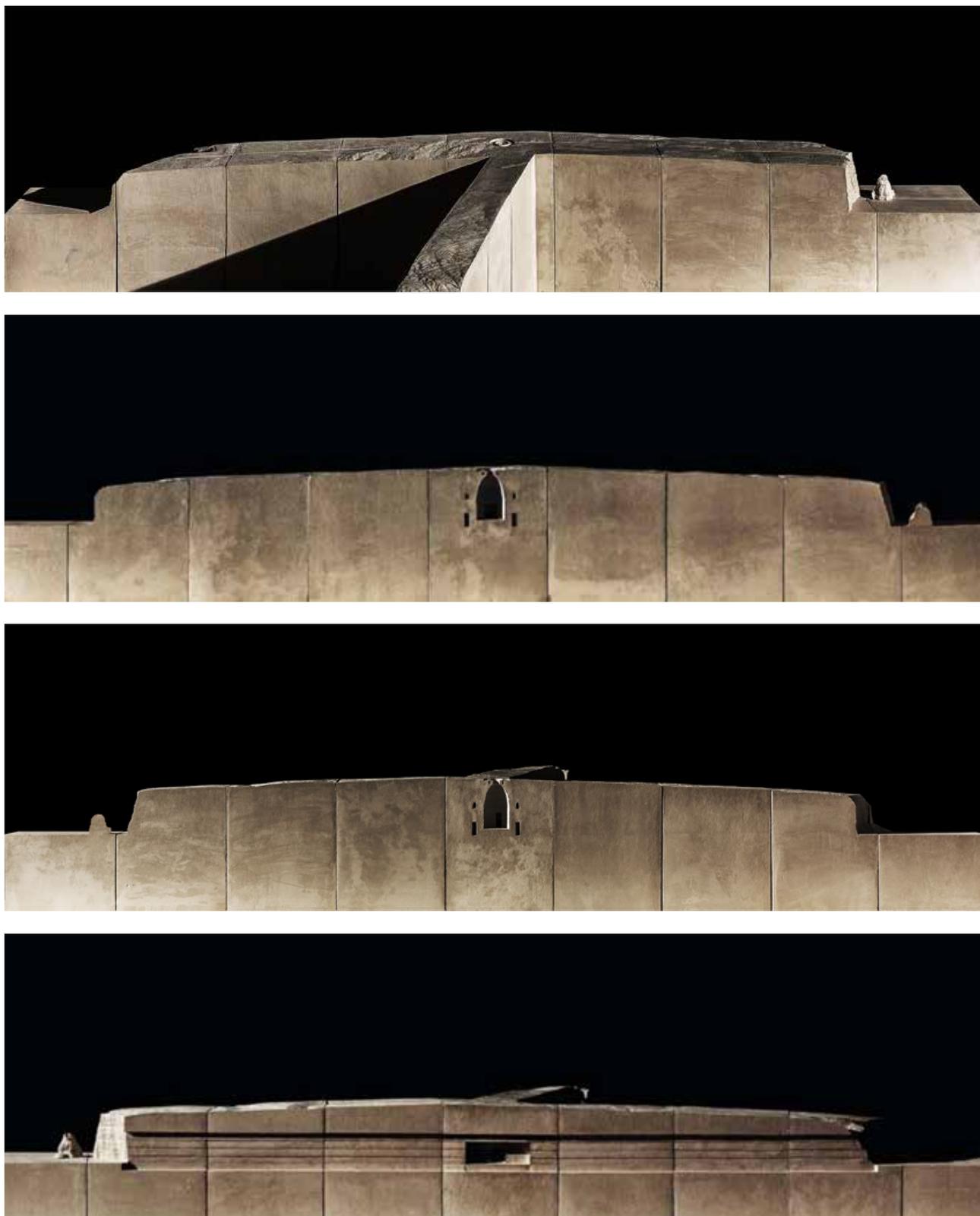
Here, then, is how the rite would change if bound to the new (and always original) condition of our being: from *nominativi* to *dativi*. It would no longer be the individual Ego that would prevail as the source of the will to power: the condition of *nominativo*. But the Self, that condition which, re-emerging from the depths of the soul, would reverse our vision into the condition of *dativo*. The thruster-centre of the Ego is replaced by the acceptor-centre of the Self. By destiny, since time immemorial, we have always been the *privileged ones*. This radical reversal of our vision is the biggest proof of the greatest gift that belongs to us. It can be assumed that our body, a unit of spirit and flesh, is the most complex and mysterious device in the universe through which the *eternals* appear, in order to be contemplated here, on this Earth, on which we live our sensory experience as if it were a miracle. Quite! We are this mystery-miracle. We are those who receive from the eternal horizon of the *non dominables* (*archè*) the rays that rekindle the matrixes of the images. These images have always been imprinted and mute in our souls (*zoè*) from which they are generated, and the final *forms* of the works feed off them, in order to be contemplated by those same *eternals* from which they come and to which they belong, coming back to them.

### **B2- Our responsibility.**

This radical change of vision implies a very severe intellectual, as well as individual, effort. The transition from arbitrariness (of the *téchnai*) to *singularity* (of the *arcuai*) is certainly not easy to implement. Nor is it automatic. Rather, we must have the strength to break out of the world of (false) security (semantic paradox, *sine-cura*) of technical and regulatory knowledge to enter the world of *appearance* (the eternal horizon of the immutable). We must have the courage to face the reign of the *risk*, of the *form*. A real *exile* for our minds and our education. From uncritical anonymity to the loneliness of *singularity*, it is a long step. Because each of us, being a temporal absolute, is always a new *adam* appearing on the world stage, destined to repeat the originality of the beginning in its infinite richness. Just as we are forced each time to leave our *eden* to develop the *project* ahead of us.

### **C3- The sense of the project.**

We are now faced with the secret hidden in the word *Architecture*. If the terms placed by the semantic structure of its name stand at the extremes of the whole (*non dominable*-dominability, *eternal*-becoming, etc.); if the extremes of our existence lie between the *impassable* limits of *birth* and *death*, then the terms of the *project* must also occupy a similar spatiality. Precisely because each of us is a *project* that must be brought to its manifestation. Indeed, every *project*, like every existence, lies between a *debt* contracted with our predecessors (*birth*) and a *gift* to be returned to our successors (*death*). In other words, between an *eden* of the beginning and an *eden* to be delivered. The whole childhood is full of the rite of enchantment of the world. There is no difference for a child between *non dominable* and *dominable*. He is everything. He identifies himself in all things. Total uni-



**Figg. 3 a-b-c-d**

Renato Rizzi whit Susanna Piscicella and Marco Renzi e Stefano Gobetti, La Cattedrale di Solomon a Lampedusa. From above, project descendant seen from the East; east and west sections of the cathedral; longitudinal section of the tapered tunnel

running in the south-north direction.  
Plaster model, scale 1:500, dimensions 360x31,4x165 cm.

ty. But like every *adam*, he too must leave the *enchanted* (and dangerous) world and walk into the places of consciousness. It will take the whole of life to rework the childhood experience (the Greek anamnesis) and translate the enchantment of the early time into the awareness of the works (understood in the most general sense of the word).

Only then, at the height of maturity, or at the peak of one's time, will the time come for the *project to be handed* over to our future successors.

In this profound perspective the sense of the *Architectural Project* expands itself. But we should get used to writing, and at the same time thinking about the word in at least two different ways. With a capital 'P' when referring to the first root, *archè*. With a lower case 'p' when referring to the second root, *téchne*. Only the *Project* of the *archè* can guarantee unity of meaning to the plurality and diversity of the projects of the *téchnai*, always maintaining the inseparable link between the eternal and the present.

This is how the dynamics of the (new) *ritual* of the *Project* can be outlined, to which we should adapt in respect of the *singularity* of *Architecture*. Of the works. Of ourselves. Of the world. Because of that sense of modesty (*aidôs*, the *religio* of all authentic doing) that should pervade our works always inscribed between the two extremes: the *Eden* of the beginning, the debt-*gift* of enchantment; the *Eden* of delivery (*NaTaN* in Hebrew, *paradosis* in Greek), to return that initial gift.

### **\*Warning**

The cultural horizon to which this paper refers comes from many different works, ancient and modern. But in this context it is better to remember the main contemporary heretical authors: Emanuele Severino, philosopher (Brescia, 1929-2020). Carlo Enzo, theologian (Venice, 1927-2019). Derek Walcott, poet (Castries, S. Lucia, 1930-2017); Andrea Tagliapietra, philosopher of the history of ideas (Venice, 1962). If one were to point to a concrete, even if totally ignored, example of the above themes, one would refer to the poetic and architectural work of John Hejduk, architect (New York, 1929-2020). Cfr. R. Rizzi, *John Hejduk. Incarnatio*, Marsilio, Venice 2010, et, R. Rizzi, S. Piscicella, *John Hejduk. Bronx. Manuale in versi*, Mimesis, Milan-Udine 2021.

Renato Rizzi (Rovereto 1951) is Professor of Architectural Composition at IUAV in Venice. He collaborated with Peter Eisenman in New York between the '80s and '90s of the twentieth century. In 1984 he won the competition for the Ghiaie sports area in Trento, a work that was awarded the national In/Arch prize in 1992. The project for the Casa Museo Depero realized in 2008, wins the Gold Medal for Italian Architecture of the Triennale di Milano 2009. In 2014 he realized the Elizabethan Theater in Gdansk, a work nominated for the Mies van derRohe Award 2015 and awarded the Gold Medal of Italian Architecture in the same year. Many of his works have been exhibited at the Venice Architecture Biennale in 1984, 1985, 1996, 2002, 2010. In 2019 she received the Prize of the President of the Italian Republic for Architecture, on the indication of the National Academy of San Luca. He has published numerous essays including: *The Daimon of Architecture* (2006), *The Jewish Wall: the Eisenman Empire* (2009), *John Hejduk: Incarnatio* (2010).

Renato Capozzi  
**The architectural sacralisation of death**

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Abstract

Starting from a theoretical reflection on the writings of Ragon and Byung-Chun Han on the profound relationship between ritual and architecture and, more generally, on the theme of sacralization, the text selects two iconic works: the Cremation Temple in Parma by Paolo Zermani and the Cemiterio de Fisterra by the Galician architect César Portela as iconic works in which the complexity of the funeral ritual is translated into lasting and stable forms.

Keywords

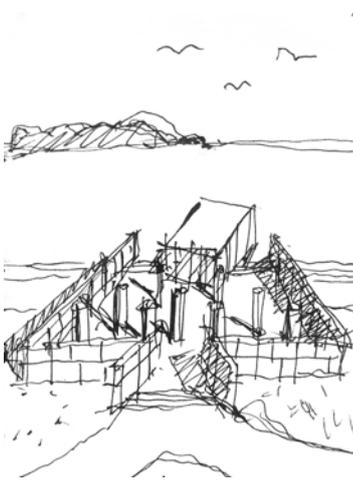
Forms — Rite — Sacred

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**Death, rites and architecture**

The fear or inexplicability of death is at the origin of thought, the authentic motive behind the birth of philosophy and science. But death is part of life, and for Svevo it is «the only disease that is always mortal» those who live hope to live as long as possible and one of the ways of doing this is to exorcise death by sacralising it.

As Michel Ragon (1981) lucidly pointed out in his fundamental study *L'espace de la mort*, rites and the many practices<sup>1</sup> connected with death are very ancient and consubstantial to man, who according to Thomas «is the only animal that buries its dead» and, even if «not all peoples have had a cult of the dead» according to François Carpenter, «no human group disregards its dead». According to Ragon, «at the origin of funeral rites lies the belief in the survival of the dead and the desire to prevent their return, rather than respect. All this is still within us in spite of ourselves» and elsewhere «primitive man, who often attributes earthquakes, but also lightning, drought, famine and disease to the jolts of the dead, must reconcile these dangerous spirits with persuasion, conciliation, cunning or force. Most funeral rites have this origin and meaning». According to the French historian and art critic, the root of the rites is essentially apotropaic [from gr. ἀποτρόπαιος *that drives away*, der. δι ἀποτρέπω *to drive away*] of the death through reconciliation with the deceased, with his spirit, considered dangerous on this primordial archetypal graft. Obviously, the regions, their dogmas of faith (immortality of the soul, life after death, reunion of souls) and their codified rites constituted a mode of necessary reconciliation that compensated both the detachment between relatives and loved ones and the fear of death as *Thauma*.



**Fig. 1**  
Renato Capozzi, The architectural sacralisation of death, pen on paper.

In defining man as a «project thrown» into the world, Heidegger attributes to him the status of «being for death» with an unsalvageable and irremediable destiny. We could continue to argue about this often neglected aspect of the funeral rite as a reconciled way in which love and pain for the detachment are mixed with the fear of the return of the deceased and we could also decline and update it, in a broader sense, with the fear of the victims of the Covid-19 pandemic in defence *à-la* Agamben of the «naked life», which led in 2020 in Italy and elsewhere – in the absence of any remedy beyond the so-called aporetic “distraction” – to the death of the deceased. In the absence of any remedy other than the so-called aporetic “social distancing”, this will lead in 2020 to the abolition of all funerals and funeral rites, all rites of farewell, and all possible private or collective reconciliation with the deceased affected by disease.

There will be a way to deal with this when the crisis is truly over, but starting now, we must continue to reflect and remedy the collective mourning that still grips us. The theme of the sacralisation of death naturally has a natural counterpart and a tangible manifestation in architecture, one of the tasks of which, by bringing together forms of ritual and forms of architecture, is precisely that of «ferrying, through memory and the sacralisation of the passage, the transient human condition into a permanent and lasting condition [...] and of overcoming the trauma of death, which is both terror and wonder (*Thaûma*), by staging the ritual» (Capozzi e Pirina 2021, p. 2). In presenting his study, Ragon himself lamented the lack of studies on death (investigating it on a historical, philosophical, psychological, sociological and semiological level) from the point of view of «architectural space, town planning, decorative arts» (Ragon 191, p. 29), of the places occupied by the rites and needs of burial, from its centrality in the Middle Ages to its progressive de-sacralisation in the Age of Enlightenment, to a «distancing of the testimony of the end of life celebrated [...] in the cemetery-skyscrapers and anonymous hospitals-obituaries of our civilisation» (Ragon 1981, flap of the cover) forgetting that «the first known architect, Imhotep, the author of the great step pyramid of King Zoser, of the 3rd Egyptian dynasty, the only architect to have been deified, was first and foremost the designer of a tomb» (Ragon 1981, p. 29). Adolf Loos, too, in his famous definition of architecture, says «If in a forest we find a mound, six feet long and three feet wide, arranged with a shovel in the shape of a pyramid, we get serious and something inside us says: someone is buried here. This is architecture» (Loos 1972) and in his famous essay *Architektur he explains that* «only a small part of architecture belongs to art, the tomb and the monument».

Another significant contribution to defining the contours of the theme of sacralisation is that offered – on rites and their progressive disappearance as a reflection of the contemporary condition – by the South Korean-German philosopher Byung-Chun (2021) Han in his very recent essay *La scomparsa dei riti. Una topologia del presente*. Han observes that «rites are symbolic actions, they pass on and represent those values and orders that sustain a community. They create a community without communication, while today communication without community dominates. [...] Today the world is very poor in symbols [...] In the symbolic void those images and metaphors are lost which are capable of giving a foundation to meaning and community, stabilising [through sameness (*Selbigkeit*) and repetition (*Wiederholung*)] the life. [...] Repetition is the essential feature of rituals» (Han 2021, p. 11). In other words, the (funeral) ritual, which is nothing more than the codification of repeated symbolic acts, opposes the

“social distancing” that destroys the very idea of community. If, as Antoine de Saint-Exupéry (1999, p. 24) says, «rites are in time what the house is in space» and if there is – according to Mary Douglas (1979, p. 13) – «a broad and explicit refusal of rituals as such [and consequently] we are witnessing a revolt against form» then we can understand how architecture in its enduring “resistant” object condition (*the resistance of things* as Hannah Arendt would say) referring to living (which requires duration) can and must allow and stage the ritual. For Han (2021, p. 23), «in the funeral rite, mourning is an objective, collective feeling, it is impersonal [...] In the funeral rite, it is the community that is the true subject of mourning: faced with the experience of loss. It imposes it on itself, and these collective feelings consolidate it [...] Collective feelings are formed more and more rarely». As Roland Barthes observes (2005, p. 210) «Ceremony [protects as a house makes feeling habitable. An example is mourning] and so it «[...] spreads like a protective varnish over the skin and insulates it from the terrible burns of mourning at the death of a loved one. Where rituals, expedients of protection, are lacking, life is completely defenceless» (Han 2021, p.21). In other words, ritual becomes a sort of “antidote to chaos” (Peterson 2018) and if rites objectify the world, then architecture, as a cosmic art that opposes *Cháos to propose a Kósmos*, cannot but prepare itself to be the theatre, and the fixed scene of the hierophany of the rite of life and death. The “rite”, as we have seen, designates a «ceremony articulated according to a fixed succession of events» and in general «the set of rules that regulate the ceremonies of a cult»<sup>2</sup>. The rite is the actual way, today we would say “eventual”, to manifest the sacred to a community starting from a normative-dogmatic structure that defines a particular “cult”. Making manifest the ultra-worldly condition, unknowable and “infinite in the fake”, inherent in the ritual in deference to a particular cult becomes the arduous task that any religious building must try to fulfil. The manifestation of the sacred, in this sense, can be associated with the term “hierophany” which is specifically «the sense of the presence or manifestation of something “sacred”, that is, something connected to, inherent in, the divine, not necessarily of a god, which man feels or can feel» to which corresponds the adjective “numinous” coined in 1917 by the theologian Rudolf Otto (1917) to indicate «the peculiar, extra-rational experience of an invisible, majestic, powerful presence, which inspires terror and [at the same time] attracts». An apparition/manifestation of the sacred that can be hypostatized in objects, stones, plants, symbols that refer to the beyond, *à-la* Otto, to the “wholly other” (*ganz Andere*) in wanting to charge further unreal meanings through real objects and forms. Similarly to the objects, the problem concerns the forms that build the sacred space (Eliade, 1982) where the cultic ritual takes place, spaces capable of making the sacred manifest through a structure that is not only symbolic and adherent to the ritual but also properly formal, provided that these forms are able to reveal and amplify the sense of the world that this space recreates ontologically. In these two reflections, the close relationship of meaning between the sacralisation of life and therefore of death and architecture as reification and condition of possibility of this manifestation *sub specie æternitatis*. emerges significantly. If rites were, *tout à coup*, to disappear, what could architecture ever represent?

**Fig. 2**

Paolo Zermani, Cremation Temple, Parma, 2010.  
Perspective view. Photo by Mauro Davoli.

**Fig. 3**

Cremation Temple, Parma, 2010.  
Internal view. Photo by Mauro Davoli.

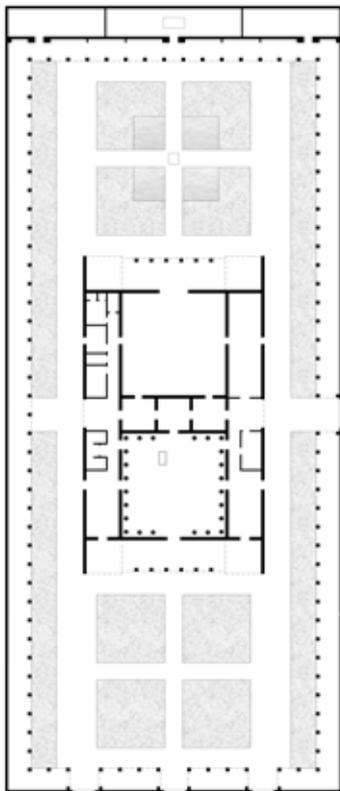
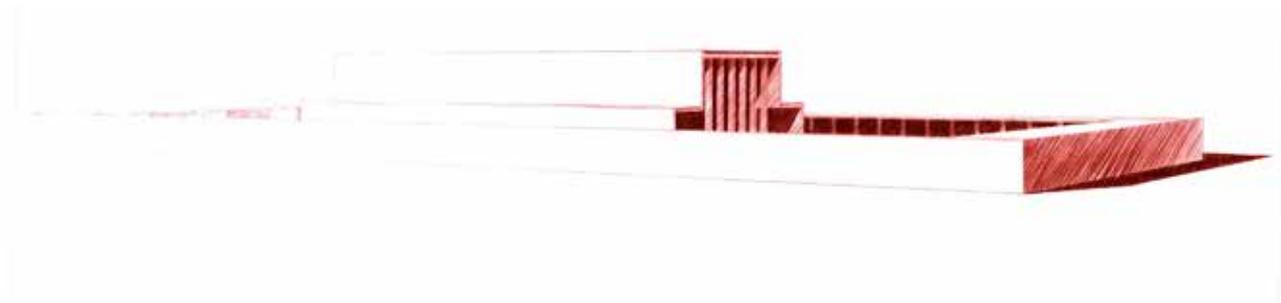
### Two examples of the reification of the rite of passage and the rite of memory

The architecture that coincides with the tomb, in the most essential sense of the mound, manifests in its codified forms, in the spaces that these forms define, the sense and value of the passing and the memory of the deceased, or by building a home “for those who no longer need it” or by magnifying death in the monument as a vehicle and ilemorial representation of timeless values. There have been many constant ways of transforming and transfiguring death and the rites associated with it *sub specie architecturae*: from Egyptian tombs to mausoleums, sacrificial areas, temples, churches, cemeteries and, in recent times, places for saying goodbye, often linked to cremation practices.

Among the numerous examples that could be given and questioned in order to emblemize two exemplary cases of the reification of the rite of passage and the rite of memory, two works by two contemporary architects will be briefly analyzed below, which individually, in the extreme iconicity that distinguishes them, entertain in their thematic and formal differences not a few subtle links of meaning: the Tempio di cremazione in Parma by Paolo Zermani and the Cemiterio de Fisterra by the Galician architect César Portela<sup>3</sup>. The Tempio di cremazione in Parma, located between the Via Emilia and the city and the countryside ordered by the persistent traces of centuriation, is isolated by an enclosure, which constitutes its *crepidoma*, from the surrounding context, redefining the landscape through its iconic presence. As we read in the project report:

As a cut fragment, it hosts and suspends in time the rite of passage, making it a single great urban symbol, almost an altar, in which the city celebrates, incessantly, the memory of itself through the memory of its dead. [...] an enclosure made of architectural space, because it is conceived as a portico wall and inhabited by the cellars that house the dust, contains, in an uninterrupted path, the relationship between life and death, fixing its reading in the sense of an ideal continuity of life. [the Tempio] also marks the tome of the rite, spatially, between the exterior and interior, dividing, in a processional path, the area for welcoming the deceased and his or her family, located near the entrance, from the area of the Garden for sprinkling the ashes, located after the farewell and cremation areas, and is characterized by two similar facades to the north and south, almost two sections that





allow for as many open and covered spaces. (Zermani 2006)

A temple of exact proportions is placed inside the temenos, almost as if to emphasize the detachment, the cut that the *sacer* space must be able to make with respect to the prosaic condition in order for the rite to take place. An oriented, delimited and protected space for the farewell with only one entrance and only one exit because:

In the excess of openness and the breaking down of boundaries that dominates the present, we lose the ability to close [and the place is a form of closure]. In this way life becomes merely additive. Death presupposes that life itself has a conclusion, so if you deprive life of any possibility of conclusion, it will end at the least opportune moment. [...] In spaces endowed with infinite possibilities of access, conclusion becomes impossible.

The Tempio consists of two squares connected by a square representing the threshold. The first square houses the Sala del Commiato, an undivided hall preceded by a portico and defined by an internal peribolos of columns leaning against the walls and supporting a coffered roof from which the light illuminating the celebrant's ambo can enter. The smaller intermediate square, which connects the room to the crematorium proper through a high opening, is a «zenithally lit chamber of light, completely empty. The body thus disappears into the light», a sacellum that sacralises the passage and detachment with the forms of architecture. As Han points out:

rites shape the fundamental passages of life [and] rites of passage, *rites de passage*, structure life like the seasons. Whoever crosses a threshold concludes one phase of life and enters a new one. Thresholds as passages rhythm, articulate and narrate precisely space and time, they make possible a profound experience of order. It is the thresholds, temporally intense passages, that are now being torn down in favor of accelerated communication and production without fractures. In this way we impoverish ourselves of space and time: in the attempt to *produce* more space and time, we end up losing them. [...] Thresholds speak. Thresholds *transform*. Beyond the threshold lies the *Other*, the *Outsider*. Without the fantasy of the threshold, without the magic of the threshold, there is only the *hell of the Equal* (Han 2021, pp. 50-51).

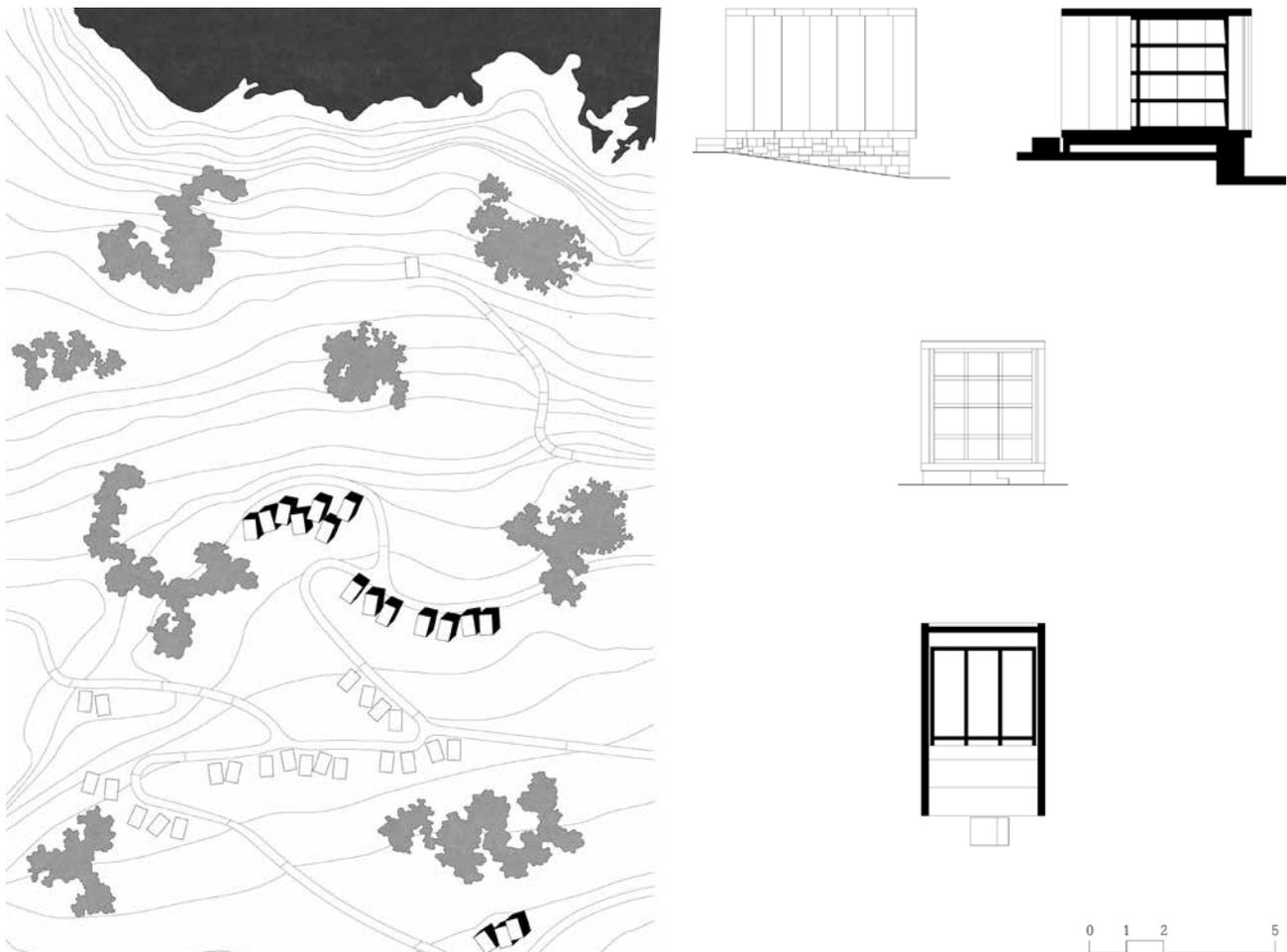
**Fig. 4**

Paolo Zermani, Cremation Temple, Parma, 2010.  
Project perspective drawing..

**Fig. 5**

Paolo Zermani, Cremation Temple, Parma, 2010.  
Plan of the second floor. Critical redrawing by Oreste Lubrano.

This is a work by Paolo Zermani, who has repeatedly grappled with the theme of the sacred and forms capable of manifesting the ritual – think of the refined and diaphanous chapel in the woods, or the cemetery of San Sepolcro, the monument to the first Christian martyrs, the church of San Giovanni in Ponte d'Oddi or the new entrance to the Medici chapels in San Lorenzo in Florence –, which masterfully renders in form the difficulty of transforming ritual into form, the impalpable matter of the sacred into “architettato” space, detachment and death manifested through a calibrated sequence of acts and thresholds rhythmized by light to bear witness to the presence of the divine.

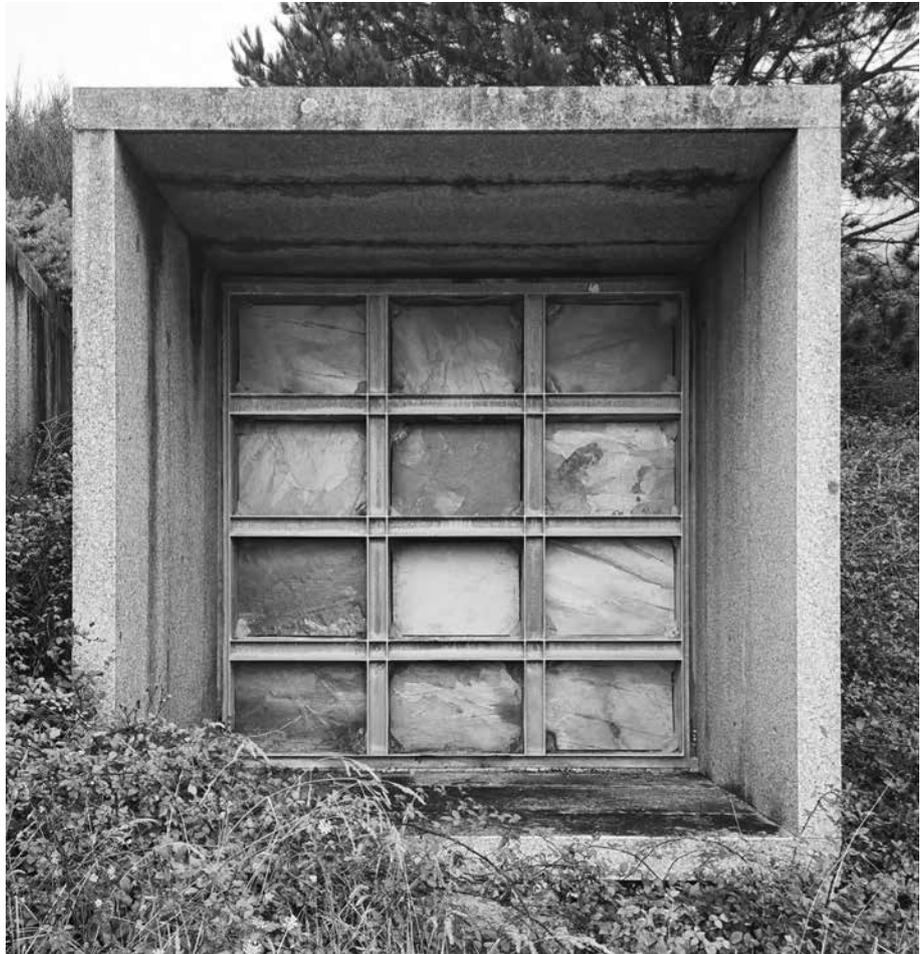


**Figg. 6 a-b**  
César Portela, Cemiterio de  
Fisterra, Coruña, Spain, 1998-  
2000.  
Drawings by Claudia Sansò.

The Cemiterio de Fisterra<sup>4</sup>, called to guard the cape of the same name towards the ocean, revolutionizes the consolidated idea of the cemetery as a hoped-for, marginal, confined place defined by chapels or burial grounds inside an exclusionary enclosure in an articulated, discontinuous place obtained by the synco-pated repetition of rooms, or rather of stereometric *cajas*, with different positions to follow the shape of the ground, open on one of the six sides towards the horizon. Rooms, open sacellums «that lie on the ground trying to conquer the view of the ocean, where there are no limits between the places for the living and those for the dead, but the only threshold is a sacred border that marks the end of the earth, announcing infinity» (Sansò 2021, p. 43). For Portela «The image of the cemetery is that of a path that crosses a cluster of houses, a snake that slithers down the mountainside to the sea, adapting to the sudden changes in the terrain [...]. It is a work to lose the fear of death» (Portela 2010) so that:

the cemetery has a tragic character, of course, but in Galicia there is a great habit of visiting the cemetery not only at a certain time of year, but every week or every day. The relatives of those who are buried meet there [...] They establish relationships. I wanted to encourage this, I didn't want it to be just a place where you pay homage to the dead, but where the living behave like the living: they talk, they walk, they sit [...]. (Trujillo e Ferreirós 2017).

As Claudia Sansò has appropriately pointed out, it is «an “apotropaic” architecture, confident in its reconciliation with the natural vastness that is the source and intimate hotel of everyone’s life» (Sansò 2021, p. 45). Here too, as in Parma, there are places for the recomposition of remains and for meditation and prayer.



**Fig. 7 a-b-c-d**  
César Portela, Cemiterio de Fisterra, Coruña, Spain, 1998-2000. Photo by Giovanni. Menna.

A small chapel rotated with respect to the two joined with a single slit in a Cor-ten slab, like a Fontana composition, from which to observe the sea, three Fates inhabiting the space lit from above by a skylight and then the 14 *cajas* sino up to a longed-for *mirador* – unfortunately not realised – which should have concluded the ritual path. A happy place, teeming with life, in which to celebrate the memory of the deceased in the presence of nature, for as Carlos Martí Arís (2010) «[...] The funerary caskets, like granaries of memory, transmit not so much a feeling of sadness and gloom but a strange sensation of serenity and reconciliation with life, with that precarious and fragile transitory victory over death which we call life». A place where the repose of the dead, accompanied only by the lapping of the waves and the rustling of the trees, allows those who honor them to enjoy, in the words of Nietzsche (1882), the «sublimity of meditation and seclusion». A place where the threshold moves to the extreme border of the sea and the abyss which, as Galimberti (2006), tells us «[...] underlies all things, and wants us to love the world in this way. The lines of the sea are in fact the “depth” of the abyss and the “borderless” of the horizon, two dimensions that disturb man».

César Portela’s architecture is adamantine, as is Zermani’s Tempio, in which he succeeds to the highest degree in sacralising death and, at the same time, life, projecting its meaning towards that horizon which separates and unites heaven from earth, the divine from the mortal, where «in the silence of the great space [of Nature] there arises not the yearning to lose oneself, but the hope of finding oneself again» (Schwarz 1927, p. 289).

## Notes

<sup>1</sup> As Rangon reports, «According to W. Croocke funerary rites can be classified into 13 categories: 1. cannibalism; 2. dolmens and other stone monuments; 3. abandonment to ferocious animals and other predatory birds; 4. burial under piles of stones; 5. in a cave; 6. in a house; 7. immersion in water; 8. deposition in a tree; on a platform; 10. in an urn; 11. contracted position; 12. in a niche. in a cave; 6. in a house; 7. immersion in water; 8. deposition within a tree; on a platform; 10. in an urn; 11. contracted position; 12. in a niche; 13. secret burial with concealment of all outward signs» (Author’s translation). W. Crooke, *Death and Disposal of Dead*, Encyclopedia of Hasting, s.d., cited in M. Rangon, p. 11.

<sup>2</sup> Cfr. entry “culto”, in A. Nocentini, A. Parenti, *L’Etimologico. Vocabolario della lingua italiana*, Le Monnier, Florence 2010. Author’s translation.

<sup>3</sup> On César Portela see the very recent monograph: Sansò C. (2021) – *César Portela. Estremo atlantico*, intr. by Barrionuevo Ferrer A.. Clean, Naples.

<sup>4</sup> The cemetery, designed in 1998 and built in 2000, has received numerous awards over the years and has been the subject of various publications. Unfortunately, twenty-one years after its construction, partly as a result of poor reception by the inhabitants and various controversies, it is still unused. In 2011, director Alejandro Gaspar dedicated the film *El cementerio marino to*, borrowing the title of a well-known collection of poems by Paul Valéry (Valéry P. (1947) – *Il cimitero marino*, Sansoni, Florence).

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**Tomaso Monestiroli**  
**Forms of the ritual, forms of architecture.**  
**If we were to come across a mound in the woods...**

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Abstract

Through the reading and the analysis, a posteriori, of Studio Monestiroli's projects for the Cimitero Maggiore of Voghera and the Cemetery on the island of San Michele in Venice, the text identifies in some specific elements, which build the place of the dead, the reasons of sense and form for the representation of the sepulchral space. The comparison of the two works also leads to a profound questioning of the permanent architectural elements that contribute to the representation of the cult of the dead. Protecting and preserving through the relationship that these elements establish with the place and, at the same time, questioning the relationship between architecture and nature.

Keywords

Enclosure — Island — Forest — Portal — Mound

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The recollection, the memory of those who have left us, is a personal feeling often entrusted to an object, an image, a piece of writing, or a series of random items which each of us treasures not only physically, but also in our mind. Items jealously kept safe, often in isolation, which have a particular, very personal and intimate meaning that is not necessarily shared with other people. Then there is the collective memory, the civil one, which needs a location in order to be institutionalized. A suitable location, exclusively dedicated to the act of remembering, a place recognized and recognizable by the entire community of citizens.

Mankind has always attributed an important, otherworldly meaning to the moment of death, shrouded in mystery and often by a fear of what comes “after”, which has led to the definition of an accompanying rite in the search for a meaning capable of alleviating that feeling of melancholy sadness which affects us when someone dear to us ends his or her earthly existence. This occurs regardless of religion, historical era, and the social structure of belonging. The funeral rite has always been that final earthly act in which the community recognizes and celebrates human life by projecting it, in diverse ways according to their beliefs, into the world of ideas, into the time of memory. It is this that makes people “immortal” – the memory of them, which in order to be handed down over time needs to be safeguarded.

In the culture of our time, the place dedicated to the safeguarding of memory is the cemetery. A place reserved for the dead and evocative of time. A place which needs the forms of architecture to be defined.

Architecture is entrusted with the task of making the character of the places in the city of the living recognizable and, in the same way, it must build

the identity of the city of the dead.

The rules which define the relationships between the parts of the cities we live in (streets, houses, parks, community buildings) are similar to those which define the parts of the place of the deceased, the only difference being that the city as we live it is a set of distinct functions, the cemetery, instead, although built on the same formal structure, is a place linked to a single function.

With his famous definition, Adolf Loos already linked the feeling that architecture arouses in those who observe it, to the theme of burial. In the few lines with which Loos tells us what the deepest meaning of architecture is for him, all the theoretical issues of our discipline are concentrated: «If we were to come across a mound in the woods, six foot long by three foot wide, with the soil piled up in a pyramid, a sombre mood would come over us and a voice inside us would say, ‘There is someone buried here.’ That is architecture» (Loos 1972, p. 255).

In this passage the profound meaning of architecture is clearly stated, that is, its recognition expressed by the appropriacy of the form and its construction. Loos reminded us of the fact that architecture, unlike any other built artefact, is able to arouse moods in man, something which Le Corbusier in another famous definition of architecture would then associate with *wonder*<sup>1</sup> and that the main task of the architect is precisely that of knowing how to specify precisely this state of mind, through the art of composition. With this in mind, it is possible to say that what distinguishes good architecture from non-architecture is the correspondence between the representative forms of architecture and the mood aroused by these forms, their measure, and their proportions.

The ultimate goal of architecture is to *arouse emotion*.

The rite, to be such, needs to be recognized and shared by the community who take part in it. First and foremost, it needs a place, which can be either natural or urban. Naturally, it must be a place dedicated to its performance. A place suitable in its size and shape for the implementation of all those human actions which the rite in question includes.

Architecture has precisely this task: to make the place and space intended for the ceremony adequate, with the necessary form, the precise size, the recognizable character capable of arousing an emotion in those participating. Suffice to think how important it is, in designing a church, to have a deep knowledge of the rite that takes place there. The relationship with the liturgy is fundamental in the construction of a sacred hall.

Designing a church means attempting to build a community space in which the congregation who gather there take part in the rite that unites them and in which they can recognize themselves.

In fact, it is a hall based on the relationship between two parts: the presbytery where the rite is celebrated, and the nave, where the community is called to participate in the rite. It is through the relationship between these two parts, through continuous compositional research grounded in an interpretation of the theme, that the diverse types of sacred hall have been consolidated over time, each time heeding the rules which determine the performance of the rite, the liturgy.

Returning to Loos’ definition, we can see how all of this has been masterfully expressed.

To begin with, Loos identifies the location of the work of architecture: a wood, a natural place which in Anglo-Saxon culture was often associated with a burial site, and is therefore in keeping with the theme being dealt

with. Later, Loos describes the mound and precisely illustrates its size and shape obtained by working with a shovel. The desire to give the most appropriate form to the construction of the burial place is the necessary element for its recognition and consequently for the sentiment transmitted. *Measure, form, and construction*, in their proportional and geometric appropriacy, combined with the correspondence with the location, allow the construction to be recognized, bestowing upon it a sacred value which arouses a feeling of respect in those who come across it. This is the power of architecture, and the architect's responsibility lies precisely in an implementation of the recognition of its forms.

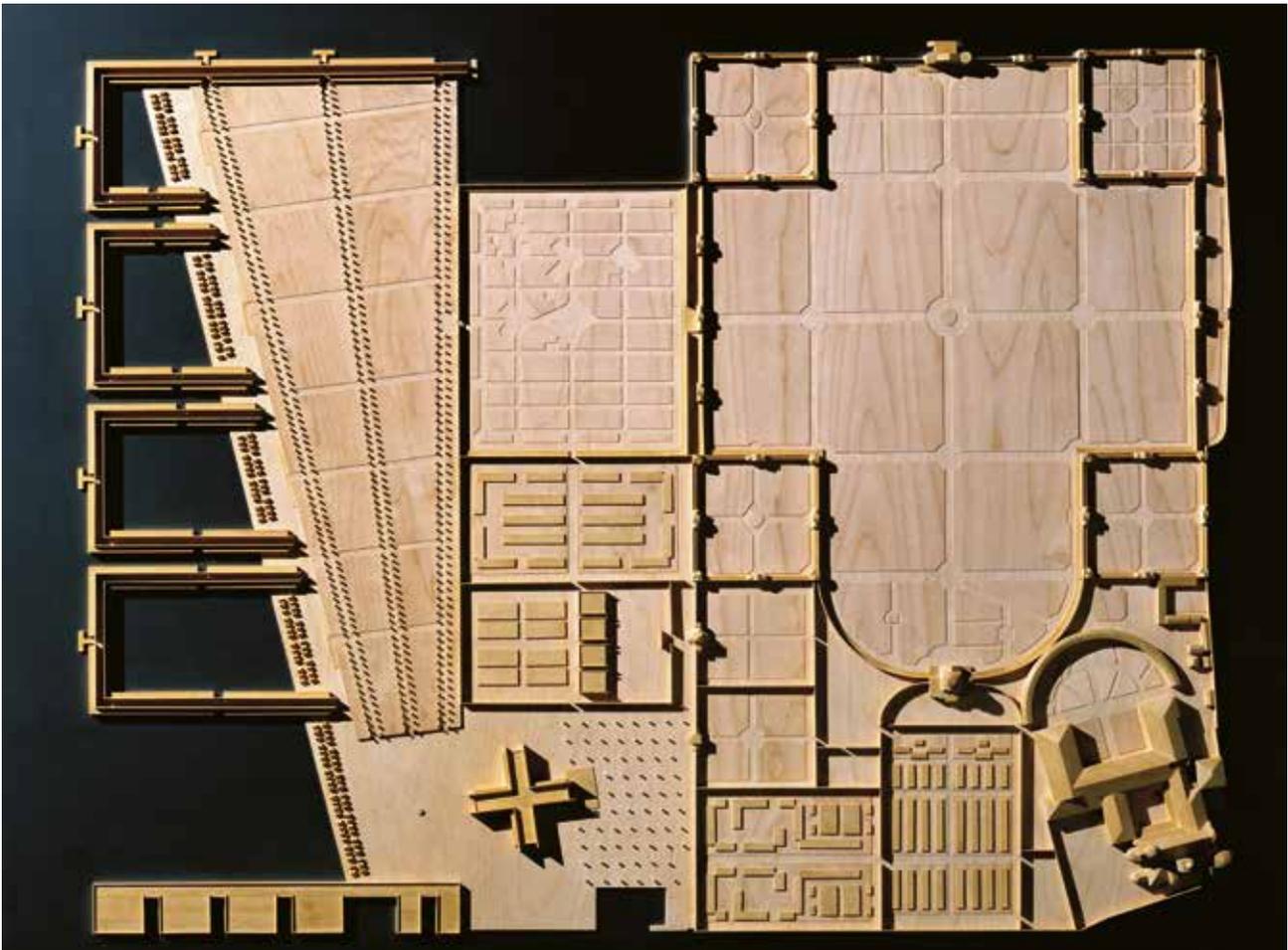
Architecture must arouse emotions in a sincere way, relying on constructive honesty and without delegating anything to the transient. Here again, Loos showed us how this is possible without using ornament, but relying exclusively on decoration. Still one of the most debated issues in our discipline, and perhaps very little understood, is the clear difference between *decoration* and *ornamentation*. The confusion between these two elements of the architectural process is historical, and it was certainly Adolf Loos, through his writings and his works of architecture, who specified once and for all the different meaning of the two terms.

*Ornamentation* is not part of the construction, it is superimposed on it, often making it hard to recognize. On the contrary, *decoration* is an integral part of the construction, it defines its form which then becomes expressive of its role. For Ernesto Nathan Rogers, decoration was a way of enhancing the reality of things and, in our case, it is not and can never be separable from construction. The difference between a support and a column lies precisely in this passage. Both perform the same practical function of supporting, but the column takes the appropriate form to make the act of supporting expressive, it "enhances" its supporting function. Entasis, which in itself has no static function, is a formal representation of the stress borne by a column in carrying out its function. The central bulge of the shaft of the column is somewhat similar to the image of a man, who, loaded down by a heavy weight on his shoulders, tends to bend forward to better resist the strain he is being subjected to. This is arguably one of the major critical issues of contemporary architecture: the persistent confusion between decoration and ornamentation.

To return to the central theme of this writing, namely, the relationship between the forms of the rite and the forms of architecture, we should therefore ask ourselves which form corresponds to the theme of safeguarding and remembrance for the culture of our own times.

To safeguard means to keep, to keep with care, to take care of something or someone as well as to defend or protect; therefore, the place designated for the safeguarding must be representative of its meaning. When designing a burial place, it is necessary to ask the question of what the profound meaning of the funeral rite is, and what architectural elements are suitable to represent it.

The enclosure is perhaps the most appropriate architectural element to represent the theme of safeguarding. The act of enclosing is a primordial act of architecture; determining an *inside* and an *outside* already means establishing the perimeter of a place. However, this act does not establish a form nor a dimension *a priori*. It can be defined by a continuous wall, a colonnade, or a simple trench in the ground, and the more the enclosure is defined in architectural terms, the more it assumes a decisive role in identifying the character of a place.

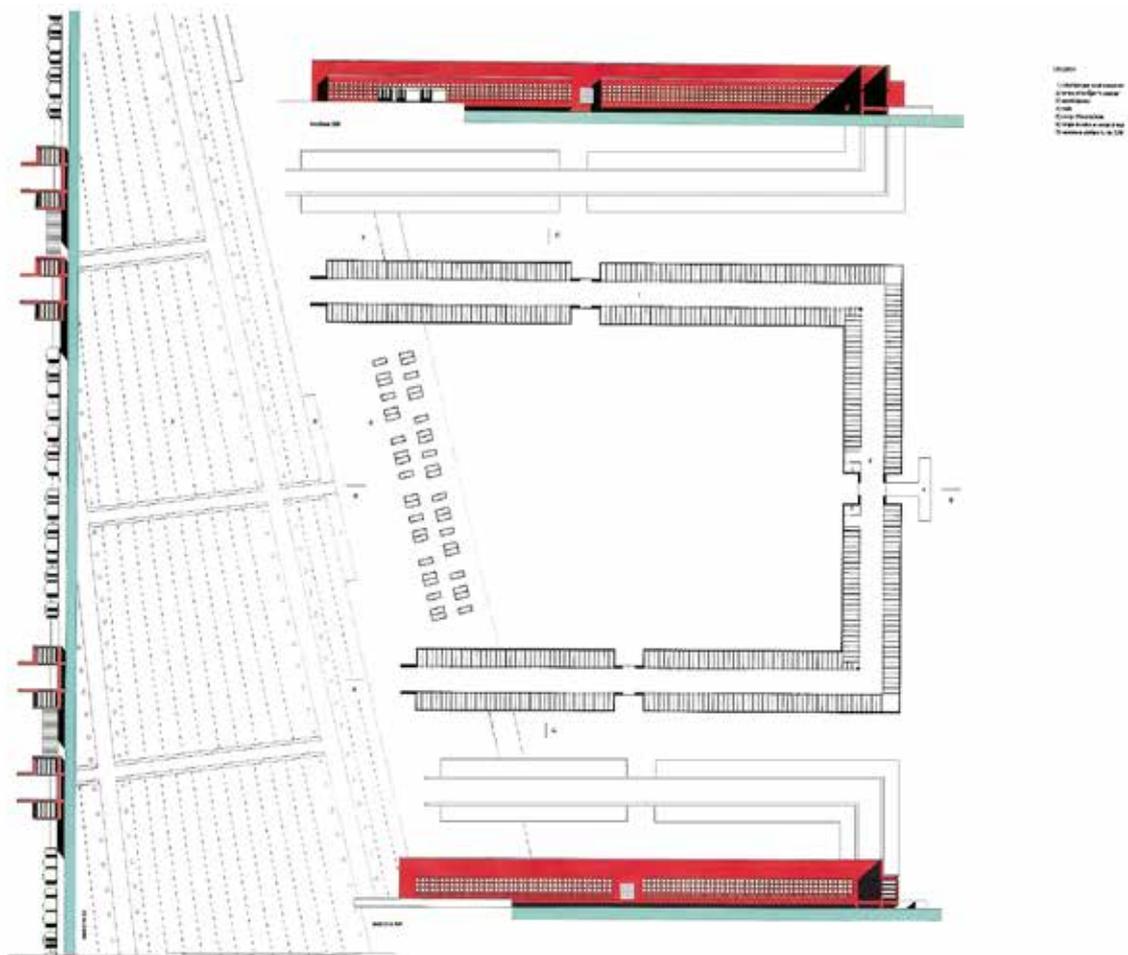


**Fig. 1**  
Monestiroli Architetti Associati,  
Competition for the enlargement  
of the cemetery on the island of  
San Michele in Venice.  
Zenith view of the model. Photo  
by Stefano Topuntoli.

For example, if we consider the Greek temple in front of which we all remain enthralled, the compositional clarity of its parts and the expressiveness of its forms is such as to make it possible every time to recognize the act of enclosing and protecting something which was considered of immense value. A temple protects and encloses the cell of the divinity to which it is dedicated, and although it is not a place accessible to the community, it nonetheless arouses a feeling of profound respect among it, directed towards the rite celebrated there. The ancient temple is certainly a building in which the forms of architecture correspond to the forms of the rite.

In the contemporary era, the place where it is possible to experience a similar feeling is certainly the cemetery.

The cemetery represents the place of farewell and the safeguarding of memory with the particularity that two parts must coexist in it: one domestic and private, in which each individual can devote himself to the cult of the single burial, the other public and facing the city, where the entire community of citizens can recognize themselves as well as recognizing the cemetery as the burial place of all the deceased. The difficulty in designing a cemetery lies in making this double character explicit. While on the one hand the right to a private relationship with the tomb cannot be denied, on the other hand it is impossible to dispense with the representation of that singular albeit hazy feeling which binds all citizens to each other in the face of death. These two ways of seeing the place, both indispensable, are the basis of the design choices of the cemeteries presented here. In the project for the fifth extension of Voghera's Maggiore Cemetery, as well as later, in the project to expand the cemetery on the Island of San Michele, Venice, this dual character was interpreted with the installation of a double headstone.

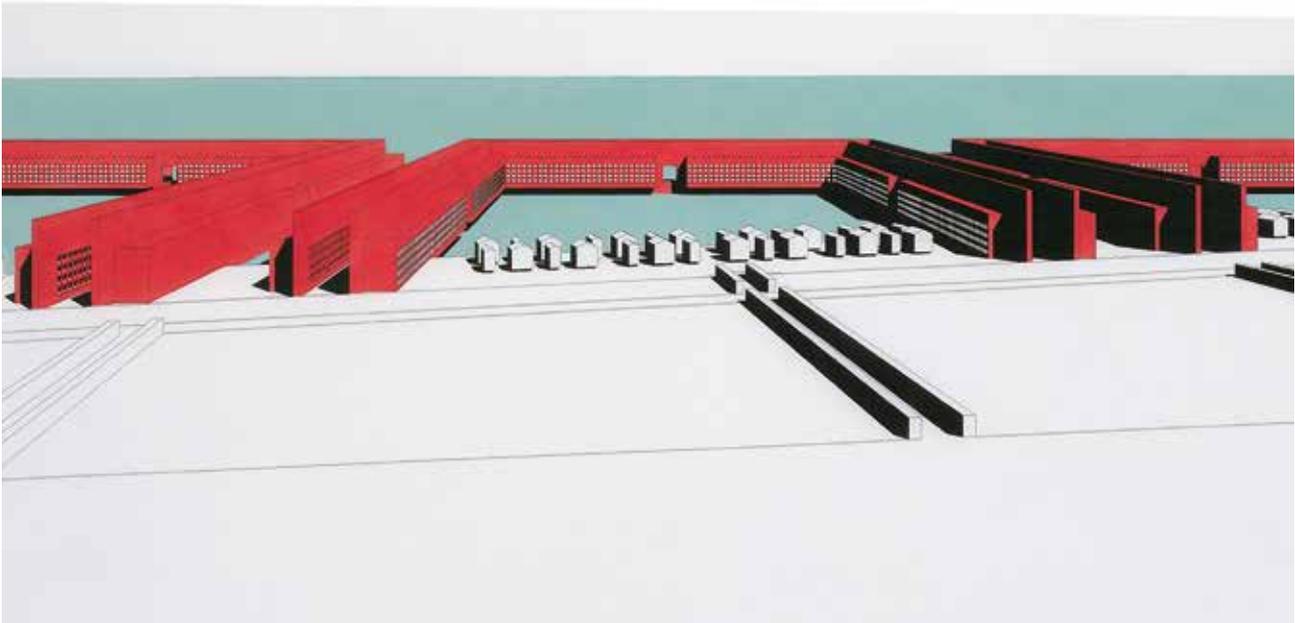


**Fig. 2**  
 Monestiroli Architetti Associati,  
 Competition for the enlargement  
 of the cemetery on the island of  
 San Michele in Venice.  
 Plan and sections of the court of  
 loculi.

A plaque mounted inside the corridors of burial niches and destined to the singularity of the rite, to the memory of the single individual, bearing all the information necessary to identify the buried person – an inscription of their name and dates of birth and death, a photograph, a light, flowers – where a freedom of compositional choice necessary for the consolidation of the private sphere is granted.

Then a second plaque of a different shape and size, with only a lightly hollowed cross, set, according to the precise rhythm of the interweaving, in the brick wall which defines the large central courtyard, to which the expressive task of the collective value of death is entrusted, a representation of that *there is someone buried here*.

In Voghera, the burial niches are arranged along three sides of a courtyard open towards the sunset. The courtyard overlooking the agricultural landscape encounters the connecting road to the city centre and assumes the role of a new atrium for the whole cemetery complex. Through it, from the three doors placed to the east, north and south, we can respectively access the oldest part of the cemetery, the most recent extension, and the new wood of in-ground burials, which remains to be realized. The building with the burial niches extends over three storeys, one of them underground, and is separated from the large central lawn by a pool of water which, like the moat of a fortress, prevents anyone crossing it from being able to touch the wall and the grave markers set into it. In addition, the pool, 15 centimetres deep and entirely clad in black stone, reflects on its surface the image of a thousand white grave markers, increasing the emotional perception of the sense of place, and revealing the presence of an undercroft where other burial niches are located.



**Fig. 3**  
Monestiroli Architetti Associati,  
Competition for the enlargement  
of the cemetery on the island of  
San Michele in Venice.  
Perspective view of the cour-  
tyards of the loculi.

An island is thus formed inside the court, originally conceived as the new *famaedium* of the cemetery, a large lawn divided into quadrants by the crossing of paths, which affords a vantage point for the surrounding grave markers.

In the competition entry for the extension of the cemetery on the Island of San Michele, Venice, the courtyards of the burial niches define four water squares overlooking the burial park, and mark a new limit of the island to the east. The courtyards, built from two parallel buildings which form an open-air path “suspended” over the water, recalling the narrow lanes of Venice, have the same representative value as the courtyard of burial niches at the Voghera cemetery. Here, too, the presence of a double plaque guarantees on the one hand that sacred moment of individual, private, personal reflection in the presence of the individual deceased, while on the other it restores the collective value of the memory that any monument must endow a place with. Unlike the Voghera project, here the courtyards cannot be crossed freely, however it is possible to contemplate them from the edge of the island’s new inner shore, thereby increasing their symbolic and representative value even more.

Being built on stilts, the courtyards ensure a continuous movement of the waters following the tides, defining a new relationship with the lagoon, while respecting the character of a closed, impassable place typical of a cemetery. In this case, the water is not so much an element in support of the forms of the architecture, as a necessary element for recognition of the place. In fact, once on the Island of San Michele, crossing the entrance to the cemetery via the ancient monastery of the monks, the relationship with the water of the lagoon is totally lost. The place is completely enclosed, and from inside, it loses any reference to Venice and the other islands of the lagoon. The project therefore sought on the one hand a definition of the most appropriate forms of the rite and on the other, to define a new relationship with the specific setting, with the lagoon. Which is why, in this case, the water has a particular symbolic value. In one of the first sketches of the project the four large courtyards of the burial niches were represented as rafts moored to the quay moved by the sea currents, almost randomly. In the definitive version, however, we wanted to emphasize the value of the construction of the island’s new eastern front.



**Fig. 4**  
 Monestiroli Architetti Associati,  
 Fifth extension of the major ce-  
 metery of Voghera.  
 Volume plan.

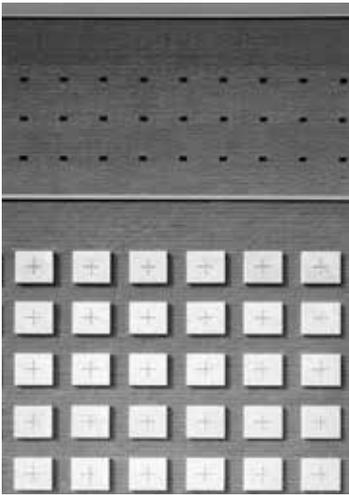
In the cemetery of Voghera, the water defines a limit which establishes a respectful distance from the grave markers and at the same time builds an island from which to contemplate the place; in that of Venice, the water represents being in the lagoon, restoring the place's recognizability.

A second element in common between these two projects is the in-ground burial park.

In Voghera the burial park is represented by a wood planted following a Cartesian pattern which identifies a series of fields of approximately 12 metres per side. For each field, 4 trees are planted, beneath each of which are eight graves in the ground (four pairs of graves), so that everyone can hope to be buried under a tree. The reference is to that of the cemeteries of Nordic culture where the place of peace and eternal rest is represented by the wood; where nature is the protagonist of the sense of place.

In Venice, the burial park is the place to view the courtyards of the burial niches built over the water. Here the park is built as a hanging garden where three avenues of tall and slender cypresses, arranged in a trident, branch off from the square of the crematorium temple and, running lengthwise across the entire garden, lead to the southern end of the island directly overlooking the shore of the *Fondamente Nove* of Venice. In both projects, however, there is a clear desire to interpret the theme of in-ground burials with an explicit reference to Loos' woods in which the natural place and the place of burial coincide and in which the forms of architecture make room for a green project. to make the forms of the rite explicit.

There is also a third and final element in common between the two projects described. The ossuary building.

**Fig. 5**

Monestiroli Architetti Associati, Fifth expansion of Voghera's major cemetery. Detail of the elevation of the loculi. Photo by Stefano Topuntoli.

**Fig. 6**

Monestiroli Architetti Associati, Fifth expansion of Voghera's major cemetery. The ossuary. Photo by Marco In-troini.

**Fig. 7**

Monestiroli Architetti Associati, Fifth expansion of Voghera's major cemetery. Construction site photos. Photo by Tomaso Monestiroli.

In Voghera, the ossuary building, built with the same rules as the niche building, but with radically different sizes and proportions, represents an imposing urban front gazing directly at the ancient city. Built as a large portal and divided into five sectors, between which four doors open, the ossuary is arranged over two storeys and can accommodate 1,200 cells for worship. Each of the cells is represented on the external masonry by a plaque smaller than that of the burial niches, which testifies to a presence at that point and to which another plaque adorned with information on the deceased corresponds internally.

In Venice, the ossuary building coincides with the crematorium temple at the centre of the entire composition which everything overlooks. The crematorium temple, with a central Greek cross plan, is also the site of the funeral ceremony of the last farewell, as well as the practical function of cremation and above all the safekeeping of the urns. The Greek cross, corresponding to the axes of the four cardinal points, is defined by the construction of four brick walls arranged in an L-shape, with the funerary altar in the centre. Here too, as in Voghera, the presence of the urn container is "told" by the setting of white Vicenza stone grave markers into the external brick masonry.

The wall, the enclosure, the tombstone, the water, the wood, and the portal are all elements of the architecture which define the place in their composition, while the decoration is what determines its character. In these projects: «The quality derives from having identified the right measure, the right number of courses of bricks or stones, the right size of the marble slabs, and therefore the right kiln or the right quarry, the right firing or the right vein, the exact profile of the beam, the best projection to use the shadow as a residual mobile moulding» (Semerani 2004, p. 11).

## Notes

<sup>1</sup> «Architecture is the wise, correct, magnificent play of volumes under light ...The business of Architecture is to establish emotional relationships by means of raw materials [...] Architecture is the art above all others which achieves a state of platonic grandeur, mathematical order, speculation». Taken from Le Corbusier (1923), *Towards a New Architecture*, London: J. Rodker, 1931. Reprint New York: Dover Publications, 1985

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Tomaso Monestiroli (Milan 1967) graduated in architecture at the Politecnico di Milano in 1996. In 2004 he obtained a PhD in Architectural Design at the Faculty of Architecture in Florence where he taught Theory of Contemporary Architectural Research. Since 2006 he has been teaching Architectural Design at the Faculty of Civil Architecture of the Polytechnic of Milan. In 2006 he participated in the 10th International Architecture Exhibition of the Venice Biennale, as invited designer at the Italian Pavilion. In 2006 he won the special prize of the jury of the Brick Award 2006 in Vienna. He collaborates with some architectural magazines such as AL, monthly information magazine of the Lombardy Architects Associations, Firenze Architettura, Il Disegno di Architettura.

Paolo Giordano

**The restoration and architectural reconfiguration of the Cemetery of the 366 Fosse and the Colerici Burial Ground.**

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Abstract

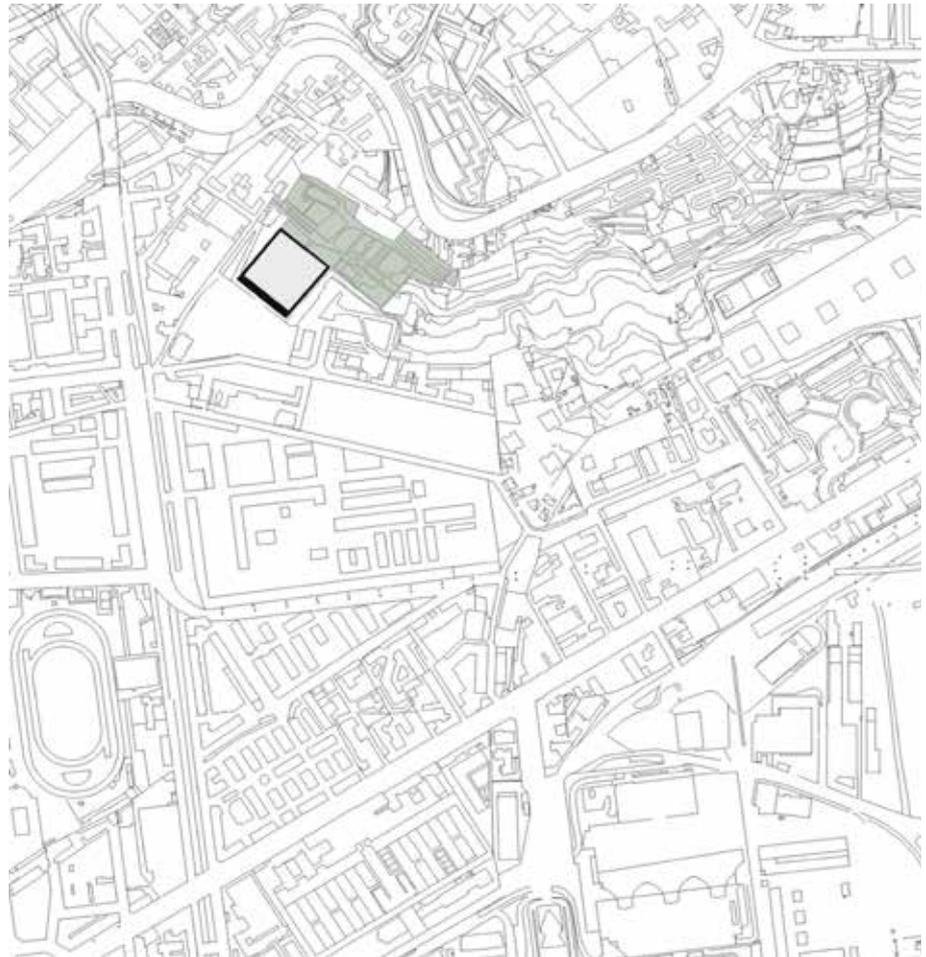
The 366 Fosse Cemetery and the Colerici Burial Ground represent, in different forms, two of the most important monumental complexes in the city of Naples. The necessity to carry out the restoration stems from the desire to bring to light the original singularity - architectural and symbolic - that these monuments established with the place of settlement. Two singular works, whose peculiarities appear today obscured by degradation and superfetations that poorly tell the original spatial configurations that have marked this part of the city. The re-signification of the spatial qualities inherent in this place are therefore to be understood as an opportunity to return, to the city and the community, a historic gateway to the cemetery park of the hill of Poggioreale.

Keywords

Ferdinando Fuga — Leonardo Laghezza — Restoration — Radura — Monument

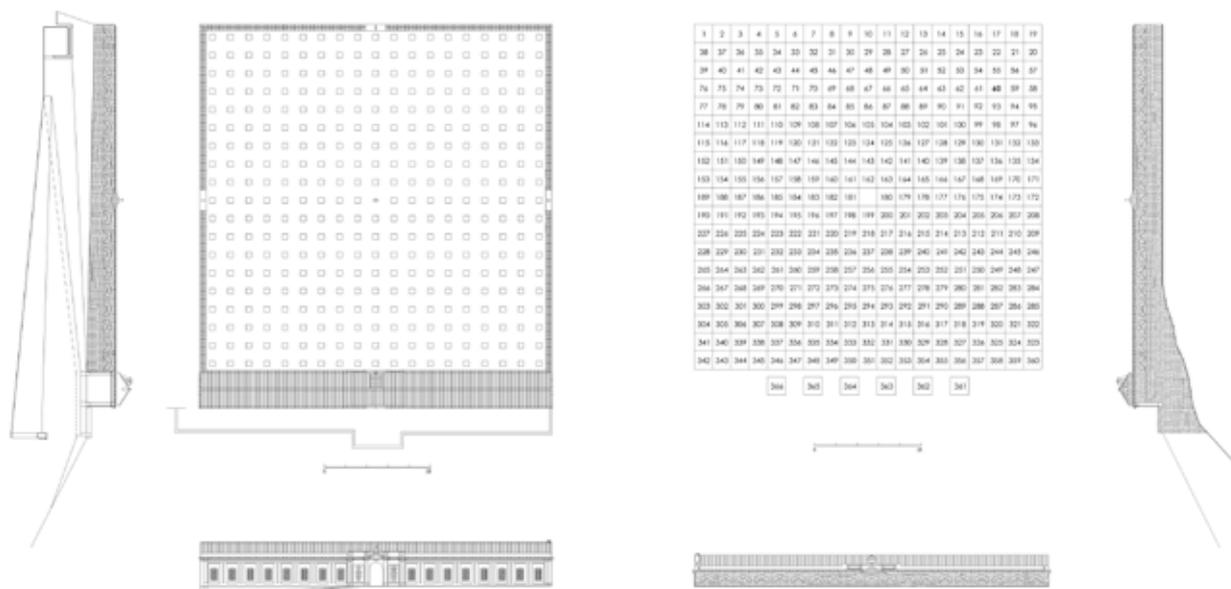
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The Cemetery of the 366 Fosse and the Colerici burial ground are each the architectural alter ego of the other: the first one is an eighteenth-century cemetery with an inner courtyard, square in shape and paved with lava stone, in which there are no name, date or face depicted, but only numbers from 1 to 366. The latter relate as many common tombs to the individual days of the year, including leap days; the second one, on the other hand, is a 19th-century funeral park, irregular in shape and dotted with tall trees, in whose enclosure various types of tombs are scattered and enriched with names, dates, epigraphs and, sometimes, depictions of faces and symbolic decorations sculpted in bas-relief or high relief. The Cemetery of the 366 Fosse is a rationalist architecture whose cyclic and perpetual mechanism of common burial refers to an idea of funeral homologation based on a rigorous anonymity incapable of recalling stories of lived life: Ferdinando Fuga's cemetery is therefore a powerful symbolic metaphor, through architecture, of human transience; of an ordinary humanity which does not yet want to recognise the value and dignity of its earthly experience. The Colerici burial ground realized by Leonardo Laghezza, on the other hand, is a romantic park which, through the presence of centuries-old trees and individual monumental tombs, proposes a double symbolic metaphor, an interweaving of life and death: on the one hand, the dense vegetation which, through its periodic seasonal withering and flowering, represents the cyclical nature of life; on the other hand, the presence of individual tombs which, through the various commemorative inscriptions dedicated to the deceased, ensures the immortality of man, at least on the level of remembrance and memory. In this sense, the two cemeteries, located on the hill of Poggioreale and bordering each other, well express the different



**Fig. 1**  
Paolo Giordano, Cemetery of the  
366 Fosse and the Colerici Burial  
Ground. Plan.

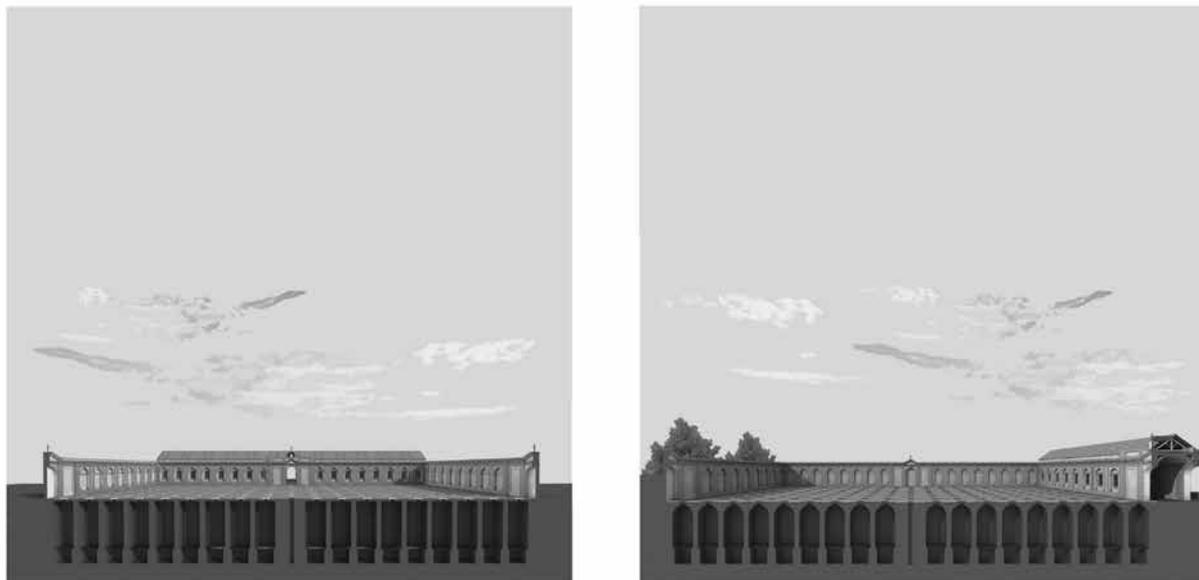
attitudes towards death and burial in the pre-Revolutionary monarchical society of the 18th century and in the post-Revolutionary bourgeois society of the 19th century. In spite of their clear cultural matrices of adoption, the two cemeteries are currently unable to fully represent their original architectural features, both because of the widespread environmental degradation that surrounds them and because of the considerable transformations that have been made to them, especially in recent decades. Specifically, the Cemetery of the 366 Fosse has undergone several transformations over the centuries that, although bold, have not distorted its original layout. These include, in addition to the hypogeum extension underneath the main body of the building, carried out in 1871, the placement of monumental tombs similar to those in the neighbouring Colerici burial ground inside the window compartments of the wall separating the inner space of the aforementioned building from the square courtyard. The construction of these funerary monuments between the end of the 19th century and the beginning of the 20th century represents, from an architectural point of view, a contamination of romantic character and style within a rational structure which, due to their high decorative and typological quality, is not to be considered invasive to the compositional balance of Ferdinando Fuga's cemetery. On the other hand, the structural and functional interventions carried out below the churchyard entrance to the cemetery and within its square courtyard in the 1960s are to be considered of a completely different order. These concerned, in particular, the removal of the rural slope with the relative construction of a reinforced concrete retaining wall concealing a new cemetery hypogeum and the systematic use of the decorative niches located on the internal western, northern and eastern facades of the funeral

**Fig. 2 a-b**

Paolo Giordano, Cemetery of the 366 Fosse and the Colerici Burial Ground. Plan and sections.

enclosure for the construction of new burial niches: invasive interventions, the latter strongly compromising the compositional clarity expressed by Ferdinando Fuga's original project.

In addition, inside the courtyard, a thick vegetation, both spontaneous and not, compromised with its roots the delicate statics of the intrados and extrados of the underground system of 360 tombs. This hybrid vegetation has recently been completely eliminated in order to restore to the courtyard of the 366 Fosse the original appearance of a square plaza paved with volcanic stone, which makes it very different from the tree-lined, irregular funerary enclosure behind the Colerici burial ground. This abandoned cemetery enclosure is the guardian of tragic funeral memories that marked the social history of the Neapolitan city from 1836 to 1913. The inexplicable abandonment of the Colerici burial ground has thus caused twofold damage: first of all to the original vegetation, which has not been cared for and has been overgrown by spontaneous vegetation, and secondly to the various types of burial ground, which have been attacked by atmospheric agents and outraged by repeated looting and vandalism, jeopardising the testimony of an important architectural and scenic environment. This recent damage, in addition to past transformations, has compromised the original design of the pedestrian paths and burial grounds designed by Leonardo Laghezza in 1837 within the first funeral enclosure of the Colerici burial ground. In this way, what could represent the monumental western end of the Poggioreale cemetery hill – the gateway to the cemeteries of Santa Maria del Pianto, the future burial ground at Fondo Zevola, the Monumentale, the Pietà and the Nuovissimo – risks approaching that fateful point of no return beyond which two of the most important burial sites in European cemetery history would be permanently compromised. In this sense, it is clear that the area enclosed by Corso Malta, Via Nuova Poggioreale and Via Don Bosco above represents an orographic and architectural ensemble of great landscape value. An important historic cemetery park in which it is possible to read the genesis and development of 18th and 19th-century Neapolitan cemetery culture, which, by virtue of this architectural and environmental characteristic, deserves a major reconfiguration project capable of re-evaluating both Ferdinando Fuga's cemetery and the Colerici burial ground at the same time. An intervention that, albeit by

**Fig. 3 a-b**

Paolo Giordano, Cemetery of the 366 Fosse. Comparing perspective sections.

different routes, has finally been implemented. Specifically, after removing the vegetation inside the courtyard, the restoration of the original ground plan for the Cemetery of the 366 fosse should restore the original ground plan, i.e. the 366 tombstones and the basic paving laid transversally to them; it should also restore the main body of the cemetery and turn it into a museum and documentation centre for the Poggioreale cemetery hill; and finally, it should free the decorative niches in the inner facades of the perimeter wall of the inner courtyard from the recently created niches. While the latter operation is of fundamental importance in restoring Ferdinando Fuga's cemetery to its original architectural setting, it also requires a great sense of respect and caution because of the obvious problems associated with the transfer of the remains there. On the other hand, as far as the Colerici burial ground is concerned, the restoration work involves the restoration of the small church designed by Leonardo Laghezza, located near the entrance to the 19th-century cemetery; the reconfiguration of the paths and burial grounds in the first sector, the one dating back to 1837, and in the third sector, the one dating back to the 1884 enlargement, as well as a series of small interventions to modify the ground plan by introducing, at specific points, new paving, new stairs, kerbs and small ramps to overcome the various differences in level within the burial grounds. The restoration of most of the sepulchres scattered around the Colerici funerary enclosure, currently lying in situ and in a very poor state of preservation, would complete the framework of the interventions necessary for the revalorisation of the sites. The restoration operations listed above, separately for the Cemetery of the 366 Fosse and for the Colerici burial ground, while meeting the specific recovery needs of the two funerary monuments, would not capture the real potential of a broader general reconfiguration capable, not only of resolving the critical points described above, but also, and above all, capable of proposing an innovative architectural-landscape scenario for the Poggioreale hill.

These considerations are based on an analysis of the drawing of the survey of the Colerici burial ground carried out by the technical offices of the Municipality of Naples in 1837 and on a passage from Chiarini's description of it in his *NOTIZIE DEL BELLO DELL'ANTICO E DEL CURIOSO DELLA CITTÀ DI NAPOLI. Divided by the author into ten days for the guidance and convenience of travellers, with additions of the most notable later improvements up to the present day, extracted from the history of monuments and from the memoirs of learned Neapolitan writers, edited by Cavaliere Giovanni Battista Chiarini*, as a result of the epidemic of 1836, due to the very high number of cholera victims, the burials in the Camposanto Vecchio, or Ferdinando Fuga's Cemetery, were suspended because the pits had been filled in, and the subsequent burials of about eighteen thousand bodies were carried out in an open space behind the latter. The 1837 survey shows that the main transversal route of the Colerici burial ground, which follows the north-south axis, had (and still has today), despite the modifications made to the original routes, an additional segment that reaches as far as the perimeter wall of the Cemetery of the 366 in correspondence with the triangular pediment that crowns the central decorative niche behind the internal façade of the square courtyard. The latter, among other things, is currently the only niche that, without niches, has a red brick wall at its back that differs from the rest of the wall structure of the funeral enclosure, made entirely of yellow tuff stone, thus testifying to tampering with the wall structure in question. From these two circumstances derives the supposition that, for a short period between 1836 and 1837, the Cemetery of the 366 Fosse and the Colerici burial ground, in spite of the different elevation of the two different ground levels, were connected to each other through an opening in the central niche of the northern elevation of the funerary enclosure designed by Ferdinando Fuga. This functional precedent and cognitive presupposition are fundamental in order to hypothesise an overall reconfiguration capable of connecting, once again and directly, the two cemeteries while at the same time satisfying all the requirements deriving from the need for a meticulous and impracticable restoration of the two funeral enclosures. In this sense, if, as noted in the past, between the two cemeteries there has already been an interrelationship not only functional, but also architectural – such as the “romantic” contamination of the Cemetery of the 366 Fosse occurred through the construction of individual tombs – it is possible to assume, at present, a restoration and reconfiguration based on a new relational connection and a new contamination, this time of “rational” setting, of the Colerici Burial Ground. A contamination that proposes, therefore, in the romantic enclosure of the Colerici burial ground, the construction of new tombs – for burial and inhumation – characterised by a strongly rigorous, clear and essential typological, morphological and decorative definition. In this perspective, the reason capable of supporting such a project draws its legitimacy from at least three strongly interconnected motivations: first of all, the need for a common restoration of the two cemeteries; secondly, the need to locate new burial niches in the immediate vicinity of the 366 Fosse Cemetery in order to free its inner perimeter fence from the corpses wrongly placed there in recent decades; finally, the need to identify one or more areas within the Colerici burial ground for a limited number of new tumulations and inhumations capable of triggering a new process of ordinary maintenance for a cemetery structure that would otherwise be destined to oblivion, abandonment and therefore irretrievable degradation.



**Fig. 4 a-b-c-d-e-f**  
Paolo Giordano, Cemetery of the 366 Fosse and the Colerici Burial Ground. Plan and perspective views.

The proposal of a modification drawing aware of these needs, as well as of the past events and configurational realities that have marked the history of the funeral of the Cemetery of the 366 Fosse and of the Colerici burial ground, represents a methodological response that has its cultural roots in a work hypothesis that assumes restoration as a discipline able to govern the cognitive and propositional processes that underlie the modification of the territory: especially of those portions of the territory on which time has deposited the signs and architectural traces of its multiple and past contemporaries. The restoration and reconfiguration project proposed for the western monumental head of the Poggioreale Cemetery Park specifically provides, in addition to the direct connection between the Cemetery of the 366 Fosse and the Colerici Burial Ground, the construction of three new burial structures to be built within the perimeter of the latter: the Court of the 366 Tombs, the Glade of the 36 Tombs and the Hill of the 6 Tombs. The 366 Tombs Court represents the architectural fulcrum of the connection between the 18th-century cemetery of Ferdinando Fuga and the 19th-century funeral park of Leonardo Laghezza. It is a semi-hypogeum courtyard building, located inside the Colerici burial ground, at the same height as the Cemetery of the 366 Fosse and connected to the latter by an underground corridor. Since the floor of Ferdinando Fuga's cemetery is four metres lower than that of the Colerici burial ground, the new 366 Tombs Court is buried below the latter, thus not altering its continuity of perception. The connection between the new funeral court and the overlying Colerici burial ground is ensured by a sloping driveway, with two ramps and a hairpin bend, developed to the west of the new cemetery structure. From a typological point of view, the 366 Tombs Court consists of a "C"-shaped building opening towards the underground corridor that connects it to the Cemetery of the 366 Fosse court. The "C"-shaped underground body is composed of a tripartite system structured on a central corridor 2.60 m wide that disengages, on the right and on the left, the niches intended to accommodate only the bodies transferred from the decorative niches of the perimeter fence of the cemetery of Ferdinando Fuga. This latter operation could thus be carried out without the use of lorries and without going outside the eighteenth-century cemetery structure, with a transfer on the shoulders, in a procession, according to the ancient ceremonies of funeral rituals.

**Fig. 5**

Paolo Giordano, Cemetery of the 366 Fosse and the Colerici Burial Ground. Project.

Claude-Nicolas Ledoux, Elevation du Cimetière de la ville de Chaux. In *L'architecture considérée sous le rapport de l'art, des moeurs et de la législation*. Tome 1, 1804. Source Gallica. BnF.Fr / BnF.

Three hundred and sixty-five niches are organised in a sequence of five vertical units for each of the seventy-three modules that give concrete form to the architectural rhythm of the hypogeum. This distributional organisation is numerically similar to that which was forcibly created in the central courtyard of the Cemetery of the 366 Fosse around the 1960s. This underground structure is illuminated by a continuous slot in the ceiling of the central corridor of the C-shaped building. The extrados of the “C” shaped building, which is lower than the height of the surrounding areas, is covered by a lawn system that camouflages its presence with respect to the bordering flowerbeds. The three hundred and sixty-sixth loculus, on the other hand, is located inside the open-air courtyard that opens below the ground level of the Colerici cemetery park. The courtyard, which is bordered by the stone-clad wall of the semi-hypogeum “C” shaped building, is mute and silent, or simply inhabited by a tall steel cross placed in the north-eastern corner of the courtyard and by some old gravestones of the Colerici burial ground almost floating on a veil of water covering its entire surface. The courtyard of the 366 Tombs is not passable, but simply perceptible from the corridor connecting it to the eighteenth-century cemetery and from the Colerici burial ground above.

The same need for architectural mimesis that characterises the Court of the 366 Tombs also defines the other two new funeral facilities located in the Colerici burial ground: the Radura of the 36 Tombs and the Hill of the 6 Tombs. These latter funerary structures are designed to allow a new use of the nineteenth-century cemetery park while respecting its specific characteristics of identity which, as described above, are not only found in the architectural quality of the tombs but also and above all in that of the vegetation.

The Glade of the 36 Tombs is located in the extreme south-eastern corner of the Colerici burial ground: an area of about five hundred square metres at the lowest level of the funeral park. Specifically, the new structure consists of two topiary box hedges, parallel to each other, lying in a north-south direction and located on the two sides, east and west, of a square-shaped clearing in which there are thirty-six burial tombs arranged in six rows. Only a tall stone stele located in the north-eastern corner of the Glade of the 36 Tombs, on which various types of crosses in bas-relief are engraved, indicates the presence of the new burial structure from the neighbouring sectors.

While the Glade of the 36 Tombs is located in the lowest altimetric depression of the Colerici burial ground, the last proposed funerary settlement, the Hill of the 6 Sepulchres, is situated above the four terraced steps that form the north-eastern end of the 19th-century cemetery. Terraced steps on which are located six old sepulchres dating back to the period between 1884 and 1887. More specifically, the third burial settlement in the Colerici burial ground is characterised by four in-line buildings, each of which is located on a single terrace with the rear elevations facing south. In this way, access to the burial niches is from the rear of these volumes, allowing these four in-line structures to appear as a sort of retaining wall with four recourses completely covered in lava stone. In this way, too, an architectural and environmental mimesis is guaranteed that respects the identity of the Colerici's funeral enclosure.

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Uwe Schröder  
**Light, Form, and Scale.**  
**On Seven Sacred Spaces by Simon Ungers<sup>1</sup>**

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Abstract

Starting from the figure of Étienne-Louis Boullée we try to face a new reading of the *Seven Sacred Spaces* by Simon Ungers. Through the association of seven types of *sacred spaces* we determine the binomials that link the idea of sacred space, developed by Ungers, and the ability of buildings, like poetry, to *awaken* our senses that, for Boullée, leads architecture - as art - towards the *sublime*.

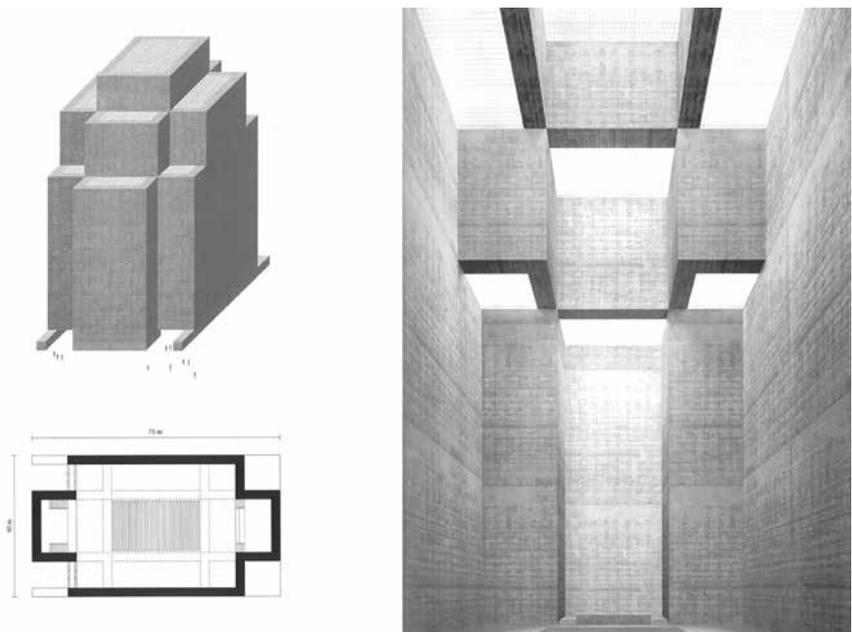
Keywords

Poetry — Measure — Light — Sublime — Character

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*Seven Sacred Spaces* (*Sieben Sakrale Räume*) is the title of a series of works exhibited by the architect and artist Simon Ungers (1957-2006) – who grew up in Germany and then moved to the United States – in the exhibition space of Sankt Peter in Cologne in 2003. In conjunction with the exhibition the catalogue *Sieben Sakrale Räume* was published, which contains a very interesting introduction by the theologian Friedhelm Meneke on the dimensions of sacred space (Ungers 2003). In the architectural designs, which can also be described as “artistic works”<sup>2</sup>, Simon Ungers examines seven fundamental types of sacred architecture: Basilica, Minster, Synagogue, Mosque, Church and Chapel. For the purpose of useful comparison, various works of architecture are presented together on the same scale in plan, elevation and section views, and are enriched with spatial drawings of interiors and exteriors. From an architectural perspective, the respective “objects descriptions” are supplemented by simplified wooden models. In this series, the architecturally constitutive dimension of the “place” is elided entirely, endowing each architectural design with a theoretical or model-like aspect, or – depending on the “education” of the observer’s eye – each artistic work with an object-like or sculptural character. In this view, the “place” is only relevant as the space in which these designs/artworks are exhibited.

The only relevant “place” is the sacred space of Sankt Peter since the “artworks”<sup>3</sup> are in no way related to specific places, rather they are autonomous regardless of whether they are seen as works of architecture or whereas sculptures. Similarly, even in Ungers’ architectural projects, “place” takes on a secondary role: topographical considerations may be crucial and may be exploited in order to intensify the monumentalization

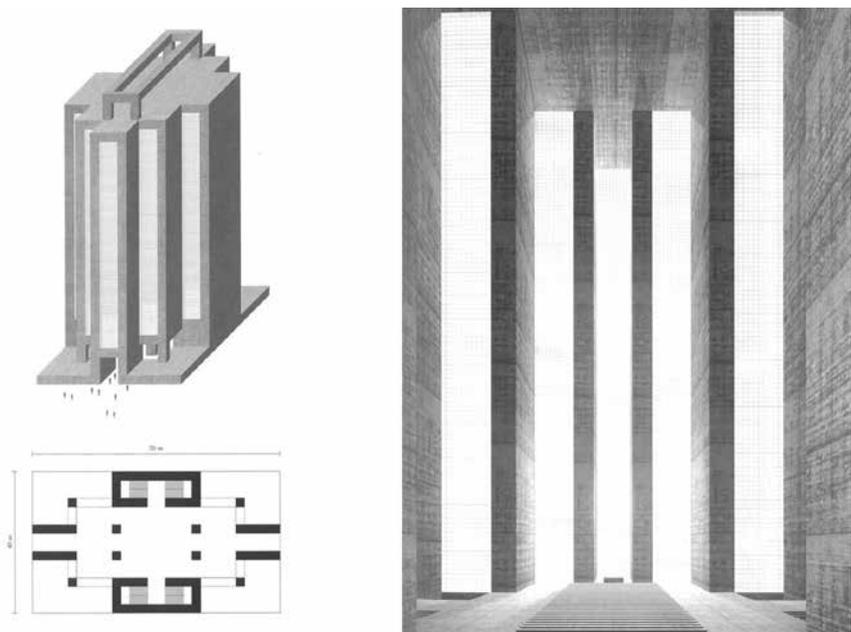


**Fig. 1**  
Simon Ungers, «Basilika» (da  
Sieben sakrale Räume, Köln  
2003). della Scuola.

of form, for example with the T-House or other works by the German architect, but his buildings are autonomous, self-referential objects, what is to say functional, accessible, inhabitable sculptures. In particular, in the architecture of Simon Ungers it's the interior, closely linked to the form of the building, that takes on a primary role: these are architectural spaces, and as such interiors constantly imbued with intentionality. And it may be precisely the term “function”, apparently meaningless, that is equivalent to a constitutive prerequisite of space and form in the works of the German architect, who always attributes a typological programme to his works. Reference is made to architectural types, that is to say the museum, the theatre, the library, and so on, which are continually elaborated until they arrive at ever-changing variations by virtue of superordinate ideas and expanded conditions – for example, massiveness, the joint, the opening, or material – and these types are raised to the level of an architectural language in space and form, and thus to the level of the speech. Similarly, in the recent history of art there are references to this research work – for example, in the artistic works of Richard Serra, Carl Andre, Kazimir Malevich –, *exempla* that can also be found in the history of architecture: just think of El Lissitzky's Constructivist designs, and in particular the “speaking” architecture of Étienne-Louis Boullée. We will be invoking Boullée in order to approach Ungers' *Seven Sacred Spaces* from a sensual and symbolic perspective under the categories of poetry, the object, measure, proportion, light, character, and the sublime.

### **The Beautiful and the Sublime**

The English philosopher Edmund Burke (1729-1797) was the first to oppose the sublime to the beautiful as an actual category. In *A Philosophical Enquiry into the Origin of Our Ideas of the Sublime and Beautiful* of 1758 (Burke 1956/1987), the term is elaborated as a basic phenomenon of aesthetic experience. For Burke, the senses and powers of the imagination – originally the same for all people, though developed differently by individuals – constitute the sole foundational elements of aesthetic experience. For the philosopher, the beautiful and the sublime are the antithetical basic categories of aesthetics, and their origin is found in the human instinct for conviviality and self-preservation.



**Fig. 2**  
Simon Ungers, «Dom» (da Sieben sakrale Räume, Köln 2003).

The intrinsically pleasant feelings of sympathy and benevolence arise from the impulse to social solidarity and are triggered by the feeling of the beautiful. In contrast, the feeling of the sublime arises from the experience of fear. To objects, Burke argues, correspond actual qualities that he considers and specifies individually to define the contrast between the sublime and the beautiful in oppositional terms:

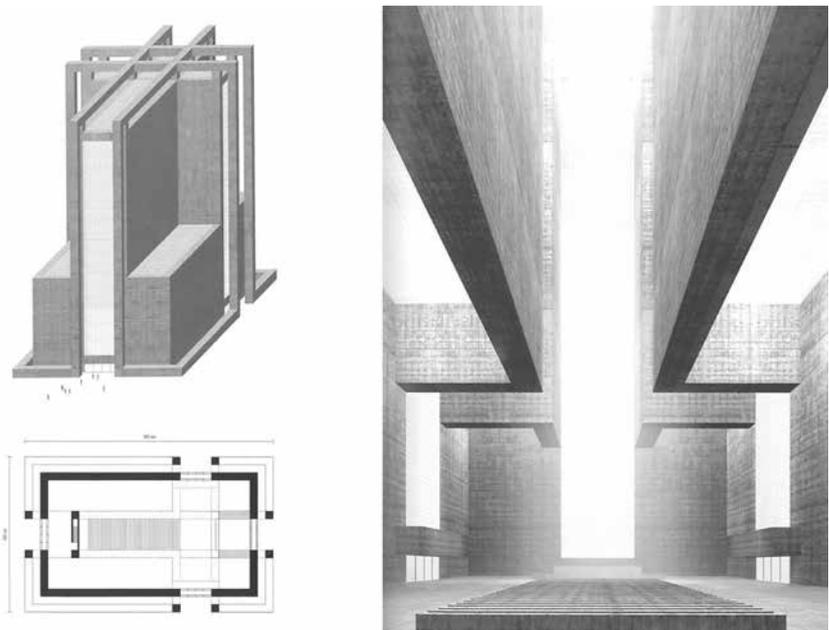
For sublime objects are vast in their dimensions, beautiful ones comparatively small; beauty should be smooth and polished; the great, rugged and negligent, beauty should shun the right line, yet deviate from it insensibly; the great in many cases loves the right line, and when it deviates it often makes a strong deviation; beauty should not be obscure; the great ought to be dark and gloomy; beauty should be light and delicate; the great ought to be solid, and even massive (Burke 1987, p. 139).

Burke's attention is focused above all on the new experience of the sublime, and it is architecture – with its consubstantial aptitude for great size, for “vastness” – that appears particularly suited to giving expression to this new feeling. Infinitude as the source of the sublime finds its architectural expression in the seemingly endless succession of columns of a colonnade; spaces are meant to appear dark, gloomy and gloomy; to achieve a melancholic immensity, materials and ornamentation must confer dark and gloomy tones, as with black, brown or dark purple (Burke 1987a).

The qualities of the sublime – and the same is true of beauty – are concretely present in objects, even though aesthetic judgement is in itself subjective and therefore also linked to a question of taste (Burke 1987b).

#### “E io anche son pittore”<sup>4</sup>

«That is my belief. Our buildings – and our public buildings in particular – should be to some extent poems. The impression they make on us should arouse in us sensations that correspond to the function of the building in question»<sup>10</sup>. The terminology used by Étienne-Louis Boullée already reveals the purpose for which he developed his new aesthetic: buildings are designed to directly capture our senses, like poetry, and should awaken in us feelings, impulses that emerge from the “magical poetry” of which architecture is capable.

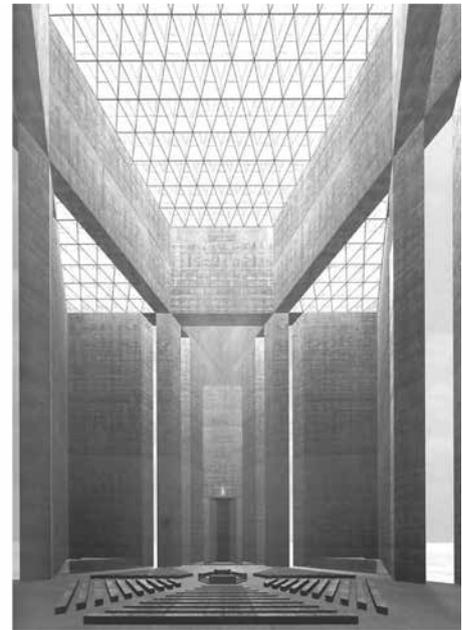
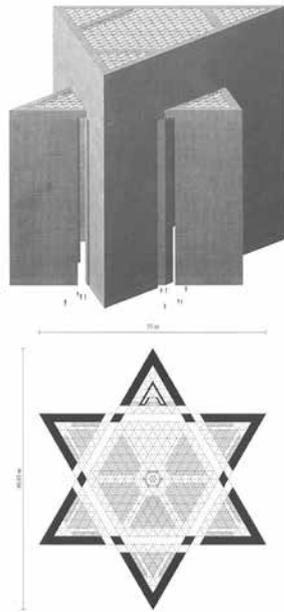


**Fig. 3**  
Simon Ungers, «Kathedrale»  
(da Sieben sakrale Räume, Köln  
2003).

For Boullée, poetry is grounded in the art of eliciting figurative impressions through the involvement of the body. It is said that it is the mass of objects and its proportions, based on regularity, symmetry, on “harmonious appearance”, that give rise to sensations in the observer (Boullée 1967, p. 66). If architecture must act on our senses and in this way know, then it must imitate the principles of nature: «I borrow the valuable effects of the latter. I adapt them to art. And it is these gifts of nature that ennoble me to raise art to the sublime» (Boullée 1967, p. 90).

Boullée wishes to guide architecture as art towards sensations of the sublime. It is therefore not surprising that he limits to a very circumscribed series of buildings the capacity and the task of expressing the immensity and infinity of the sublime. He considers residential buildings “fruitless themes” because it is very difficult for the poetics of architecture to be fulfilled in them<sup>13</sup>. In the central, programmatic part of his essay, where words and images converge magnificently, he lists only public buildings. Before the third paragraph entitled “Basilicas”, Boullée devotes an autonomous paragraph to the term “Character”. By “character” he means the effect which emanates from an object and which gives rise exclusively to that sensation which is commensurate with it (Boullée 1967, p. 74). Winter appears to us black, barren, colourless, angular and hard and we become sad, gloomy, subject to fright, because this is its character (Boullée 1967, p. 75).

Returning to the Basilica, to sacred space, and, through analogy with his reflections on nature, passing through the “dark” and “mysterious” forest, Boullée comes to the conclusion that in architectural space it is only through the way light is allowed to enter that the desired effect is achieved. «It is light that produces impressions which arouse in us various contradictory sensations depending on whether they are brilliant or somber» (Boullée 1967, pp. 85-86). The effects of light condition the appropriate character of the sacred space, giving rise to a corresponding state of mind in the spectator. Bright light, says Boullée, fills the spirit with joy while, on the contrary, a gloomy space arouses sadness. And where the light penetrates the space by an indirect route, without the observer perceiving where it originates, the result is an “unfathomable” and “mysterious” impression that produces an “enchanted magic” (Boullée 1967, p. 86).

**Fig. 4**

Simon Ungers, «Synagoge» (da Sieben sakrale Räume, Köln 2003). Firmian, Bolzano, 2014.

### Seven terms

Having completed this *excursus* on Burke and Boullée, we now return, better equipped on the logical terms of the question, to Simon Ungers' *Seven Sacred Spaces*.

#### *I Poetry (the Basilica)*

Ungers' *Seven Sacred Spaces* give rise to figurative perceptions. They are figurative in the sense that their respective purposes, those suggested by the names given to them – for example, “Basilica” – are investigated typologically, translated immediately and unequivocally into architecture, depicted and embodied by an architectural idea. The “magic poetry” that allows the space or form to appear as an object emerges all the more strikingly the more – and more clearly – ideas of purpose and the space converge.

#### *II Object (the Cathedral)*

The effect achieved derives entirely from the impressive massiveness of the architecture, its simple, polished forms, thick, heavy walls, massive pillars and ceilings. The few elements used are presented in a regular way and mostly follow a symmetrical arrangement. Because of the chosen material, rough concrete, the surfaces of the object appear differently depending on the incident light.

#### *III Measure (the Cathedral)*

The plan, section and elevation drawings are enriched with the dimensions of the exterior shown in metres. Depending on the type of construction, the architectural objects of the Cathedral show graduated dimensions. Number and size refer to a systemic context. The order is constructed in a modular way and can be traced back to the thickness of the parts.

#### *IV Proportion (the Synagogue)*

Object and dimension determine the proportions of space and form. The Synagogue is commensurably divisible, the proportions of the space can be traced to the opening, just as the proportions of the form can be traced to the pillars. Boullée speaks of “harmonious appearance”.

Ungers inserts references to scale, to the proportionality between man and architecture. Certain objects of furniture, such as benches, are introduced into the interior to show the “vastness” of the architecture. Outside the sacred building, on the other hand, tiny human figures appear.

#### *V Light (the Mosque)*

Light determines the atmosphere of sacred spaces in a decisive way: «The manipulation of light is the essence of sacred space» (Ungers 2005). White light enters through translucent windows in the perimeter walls and ceiling. In the Mosque, Ungers has completely renounced bright light and deep shade. The spaces are neutral in their lighting; overly theatrical effects are avoided, and only occasionally does light enter the building indirectly.

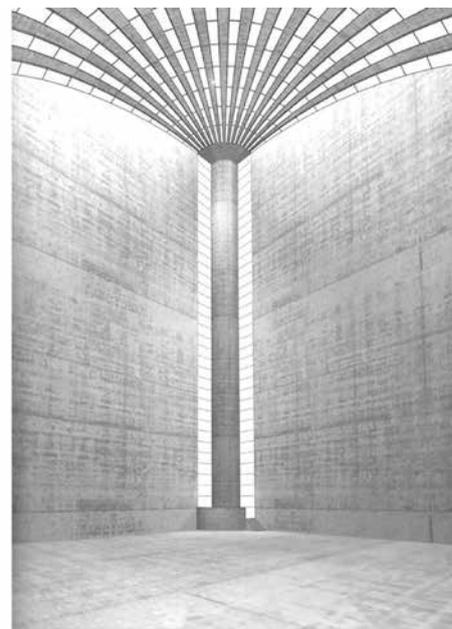
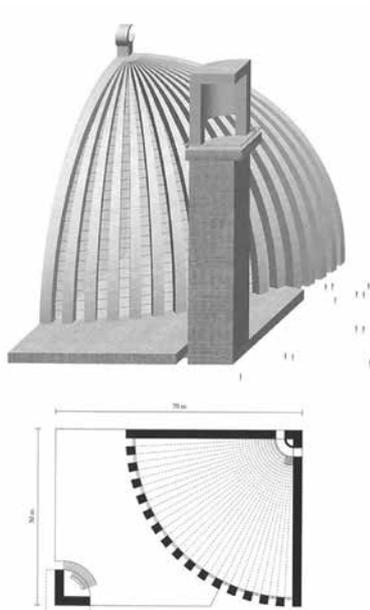
#### *VI Character (the Church)*

Similar to Boullée’s assertion in his *Essay on Art*, Simon Ungers believes that art can bring architecture to the level of speech. Ungers allows his *Seven Sacred Spaces* to speak to us, but they must remain open if the German architect is to ask questions similar to those raised by Boullée in his preoccupation with sacred architecture; questions, for example, about the “profound respect” that accompanies religious faith, for a “grandeur” that “imposes itself on the onlooker, filling him with astonishment and wonder”, for the “inconceivable”, and so forth (Boullée 1967).

#### *VII Sublimity (the Chapel)*

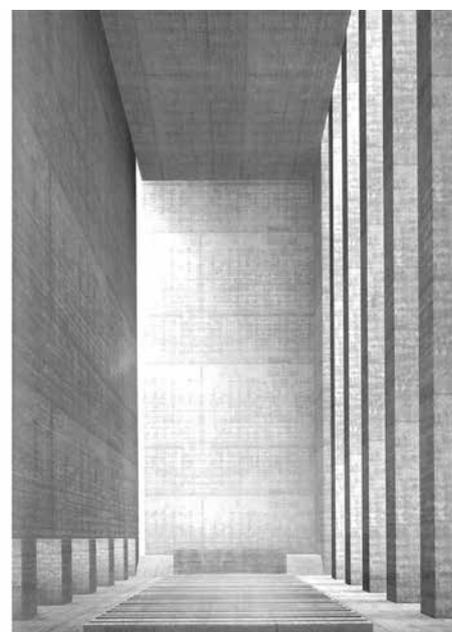
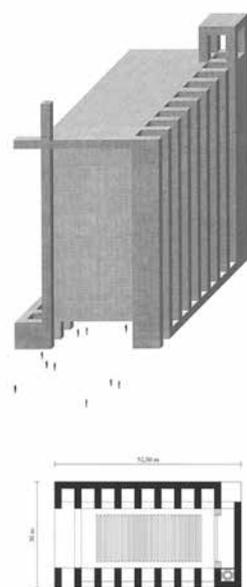
The sublime sacred space may aim at transcendence, but in Ungers’ works this higher purpose is present only as an abstract idea, and so remains entirely in the background against which his architecture appears as an art form.

In conclusion, on the occasion of the interview with Jos Bosman in 2005, Simon Ungers (2005) states: «For me thinking about sacred space is thinking about architecture in its purest form. Sacred space is not contaminated by programmatic concerns. (...) It is pure light, form and scale and this was the motivation for doing the series».



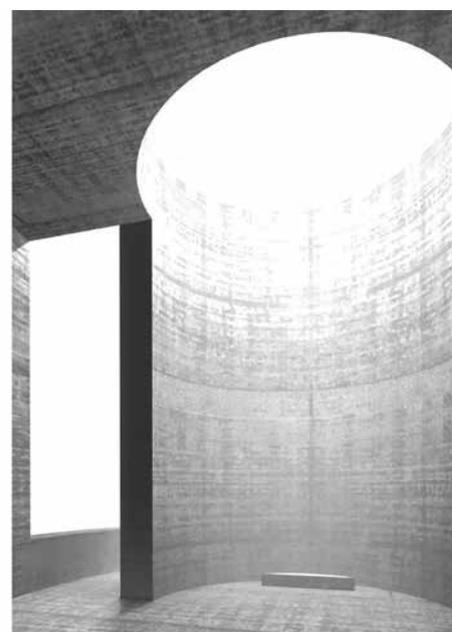
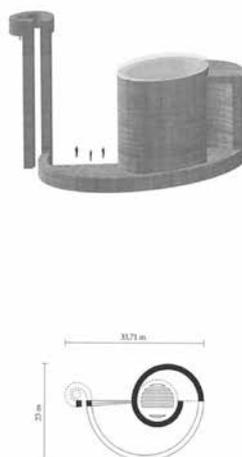
**Fig. 5**

Simon Ungers, «Moschee» (da Sieben sakrale Räume, Köln 2003).



**Fig. 6**

Simon Ungers, «Kirche» (da Sieben sakrale Räume, Köln 2003).



**Fig. 7**

Simon Ungers, «Kapelle» (da Sieben sakrale Räume, Köln 2003).

## Notes

<sup>1</sup> *Lectio* by Uwe Schröder on the occasion of the Symposium entitled “Holy Spaces. On the Construction of Sacred Architecture” at the Politecnico di Milano on 18 March 2019.

<sup>2</sup> In Simon Ungers’ work, it seems appropriate to speak of both “architectural project” and “artistic works”.

<sup>3</sup> The term is used here as a synonym for “project” .

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Claudia Pirina  
**“Landscapes” of memory**

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Abstract

The mystery of permanence is the theme investigated by Claudia Pirina in the forms of the sacred and in those architectural systems capable of relating man to the divine. These forms are perpetuated over time, in a circularity that becomes essence, stimulating reminiscence. They are forms of the transposition and representation of mnemonic images, delegated to the remembrance of the absent object (or person), activated by perception and by the senses. In this text, however, we are not interested in investigating only the forms themselves, but rather the ability of some architects to «bring together distant forms, in time and in the mind, [to] bring together a time with another time, [to] create short circuits; another idea of time». Two works, not contemporary to us, are used as examples for their ability to interpret differently, sometimes oscillating ambiguously between one term and the other, what Teyssot recognizes as a fundamental problem of funeral art: «invention as opposed to repetition»: Plečnik’s Garden of the Dead in the Žale cemetery in Ljubljana and Ravnikar’s Kampor Memorial on the island of Rab.

Keywords

Funeral archetype — Žale cemetery — Kampor Memorial

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**From the underworld**

From parks to museum and then cemeteries: our travels through the scripture of myth – travels in mythic topography – now makes landfall on the obscure shores of memory and oblivion par excellence. In the ‘beginnings’, architectural works arose to be the dwellings of the gods and the dead. (Teyssot 1983, p.5)

In the early eighties, George Teyssot<sup>1</sup> begins with these words the opening text of the issue entitled *Funeral Lotus*, dedicated to «architecture as a work of mourning». The author continues by declaring the interest (or the urgency) to deal with the theme, in opposition to or response to the condition of progressive «embalment of the environment», of «mummification of culture» and reduction of the project to the conservation of the existing, predominant in that specific historical moment.

Today, after forty years, his words can be read again, starting from «questions relating to a profound rethinking of burial places or to possible themes of invention or reinvention» (Capozzi e Pirina, 2020, p. 2) by architectures assigned to the rite of passage from life to death. In the search for possible answers to these questions, it can be recognized how new models, and sometimes changed rites, are grafted onto pre-existing imaginaries<sup>2</sup>. «It may be of use to study the relation between the architectural work and the space of death» (Teyssot 1983, p. 5), turning our eyes to the origins and mystery of permanence in the forms of the sacred and in those architectural systems capable of relating man to the divine. Therefore, to go back to dealing with that «beginning» of which Teyssot speaks, with the source of phenomena, with a sort of their original dimension that links the forms of the rite to the forms of architecture.



**Fig. 1**  
 Jože Plečnik, Pyramid on Zois Street, Ljubljana, 1927.

**Fig. 2**

Funerary complex of el-Giza, aerial view and plan of the Pyramids and the Necropolis, Egypt, 2600-2500 BC.

Rudolph Müller, the Protestant cemetery, Rome, c. 1840

Bartolomeo Pinelli, *Una tumulazione notturna nel cimitero protestante*, Rome, 1840.

Étienne-Louis Boullée, *Cenotaph*, [projet n° 15] [planche n° 13], 1781-1793, <https://gallica.bnf.fr>.

Francesco Venezia, Exhibition "Pompei e l'Europa, 1748-1943", Amphitheater of Pompeii, May 26 - November 2, 2015. Redrawing by Claudia Pirina.

### Forms of reminiscence<sup>3</sup>

The relationship between primogenial forms of architecture (and art) and the «aspiration of man to get in touch with supernatural forces in order to know the future» (Giedion 1969, p. 7) is the interpretation chosen by Sigfried Giedion to retrace its origins in search of an «eternal present». These origins can only be understood by investigating the relationship a people have between rite, sacred and their representation in form. According to the author, man's aspiration towards the divine or survival after death can be found in a series of primeval archetypal forms that demonstrate how «in the infancy of time art was prayer» (Parmiggiani 2010, p. 4). They are forms of the transposition and representation of mnemonic images, delegated to the remembrance of the absent object (or person), stimulated through perception and the senses. Those same «simple forms [cylinders, pyramids, cubes, prisms, spheres] that trigger constant sensations»<sup>4</sup> –which for Le Corbusier constitute the lesson of Roman architecture – are perpetuated over time, in a circularity that becomes essence.

But what are some of these forms that, remaining in the history of architecture, refer to the sacred? «Pure cubes, spheres, pyramids and cylinders: these geometrical forms evoke a primitive, primordial time; funerary and sacred architecture can only return to its origins, the times of the beginnings» (Teysot 1983, pp. 9-10).

A series of images in sequence of forms and devices of permanence can be used for some reflections useful to introduce the projects subsequently analyzed.

An image of the necropolis of Giza shows the articulation of the complex of ancient monuments in which the three great pyramids of Cheops, Chefren and Menkaure, are counterpointed by other elements of equal interest: small pyramids, tombs, temples, ceremonial streets, pits and necropolis characterized by the regularity of the mounds in the form of tombstones. This image activates reflections on the difference, repetition, and measurement of symbolic forms, but also evokes a duality between the representative uniqueness of the monument and the obsessive “democratic” repetition of the identical.

By comparison, the image of the pyramid of Caio Cestio and the adjacent Non-Catholic Cemetery in Rome testifies of the fascination exercised by the pure pyramid shape on the wealthy Roman who adopted it as his own

**Fig. 3**

Monumental Cemetery of Staglieno, Genoa, from 1851. From *Lotus International*, 38, 1983, p.4.

Non-Catholic Cemetery, Rome, from 1821. Photo by Claudia Pirina. Cemetery, Roquebrune-Cap-Martin. Photo by Claudia Pirina.

Marc Barani, extension of the cemetery, Roquebrune-Cap-Martin, 1992. Photo by Claudia Pirina.

funerary monument in a prestigious position at the beginning of the busy consular Ostiense road. The space of the original cemetery, made available at the beginning of the eighteenth century by Pope Clement XI as a burial place for Protestant members<sup>5</sup>, introduces at the same time the relationship between architecture and nature, portrayed, described, and remembered by numerous painters and artists attracted by the charm picturesque of that place and the presence of the prestigious archaeological presences.

The relationship of architecture with nature and topography, which characterizes this as well as other romantic cemeteries, is indeed one of the recurring *topoi* in the image of burial places, and refers to a symbolic link between nature and death. At the same time, the theme of the itinerary characterizes, in a symbolic form, spaces inside the cemeteries, but also larger portions of the territory. In this sense, the Egyptian ceremonial streets in the form of causeways mentioned above are flanked by the Etruscan cuts – which contrast the previous extrusion of volumes with a crack in the ground –, or the Roman necropolises generally present at the edges of the inhabited areas. The exemplary *Via Appia*, dotted with funerary monuments characterized by iconic shapes sometimes of considerable size<sup>6</sup>, will once again be handed down for a long time in more or less romantic representations.

Path in symbolic form is also the foundation of the design of the *Sacred Mountains* that stage the ascent to Calvary by Christ, building a symbiotic relationship with the landscape.

**Fig. 4**

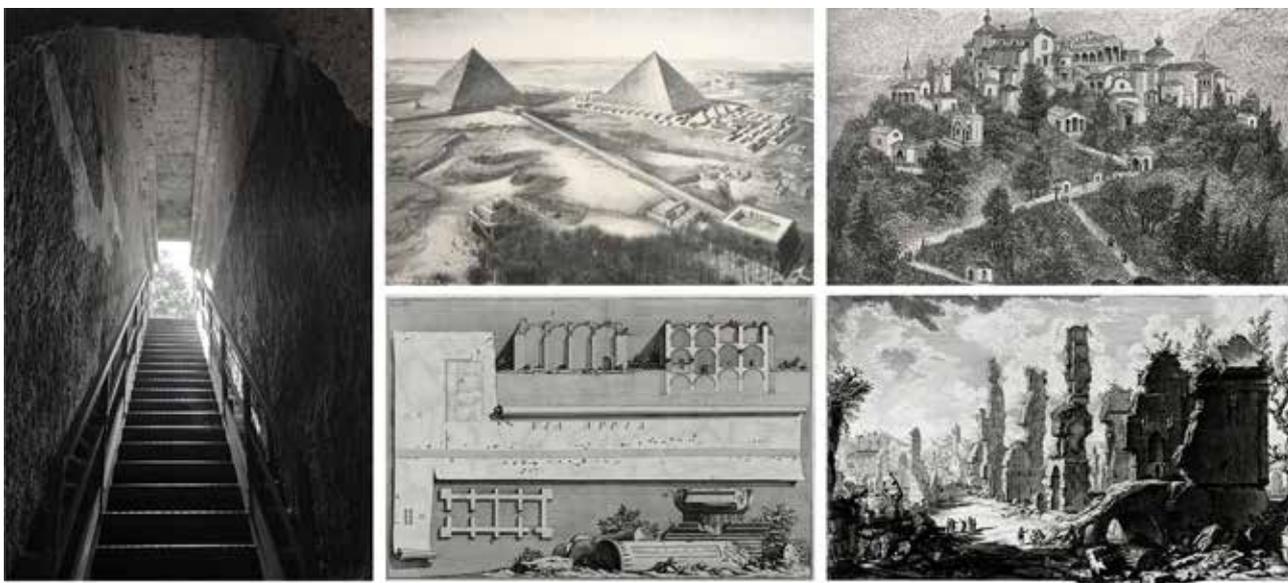
Tomb entrance, Cerveteri. Photo by Claudia Pirina.

Funerary complex of el-Giza, reconstructive hypothesis, Egypt. Wikimedia Commons.

Giovanni Battista Piranesi, Part of the ancient *Via Appia*.

Engraving of the *Sacro Monte di Varallo*, 1890. Wikimedia Commons.

Giovanni Battista Piranesi, *Via Appia*, 1756. Wikimedia Commons.





**Fig. 5**  
Necropolis of Cerveteri. Photo by Claudia Pirina.

Going back to the initial image of Cairo, if the shape of the pyramid will be declined over the centuries in projects of cemeteries, tombs, votive shrines, monuments or mausoleums, the image of the tombstone will have as much luck which, in the form of an imprint or volume, not only can be found in the necropolis of numerous peoples of antiquity, but it will in turn constitute a reference for as many contemporary funeral architectures.

In this text, however, we are not interested in investigating only the forms themselves, but rather the ability of some architects to «bring together distant forms, in time and in the mind, [to] bring together a time with another time, [to] create short circuits; another idea of time» (Parmiggiani 1995, p. 170).

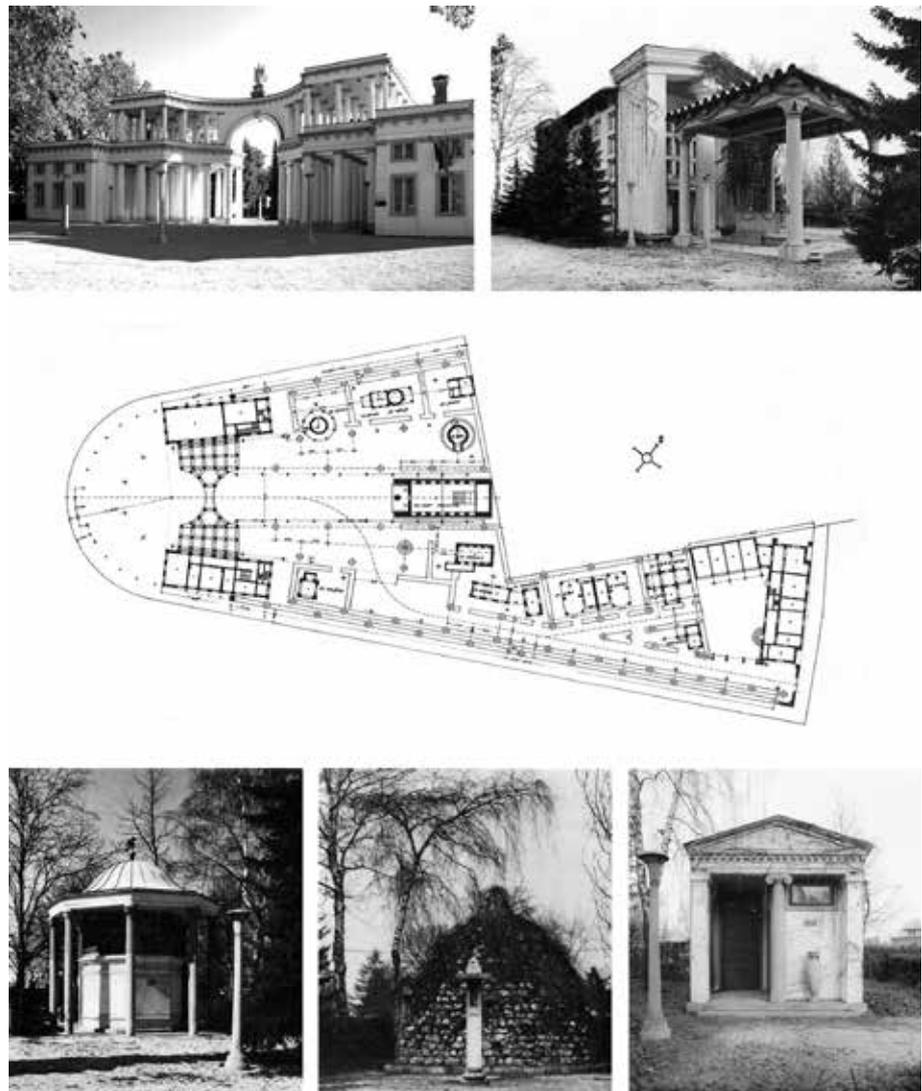
Two works, not contemporary to us, can be used as examples for their ability to decline differently, sometimes oscillating ambiguously between one term and the other, what Teyssot recognizes as a fundamental problem of funeral art: «*invention* as opposed to *repetition*» (Teyssot 1983, p. 9). The “landscapes” of memory designed by Jože Plečnik for the Žale cemetery and by Edvard Ravnikar for the Kampor Memorial are the expression of another idea of modernity, among archaic forms and new figurations.

### ***Ars perennis* and another idea of modernity: Jože Plečnik’s Žale cemetery stone garden in Ljubljana (1942).**

The so-called Garden of the Dead<sup>7</sup> of the Žale cemetery is the project that Jože Plečnik delivers to the city of Ljubljana at a particular moment in which there is a heated debate resulting from the issuing, by the administration, of a series of decrees to limit funeral processions in the city<sup>8</sup>. The architect’s purpose is to respond to the request for new hygienic conditions and functions, returning to the foreground of the ceremonial of the last trip. By renewing a funeral ritual that focuses on the ways and rites of farewell, Plečnik intends to design corresponding places capable not only of welcoming them, but of magnifying them, while integrating the ancient cemetery specifically dedicated to burials. The resulting original structure, designed in contrast to some requests from the municipality, celebrates the rite of passage, providing a place to welcome the pain of the living in a private and intimate way. The succession of the phases of the rite guides the design of spaces, paths and buildings, as well as their respective positions and sizes. The journey from the city of the living to the city of the dead is, in fact, meticulously designed<sup>9</sup> by Plečnik, according to a procedure whereby «all the procedures are subtended by the architecture and by microuban planning solution» (Pozzetto 1983, p. 111). The interior of the “garden” is separated from the city by solemn propylaea that refer to classical and baroque images and which, with their concave shape, welcome the funeral procession to ferry it into a new dimension<sup>10</sup>. The interior is dotted with 14 chapels<sup>11</sup>, which refer to the as many stations of the Via Crucis, as well as a series of more or less symbolic elements that integrate the functions of the park (such as benches, street lamps, fountains, etc.). These chapels can be interpreted as a sort of catalog of architecture derived from primitive geometric shapes which, in the architect’s work, also refer to those symbolic elements taken from the forms of the sacred inserted in strategic places in the cities of Ljubljana, as well as in Prague. Columns, pillars, arcades, aedicule, obelisks and ornaments will constitute those signs arranged inside the garden – or along the urban paths – which in some way become an expression of his will (which he himself declared) to build a bridge between tradition and formal invention: «like a spider, I



**Fig. 6**  
Jože Plečnik, entrance to the Stone Garden of the Žale Cemetery, Ljubljana, 1942. Wikimedia Commons.  
Jože Plečnik, the Gate of the barrier on the Ljubljanica River, Ljubljana.



**Fig. 7**  
Jože Plečnik, The Stone Garden  
of the Žale Cemetery, Ljubljana,  
1942.

aspire to attach my thread to tradition and, starting from there, to weave my web» (Burkhardt 1988, p. 112). According to Plečnik, in fact,

there is [...] a relationship between the philosophy of real time and millenary art, a relationship of true analogy or internal similarity (partial equality + partial difference). Both have their origins in ancient religion (mythology). Both have their peaks in the religious sphere [...] The *ars perennis* absorbs the revelations of beauty from all eras and schools, it rejuvenates itself with ever new forms, yet it is not gothic, nor baroque, nor romantic, nor naturalism, nor symbolism, nor surrealism. (Plečnik 1941, p.230)

The harmonious geometry of the volumes, combined with the plasticity of the forms, starts from ideal figures or monumental forms, becoming the expression of a personal style. The imprint of novelty is obtained through a transformation and simplification of these forms and, at the same time, a monumental definition of the detail. The “stone” garden thus becomes an archive of small architectures that decline the shapes of the mound, the dome, the Turkish sepulcher, octagons with drums, oblong bodies in the shape of a nave, volumes that welcome central columns in the form of an archetype (Cornoldi 1996).

His personal montages do not refer only to a symbolic dimension: symbolic aspects of the architectural signs derived from Etruscan, Greek and Roman art are in fact assembled and mixed with decorative elements, and popular art, with the aim of promoting and enhancing a new national identity. This

eclectic assembly of elements gives a character of opulence to a place where the decorative dimension «is not an additional application but an expressive combination born from a different constructive logic. [...] Columns, pillars, arcades and ornaments are an attempt to evoke memory through tradition; the use of a code recognized by the creator as by the users therefore allows the association with the past» (Burkhardt 1988, p. 108).

Going back to the path of the rite that structures the project, an oratory podium is arranged in line with the entrance below a square canopy in front of the Prayer Chapel. The internal spaces of the chapels, with their contained forms that can accommodate only the few family members, emphasize the private dimension of mourning that is combined with the design of the external spaces that allow you to accommodate a larger number of people, in case of need. A series of buildings used for functions deemed less significant for the rite will find their place on the edge of the system. The mystical search for a relationship between man and divinity is the ultimate goal of Plečnik's work, who effectively interprets in an architectural form that journey described by Rangon which «constitutes the last journey, perhaps a modern version of the ancient journeys of the dead to the underworld» (Rangon 1986, p. 173).

#### **“In the shade of cypresses and inside the urn ...”: the Kampor Memorial on the island of Rab by Edvard Ravnikar (1953)**

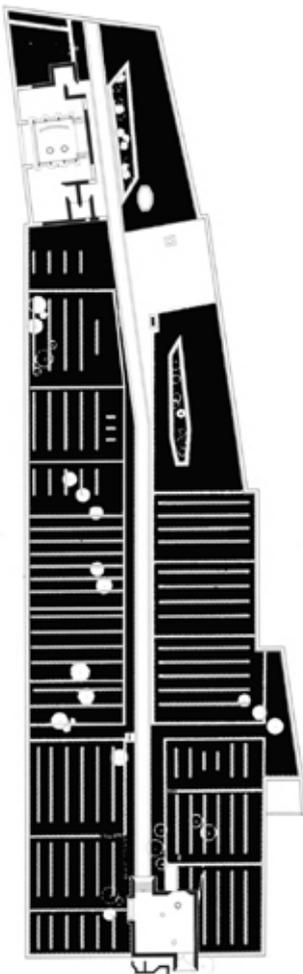
To the “stone” garden of Plečnik is juxtaposed the “landscape of the memorial that Edvard Ravnikar designed on the island of Rab to commemorate the massacre of the concentration camp for civil war internees in Rab. The two projects, if analyzed together, make it possible in an emblematic way to provide a sort of archive of forms of funeral architecture. Although constructed in different contexts<sup>12</sup>, in response to different forms of the rite<sup>13</sup>, they share a similar search for spirituality and suspension of time.

Ravnikar, a pupil of Plečnik, inherits from the master the interest in the ancient, together with the desire to transform the past, and to merge the forms of different civilizations in a new symbolic language. In the Memorial project, the search for a primordial alphabet capable of radical innovation builds a metaphorical vocabulary that alludes to the origins of architecture. Platforms, columns, walls, sacred streets and openings onto the landscape give life to a universal harmony, «the simultaneous expression of a multiplicity of meanings transmitted through symbols» (Eliade 1948, n.169) that become an expression of the sacred.

Everything that is not directly consecrated by a hierophany becomes sacred thanks to its participation in a symbol [...] The symbol is not important only because it prolongs or replaces a hierophany, but above all because [...] it reveals a sacred reality or cosmological that no other ‘manifestation’ is capable of revealing, [...] [implementing] man’s permanent solidarity with sacredness [...] [in] a ‘language’ accessible to all members of the community. (Eliade 1948, n.169,170)

Ravnikar creates an architecture, evoking the horror of that place, sublimates its terrible history through the landscape, stimulates the senses and the mind, challenges time and produces a continuity, echoing ancient memories, and at the same time of dry land that divide the properties, or archaeological complexes scattered throughout the region.

The site is delimited by a fence that takes up exactly the measurements of the dry-stone walls that dot the territory in height, building a distance



**Fig. 8**  
Edvard Ravnikar, plan of the Kampor Memorial on the island of Rab, 1953. Redrawing by Claudia Pirina.

**Fig. 9**

Edvard Ravnikar, images from the Kampor Memorial on the island of Rab, 1953. Wikimedia Commons.

between the external landscape and an internal world that is divided into a processional path that introduces the temporal dimension into the architectural experience. A refined system of carefully controlled visual foreshortenings is obtained through denied misalignments, deviations and axialities, which generate a feeling of estrangement. Asymmetry and diagonal paths simulate a labyrinth that, once you cross the threshold of the metal portal, leads inside a petrean open-air room inhabited by drums of broken columns and windows overlooking the landscape. Subsequently the ritual path winds along the entire length of the site along a paved “sacredcccc” street of ancient memory, to culminate, on the opposite corner, in the equally iconic slightly recessed space created below a lowered vault that alludes to archetype of the ancient *arcosolium* «populated by domestic animals, buffaloes, pheasants and peasants» (Semerani 2010, p. 57). «A feeling for the antiquity that is a moving backwards, towards the archaic, the primeval and towards the search for the original symbols» (Semerani 2010, p. 58) projects the Memorial into a timeless dimension that incorporates the surrounding landscape into experience of the observer. The ritual structure produces meditative calm and serene spaces in which abstraction, monumentality and pure form are combined with the search for the symbol, and the relationship with traditional architecture and the classic.

Between the central ordering structure and the enclosure, the architect arranges a series of slightly terraced platforms to support the trend of the topography, which accommodate the orderly and rhythmic rows of tombstones aggregated in elongated shapes. Once again, the arrangement according to perpendicular trends produces an alternating and harmonious rhythm, in which the horizontal lines of the tombstones lying on the ground contrast with some vertical stems (obelisks) and the elongated ‘architecture’ of the cypresses. Light, shadow, proportion, material and scale are the other elements used by Ravnikar to evoke emotional reactions in the observer.

While Ravnikar’s Memorial Complex on Rab contains classical echoes, the intention was never to anchor a reference to one particular example, place or time. On the contrary, abstraction was this architect’s means for distilling the past, for fusing sources, for seeking out an essential nature, a sort of archaic, eternal present. (Curtis 2009, p.44)

Epiphanic places and symbolic forms return in these two works, showing another time and another modernity, and projecting mourning and death into the future and into action<sup>14</sup>.

## Notes

<sup>1</sup> At that time editorial coordinator of *Lotus International* magazine.

<sup>2</sup> In retracing the history of the burial places, it is clear to recognize their close relationship with the culture and knowledge of the different eras, but also with particular conditions that determine, in some cases, the gap capable of triggering new answers to ancient and ancestral questions. In this sense, in France, the dismantling of the largest cemetery in Paris in the heart of Les Halles in 1785, on the one hand can be considered a direct expression of the acquisition of new medical-scientific knowledge that promotes a removal of burials from urban centers, on the other hand it will activate the change that will lead to the enactment of the 27 articles of Napoleon's *Décret impérial sur les sépultures* in June 1804. This decree, as well as its subsequent extension to the Kingdom of Italy through the *edict of the Medical Police* of September 1806, will provide precise indications on the new burial methods that will give rise to the appearance of a new model which, albeit with modifications, is still perpetuated today.

<sup>3</sup> «In philosophical usage, the corresponding term of Gr. ἀνάμνησις, which in Platonic terminology is distinguished from μνήμη 'memory'. While memory (especially in the Teetetus) indicates the unconscious reservoir of knowledge into potential, reminiscence is the act that transforms that knowledge from the unconscious state to the conscious state. On this distinction Plato sets his theory on the knowledge of ideal forms by the soul. On the other hand, it is maintained, even after the abandonment of this theory, by Aristotle, who dedicated to the distinction of the two concepts the short treatise *Περὶ μνήμης καὶ ἀναμνήσεως* (*On memory and reminiscence*)». From Enciclopedia Treccani. At <https://www.treccani.it/enciclopedia/reminiscenza> [Last accessed November 2021].

<sup>4</sup> Reference is made to the text in Le Corbusier's sketch in *Vers un'architecture*.

<sup>5</sup> Subsequently the burial place of foreign and illustrious personalities.

<sup>6</sup> As in the case of the tomb of Cecilia Metella.

<sup>7</sup> Or of the Farewells, or of All Saints.

<sup>8</sup> The first project will be drawn up in 1936, and subsequently modified in the final version which will be carried out in parts, separating a part of the land which, only in more recent times, will be acquired by the cemetery. The current condition partially distorts the layout of part of the open spaces designed by Plečnik to adapt them to the insertion of a new church.

<sup>9</sup> Even the design of the uniforms of the personnel assigned to the ceremony.

<sup>10</sup> The images of the propylaea of Žale, together with those of some chapels, are pinned by Plečnik himself to accompany his theoretical text *Architectura perennis* in which he deals with offering a personal reading of the architecture of the tradition that precedes the exhibition of his theory on the relationship between *Philosophia perennis* and *Ars perennis*.

<sup>11</sup> Dedicated to the patron saints of the individual parishes of the city.

<sup>12</sup> The city of Ljubljana is in contrast with the Mediterranean landscape of the small island of Rab.

<sup>13</sup> Place expressly dedicated to farewell (independent from the cemetery) in the case of Plečnik, while space for remembrance and burial for Ravnikar.

<sup>14</sup> According to Michel Guiomar's theories, it is the category of the lugubrious that has this ability, as explained in Guiomar M. (1967) – *Principes d'une esthétique de la mort*. Librairie José Corti, Paris.

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José Ignacio Linazasoro  
**About Valdemaqueda. Designing a sacred space.**

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Abstract

The Church of San Lorenzo in Valdemaqueda is located 65 km far from Madrid, in the Sierra de Guadarrama, 20 km far from the Escorial. It was designed and built by architect José Ignacio Linazasoro between 1997 and 2001. It is a small but intense work. This short essay describes the design process and the references that the architect took into account during the project.

Keywords

Sacred space — Memory — Light — Material — Romanesque

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When I was commissioned to design the Valdemaqueda Church, the first thing I thought about was the character the sacred space should have, if seen through modern eyes.

Ever since I was very young I wanted to design a church, a temple. My first architectural experiences were small Romanesque and pre-Romanesque churches for which I was attracted by their size and their mysterious and deep light. It seemed to me that these sacred spaces were more contemporary, closer than the imposing Gothic cathedrals or the spectacular Baroque churches. I saw the same mysterious expression much later in the work of modern architects such as Le Corbusier, Lewerentz or Van der Laan, in their dimly lit churches, their ancestral references and their bare buildings.

When designing the Valdemaqueda project, I decided from the outset to avoid any kind of spectacle, bright light or ornamentation. I also decided to avoid any expressiveness based on spatial or technological exhibition. I wanted to design an interior, first of all an interior, like the rural Romanesque chapels, full of mystery, of expressiveness of the ineffable, of Pascal's hidden God.

I had to design a small space, in a rural setting, far from urban centres. A mountainous place in the Sierra de Guadarrama which divides the two highlands of Castile.

This is a region of the Iberian Peninsula whose character is always identified by its austerity and its tendency towards mysticism. A place, therefore, appropriate for such an experience. I decided from the outset to give the space the maximum intensity with the least possible means, as had always been done in Castile in its small sacred buildings, monasteries and convents.



**Fig. 1**  
José Ignacio Linazasoro, Church of San Lorenzo, Valdeamaqueda. The interior space. Photo by José Ignacio Linazasoro.

I was also interested, as in those small pre-Romanesque Mozarabic churches I referred to, that access was always from the side, never from the axis of the main nave, thus generating an internal route more complex and less direct towards the altar.

I remembered the churches of San Miguel de Escalada, or Santiago de Peralba, always in hidden and remote places in deep Castile. But especially I thought of San Baudelio de Berlanga, of that unique space presided over by a single majestic column in the shape of a palm tree that occupies the centre of the space. There too, to reach the altar through the darkness, you have to turn 90°. A space illuminated only by two windows, a unique and wonderful space that I have always tried to imitate, without succeeding at all.



**Fig. 2**  
The ermita de San Baudelio de Berlanga, Caltojar, 11th century.

All these sensations had been crowding into my memory since ancient times, although at that moment they had been reinforced by new references I had received when I visited Ronchamp or St Peter in Klippan. There I felt, despite the time that had passed between those buildings and the buildings in my memory, the same world of sensations, as if there had been a temporal jump between these new experiences and my memories; a temporal jump towards my first experiences which, in short, were the most profound, despite the knowledge, later accumulated, of the works of the great masters, ancient or modern.

I remember Christmas 1997, sketching continuously, almost obsessively, because it seemed to me that I was faced with the unique possibility of synthesising my deepest desires in a single, almost extreme space.

I drew and drew, even making small models in an attempt to synthesise experiences that came from afar but which only then saw the possibility of being realised.



I already thought, and still think, that light is the fundamental material for composing a space and in the sacred space light is also transformed into a symbolic element. Light conveys a way of feeling space through symbolic connotations.

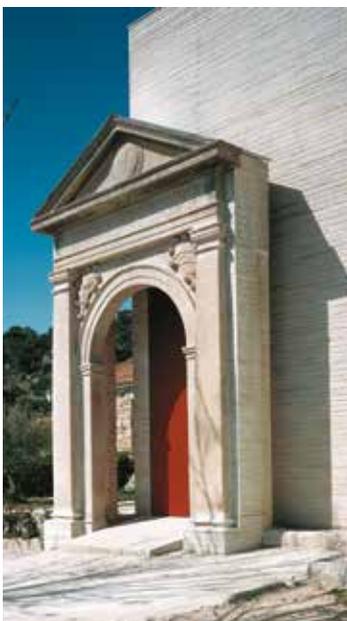
I still believe, as I did then, that our feeling of sacred space is not close to that of the Gothic age, with its stability, with the security of living in the figurative paradise conveyed by the stained glass windows of the cathedrals, nor the rational, serene space typical of the Renaissance, of Redeemer by Palladio. But not even in Reims, in *douce France*, or in wealthy Venice, but in Castile.

That is why I kept thinking about the Romanesque, in its dense, dark, mysterious, dimly lit spaces. It was also my first experience of sacred space, the one I had experienced on my youthful excursions through the lands of Navarre or Castile.

In a time of disbelief, of uncertainty like the present, the light of the Romanesque also expresses those feelings, those doubts in the face of the ineffable. The same as one feels at St Anne's in Düren by Rudolf Schwarz or at St Peter's in Klippan by Sigurd Lewerentz.

The half-light of an interior in the middle of the bright Castilian plateau evokes a feeling of emptiness, but at the same time allows us to experience the yearning for Totality that Miguel de Unamuno talks about.

And light is the vehicle through which this desire is experienced. If we don't control light, if we don't take into account its evocative capacity, every space is anodyne. But in the case of sacred space, it is important to hide its source, so that the space is autonomous from the outside world.



Beginning with the reflected light, all the elements that make up the architectural space, such as the structure or the construction, can be highlighted. However, I have always escaped, in all my projects, the unjustified structural exhibition, but at the same time I have always thought that in the structure, in the construction, there is the origin, the principle of architecture. I have never been interested in the “sculptural spaces” of many modern churches, let alone those that present themselves as a structural exhibition. As Van der Laan stated, the act of lifting a stone vertically symbolises the human presence in the Cosmos. It is the triumph of reason over the inexorability of Nature.

From its origin, the construction arouses an idea of superimposition of elements. In order to build a shelter, a house and the temple, symbolically the house of the gods, a trilithic structure must be formed.

A structure that is present in Valdemaqueda in its most ancestral, most primitive version: the Valdemaqueda church is above all a house, a living space, the very idea of home.

This is why the structure is not treated here as something merely functional, a support, but as a principle of overlapping elements. This overabundance of elements evokes a overabundance which belongs to the world of architecture: colonnades, architraves which refer to a tectonic origin but which overcome it by multiplying, making themselves constructively superfluous. In Valdemaqueda, in addition to overlapping each other, forming a bidirectional framework, the concrete beams – simulating old wooden beams petrified by the action of time – are also overlapped by other wooden beams, suggesting a “successive” operation.



An apocryphal story, invented, but necessary to symbolically introduce the passing of time.

A single pillar, perhaps superfluous and repetitive constructively, though not spatially, orders and directs the interior space, dividing it and, in a sense, multiplying it. It is another manifestation of the overabundance of architecture.

The light brings out the entire structure, placing it against the light and illuminating only the walls. These are immersed in a light whose origin remains hidden, unless you look under the skylights, close to the walls.

A sacred space must first be a timeless space. I have a particular rejection for churches that claim to be modern. Actuality does not belong to sacred space. In the configuration of that timelessness, the traces allow us to express the wear and tear that the passage of time produces.

This is why the interior walls of the single nave in Valdemaqueda – or perhaps two naves divided by a single pillar? – have a rough texture, resulting from a soft, almost transparent coating on the brick with which they are built.

And the concrete beams, as a material similar to a stone consumed by time that is reflected in the imprint of the formwork, also have that same roughness, that same nakedness of the walls, as if they lacked the coating. A form of “unfinished” as expression of timelessness, of permanence, like that seen in the columns of Selinunte without an old coating, but still standing.

Timelessness understood first as memory rather than as the absence of the action of time. An idea that takes us back to the Romanesque period, to its bare walls that have lost ancient wall paintings. I now recall the interior of the church of Giornico in Ticino and how Peter Märkli absorbed its atmosphere in the nearby, beautiful, archaic La Congiunta Museum.

To this density of references, concentrated in a limited space, as happens even more intensely in San Baudelio de Berlanga, Valdemaqueda adds the coexistence of the new with a real pre-existence, with a permanence: that of the old apse of the original church which has disappeared. In this case an exercise bordering on the paradoxical has been proposed, between harmony and contrast.

This apse is Gothic, but a rural Gothic, a wall architecture, more Romanesque than Gothic: no lightness, no transparency, closed by stone walls and with only one side window, still Romanesque.

With my project I also tried to respond to this architecture through an even greater archaism: no vaults, no heights, an even lower, more primitive, more archaic construction. The new was then older, more atavistic.

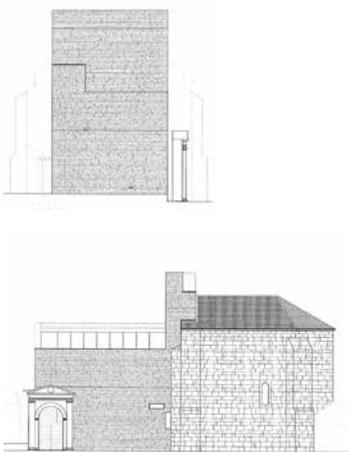
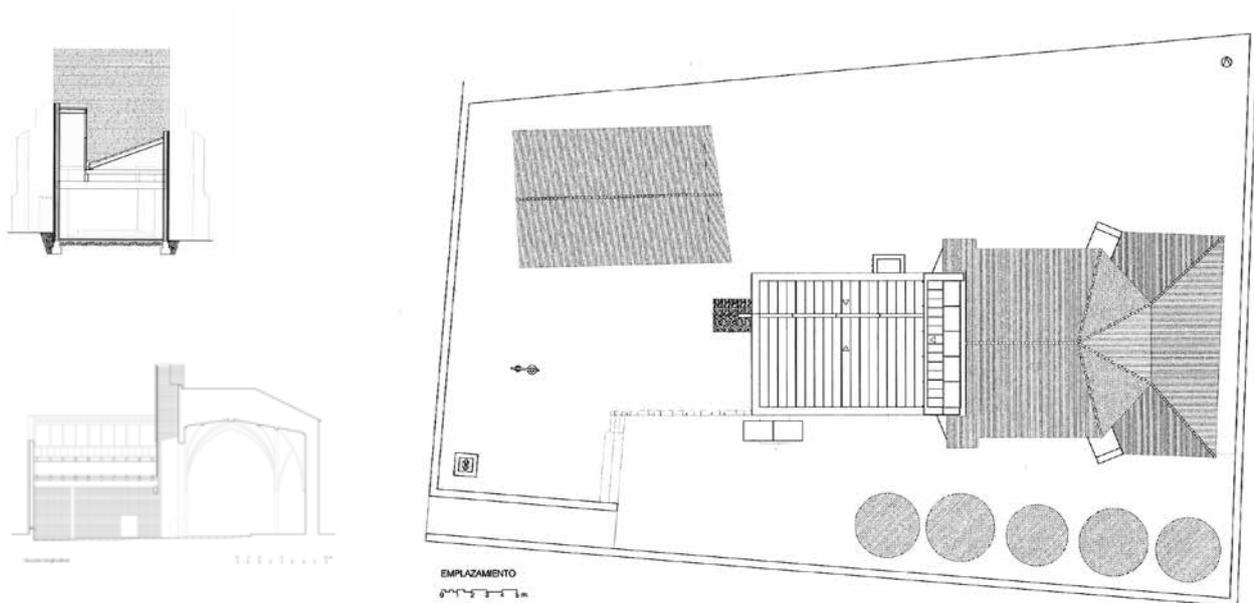
I was also recalling, in making these kinds of reflections, how the relationship between new and pre-existing is produced in certain constructions that never ended up replacing others and that now remain as two incomplete elements, side by side. This is the case of the Cathedral of Plasencia in Extremadura or the two cathedrals of Beauvais, always the new part higher than the old.

Something similar happens in Valdemaqueda, only the old part is higher than the new one, more ‘modern’ than the one now added. The old is now the ancient and the new the archaic.

Bramante, who found a similar situation in Santa Maria delle Grazie, managed to achieve a new unity between the original dark Gothic church and the illuminated rotunda that was added.

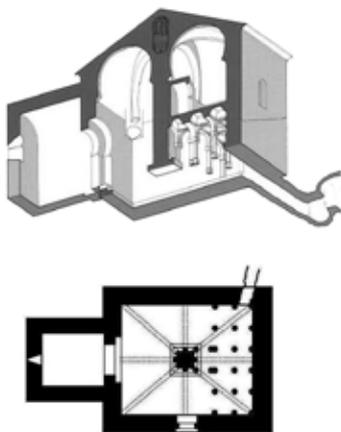
**Fig. 3 a-b-c-d-e-f-g**

José Ignacio Linazasoro, Church of San Lorenzo, Valdemaqueda. Photo by Javier Azurmendi.



**Fig. 4 a-b-c-d-e-f**

José Ignacio Linazasoro, Church of San Lorenzo, Valdemaqueda. Planimetry and elevations.



**Fig. 5 a-b**

The ermita de San Baudelio de Berlanga, Caltojar, 11th century. Axonometric section and plan.

In Valdemaqueda the emphasis was on the meeting point, through the highest skylight that unifies and at the same time separates the two bodies of the church, between which a continuity is established at the same time, through a common wall covering.

The apse represents the conclusion of the path through the church, from the side door and there the simple but beautiful Renaissance altarpiece marks the end of a path that is emphasised through a slightly sloping floor towards the altar.

A new window is opened in the wall of the extension, through which a grazing light penetrates and is reflected in a wooden frame. This window responds in modernity to the old Romanesque window in the apse.

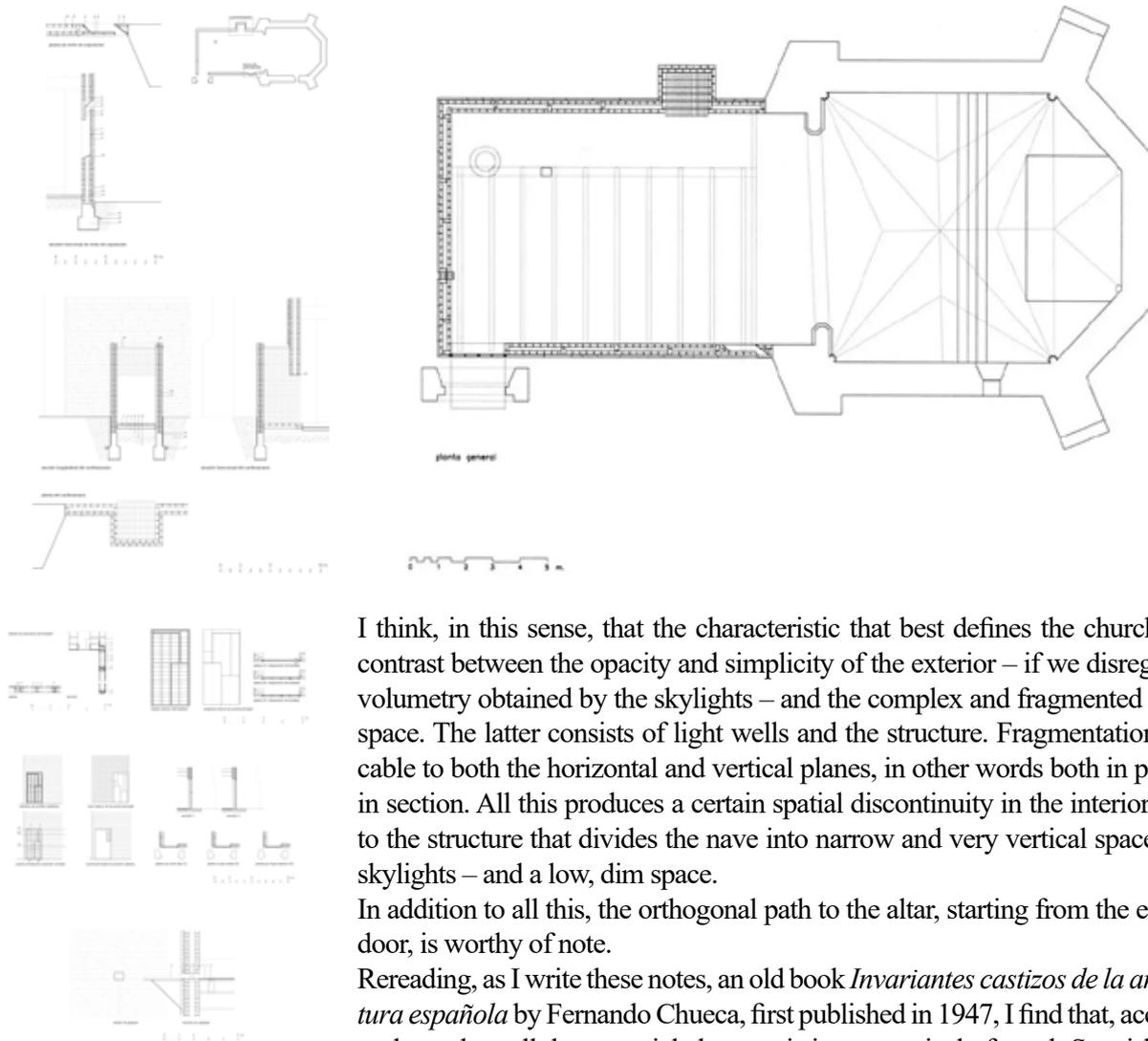
The confessional, open on the opposite wall to the north, receives a cold zenithal light that contrasts with that coming from the skylights through which the walls are lit.

Another window, in this case a small window, the only one from which the outside space can be seen, illuminates the stoup, a polished granite stone. The window simulates a star in the middle of a dim place.

On the outside, the church is monolithic, austere and mono-material. There is nothing to reveal its interior space. I was also thinking here of San Baudelio, of his austerity so Castilian, so similar on the outside to Muslim marabouts. As there, only a door, in our case a Renaissance one, recovered from the old church that has disappeared, interrupts the continuity of the wall. A door that separates itself from the wall, however, as if it were an archaeological find reconstructed as an autonomous construction. The lithic wall is made of narrow and elongated pieces of stone of different thicknesses and textures to give it liveliness and reduce monotony. In this way, the wall also harmonises with the old wall of the apse, worn and weathered by time.

In the distance, the silhouette of the new temple stands out thanks to the profile given by the skylights

A final reflection arises again, now in retrospect, from the analysis of the finished building, from the result of the design process.



**Fig. 6 a-b-c**

José Ignacio Linazasoro, Church of San Lorenzo, Valdemaqueda. Plan and technical drawings.

I think, in this sense, that the characteristic that best defines the church is the contrast between the opacity and simplicity of the exterior – if we disregard the volumetry obtained by the skylights – and the complex and fragmented interior space. The latter consists of light wells and the structure. Fragmentation applicable to both the horizontal and vertical planes, in other words both in plan and in section. All this produces a certain spatial discontinuity in the interior thanks to the structure that divides the nave into narrow and very vertical spaces – the skylights – and a low, dim space.

In addition to all this, the orthogonal path to the altar, starting from the entrance door, is worthy of note.

Rereading, as I write these notes, an old book *Invariantes castizos de la arquitectura española* by Fernando Chueca, first published in 1947, I find that, according to the author, all these spatial characteristics are typical of much Spanish architecture derived from the Spanish-Muslim tradition.

In fact, I had already referred in this essay to my interest, since my youth, for San Baudelio de Berlanga or Santiago de Peñalba, both Mozarabic churches. But now, following Chueca, I could also mention among many others, both for fragmentation and light: the Oratorio del Partal in the Alhambra or the marvelous and tiny early Christian church of Santa Cristina in Lena, located in the mountains of Asturias.

I say all this because it calls into question the possible influence on this church of the Nordic world and, more specifically, of the churches of Lewerentz, more precisely of the church of Klippan, and not because I am now interested in denying this possible influence – in fact I consider myself a great admirer of the work of the Swedish master – but because the facts point us towards another type of architectural value.

Let us highlight two fundamental differences: neither Valdemaqueda's light nor its fragmented space – “quantum”, Chueca would say – has anything to do with the “black light” nor with Klippan's spatial unity and continuity. The single pillar in Klippan centralises the space, while in Valdemaqueda it divides it. It is curious that until this moment, until the re-reading of this rare and, in a certain sense, masterful book, I had not noticed all this. Certainly because Valdemaqueda is a very personal, autobiographical and intuitive project, and the references appeared throughout the design process without having been deliberately researched.

There is, however, a fine, very concise, precise essay by Francesco Venezia, published in “Casabella” in 2002, shortly after the church was built, which seems to confirm these impressions. Venezia visited Valdemaqueda with me and wrote the article shortly afterwards. In his article, among other things, he talks about light and the Castilian landscape.

For all that, I finally ask myself the question: isn't Valdemaqueda after all a profoundly Castilian chapel, an example of architecture that, from an essential version, expresses a set of references that almost always re-emerge in my projects?

José Ignacio Linazasoro (San Sebastián, Guipúzcoa 1947) is a Spanish architect based in Madrid. He graduated in 1972 from the Faculty of Architecture of Barcelona (ETSAB), where he also received his PhD in 1980. In 1977 he began his academic career at the ETSA in San Sebastian. Between 1983 and 1988 he was Professor of Architectural Design at the ETSA of Valladolid. He currently holds the same teaching position at the Escuela de Arquitectura de Madrid and holds lectures as Visiting Professor in several international universities. Since 2005 Linazasoro collaborates with Ricardo Sánchez, with whom he founded, in 2011, the studio Linazasoro&Sánchez Arquitectura SLP. Linazasoro's major projects include: Ikastola in Fuenterrabia (1974-1978); the housing complex in Mendigorria (Navarra, 1978-1980); the reconstruction of the Church of Santa Cruz (, 1985-1988); the University Library of UNED (1989-1993) and the Faculty of Economics in Madrid (1991-2003). Linazasoro's works have won numerous national and international awards.

Francesco Venezia  
***Transitus\****

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Abstract

Francesco Venezia laconically describes the project for the double hypogeum of Caserta Cathedral. The architect guides us along a path of descent and ascent accompanied by the rhythm of shadow, light and penumbra.

Keywords

Architecture — Excavation — Light

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The idea of circulation and circularity emerges immediately as dominating – a double ramp descends from the sides of the Presbytery to the solid shadow of the first Hypogeum; from here, a further descent leads to the Crypt excavated into the Temple's foundation and to the barely announced light beyond the folding path; one gets to the second Hypogeum to find even more light, then climbs back up to the rearward garden and the twilight of the tiny space that completes it in an elevated position. From here, one finally returns to the formerly abandoned concave presbytery- albeit from the back of the Apse, from behind the high altar's detached body; and, once skirted the obstacle, the perspective, in the reverse angle, of the Hall comes as a surprise with its giant columns aligning towards the door. Walking through this architecture means discovering a rhythm made of shadow, light, twilight.

The first Hypogeum, below the Presbytery, shows a «Syracusan» section that remotely evokes a descent into Syracuse's deep quarries: two bulging surfaces divided by a cross-beam.

The Hypogeum is also a «storage» used to preserve objects that were once dispersed in the *Ager*, such as two broken shafts of columns and a sepulchral relief with faces perhaps disfigured by the wheels of carts that passed through that field, reconstituted in a space where the very nature of materials – the walls' scraped off concrete, the poured concrete on the ground – conveys an accessory idea of time's action.

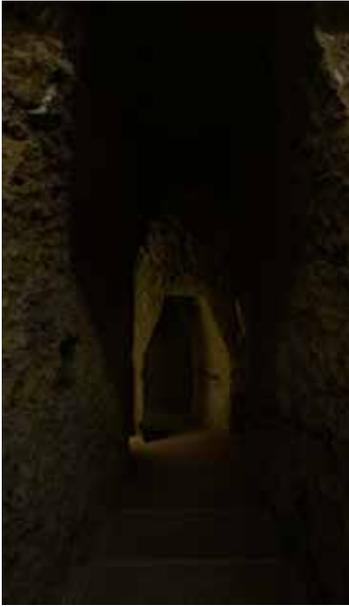
At the center, the black steel ark, placed on a shaft that emerges from the ground, barely opens its panels to reveal the day tile with a graven cross. The cross conveys the instantaneous nature of a gesture – it is as primarily iconic as the cross graven on the secret *cubiculum* of a *domus*, or on the walls of a Catacomb at the dawn of Christianity.

**Fig. 1-10**

The photographs accompanying the text were taken by Mario Ferrara in January 2021.







A symbolic harbinger of the new faith affirming itself upon the ruins of the pagan world.

A "Cumaean" section – clearly evoking the Cavern of the Sybil – defines the space of the ribbed Crypt that descends in a fold towards the second Hypogeum. Here, the materials become brutal: uncertain stones for the walls, *cocciopesto* (lime mortar with crushed pottery) on the ground.

After a fold to the left, the Crypt finally leads to the second Hypogeum. Here, the space is defined by a "Roman" section. A vaulted space almost resembling a Hall in a Roman bath, with a double line of *loculi* on the longitudinal walls articulated by elegant Ionic pilaster strips. A remarkable decision: the interior of the central well is kept visible by letting the headstone that used to cover its opening «fall» to the ground below – a terrible image that eternally evokes an uncovered burial.

A stream of light floods in from a very high opening on the back wall to show the way back outside. A very narrow garden encircled by walls welcomes us as we emerge from the stairs. A play of fragments returns here: the giant fragment made of slabs of various kinds of marbles salvaged from a long abandoned open-air storage; fragments of consoles that support the beams of a double pergola with the joist changing colours in the two directions. This 'archeological' garden is completed by a tiny space for rest, reading, meditation – a *diaeta*.



\* VENEZIA F (2014), *In the depths of the cathedral*, Libria, Melfi.

We would like to thank the author and the publisher for permission to publish the text.

Francesco Venezia (Lauro, Avellino 1944), a refined and sensitive architect, occupies a prominent place among the designers working on the international scene. He is professor of Architectural Composition at the University Institute of Architecture in Venice. He has taught in several universities in Europe and the United States. His works have received several awards and have been published, like his writings, by major international magazines. Among the publications that collect his studies, there are *La Torre d'Ombre o l'architettura delle apparenze reali* (1978), *Francesco Venezia* (1989), *Scritti brevi Napoli* (1990), "Korean Architects", 8, 1995, *Architetture in Sicilia 1980-1993*, (1993), *Francesco Venezia. Ideas and occasions* (2006), *In the depths of the cathedral*, (2014). He lives and has professional practice in Naples.

Mario Ferrara  
**Photography as an experience.  
Light as the guide in the space of architecture**

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The short text is written to accompany the photographic sequence created for the project of the double hypogeum of the Caserta Cathedral by Francesco Venezia included in the previous contribution,

Keywords

Francesco Venezia — Caserta Cathedral — Light

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If the photography is the result of a meeting between author and architecture, then the light, the essence of photography, is the necessary guide to complete the experience of architecture.

Reading with the look the project of the double hypogeum of the Cathedral of Caserta by Francesco Venezia means bump into the light and inevitably being led by it.

The encounter with the first space is refined: the Tent of the Congregation is revealed to the eye during the way of the staircase leading to the first hypogeum, the time necessary for the retina to adapt to the atmosphere of the place of prayer.

The light from the shrine of the covenant invites to get closer; the time of being completes the familiarity with space, things and matter.

The opening dug out of the tuff by as the Cumana section recalls the rite of passage when crossing it.

At the bottom, the light leads to the place of death, the theological oxymoron showed by the architecture of the second hypogeum.

From here, the natural light guides us to the opening that leads to the outer space: "sweet is the light and the eyes like to see the sun" (Qohelet, Ecclesiaste 11-7).

Mario Ferrara (Caserta 1972) graduated in architecture from the Federico II University in Naples and completed a master's degree in "The photographic representation of architecture and the environment" at the Sapienza University in Rome. He divides his time between the professional activity related to architectural photography and the teaching of photography; he has to his credit numerous publications. He has taught architectural photography at the Academy of Fine Arts in Naples and currently holds a course at the Federico II in Naples. Among the main exhibitions: New Italian Churches (MAXXI Rome 2013), Mediterraneo (MACRO Museum Rome 2014): Photographs between land and sea (Venice, 2015), Seminar of Architecture and Urban Culture (Camerino 2015), Museo Foto Festival (Bari 2015), Rovinj Photodays (Rovinj Croatia 2016), Tianjin Design Week (Tianjin China 2019), III Biennale di Architettura di Pisa (Pisa 2019).

Giuseppe Ferrarella  
**Pantheon's door, Alberti's excavation and Chillida's void.  
Forms of the hypogeum and architecture of hollow spaces**

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Abstract

No form or type seems to be uniquely linked to sacred architecture, yet many of these sites possess a common character: the idea of hypogeal space. If in some of these places – especially the oldest – the space is the product of a real material movement, in others – more recent – the effect is reproduced by massive forms, by the logic of subtraction of volumes, by the conception of space as a place 'carved out of the solid'.

Tracing the origins of this need apparently common to many cultures is hard, if not impossible, and although it is fascinating to think that all this has its genesis in the gesture of the excavation of the first tombs, the hypothesis would remain indemonstrable. Through three quick incursions, we will try to reflect on the sense of space in places devoted to the sacred and the ritual.

Keywords

Hypogeum — Underground — Similarity

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**Prologue**

The territory of architecture does not tolerate taxonomies and prefers "similarity"<sup>1</sup> as an instrument of investigation and design.

Unlike categorizations that do not admit trespasses and, therefore, obliterate the shades of the boundaries<sup>2</sup>, the analogical similarity accepts numerous degrees of consonance, hosts contradictions and allows new works to be placed side by side with the oldest ones<sup>3</sup>.

It must be admitted that the architectures called into question in this text – Agrippa's Pantheon, the Basilica of Sant'Andrea in Mantova, the sacred mountain of Tindaya in Fuerteventura – differ not a little: a central plan, a basilica and an aula; three types for as many compositional principles direct ideas of space with profound differences. But if the dissonances appear with a certain determination, there is nevertheless a distant and profound consonance: these spaces offer «the image of a buried architecture» (Boullée 2005, p. 85), or the characteristic of a place that «descends into the sepulchres to give form to [...] ideas» (Boullée 2005, p. 85).

These architectures are, in different ways, the result of massive forms and subtraction of volumes, the manifestation of a particular relationship between fullness and emptiness where the first always wins over the second, the consequence of the use of light as a limited and precious resource, the outcome of the conception of space as a place 'carved out of the solid'. With a synthesis that is perhaps excessively reductive and guilty of generalization, it is asserted that the places of the sacred recall, in distinct ways and forms, more or less deliberately, soil movements and underground places.

All this is stated ‘whispering’, surreptitiously insinuating into an open conversation<sup>4</sup> without the illusion of being able to end it. Because these examples are neither decisive nor exhaustive; they have been chosen for reasons of convenience and their role in this study is instrumental, their presence serves only to investigate the reasons for the form and not to enunciate theories; the intention is not to demonstrate any law, but simply to indicate a path – already beaten, though very little explored – for further reflections on both research and design.

The author is aware that we are about to mention exceptional architectures on which a lot has been written, for this reason we will avoid assertions and proceed with the awareness that we are just scratching the surface of things, reminding (both the reader and the writer) that the main aim is the similarity of spaces and not of matter, and to do this it is necessary to focus not so much on what is there, but on what is missing.

On that nothing, that nothing is not, we direct the reflections of this essay.

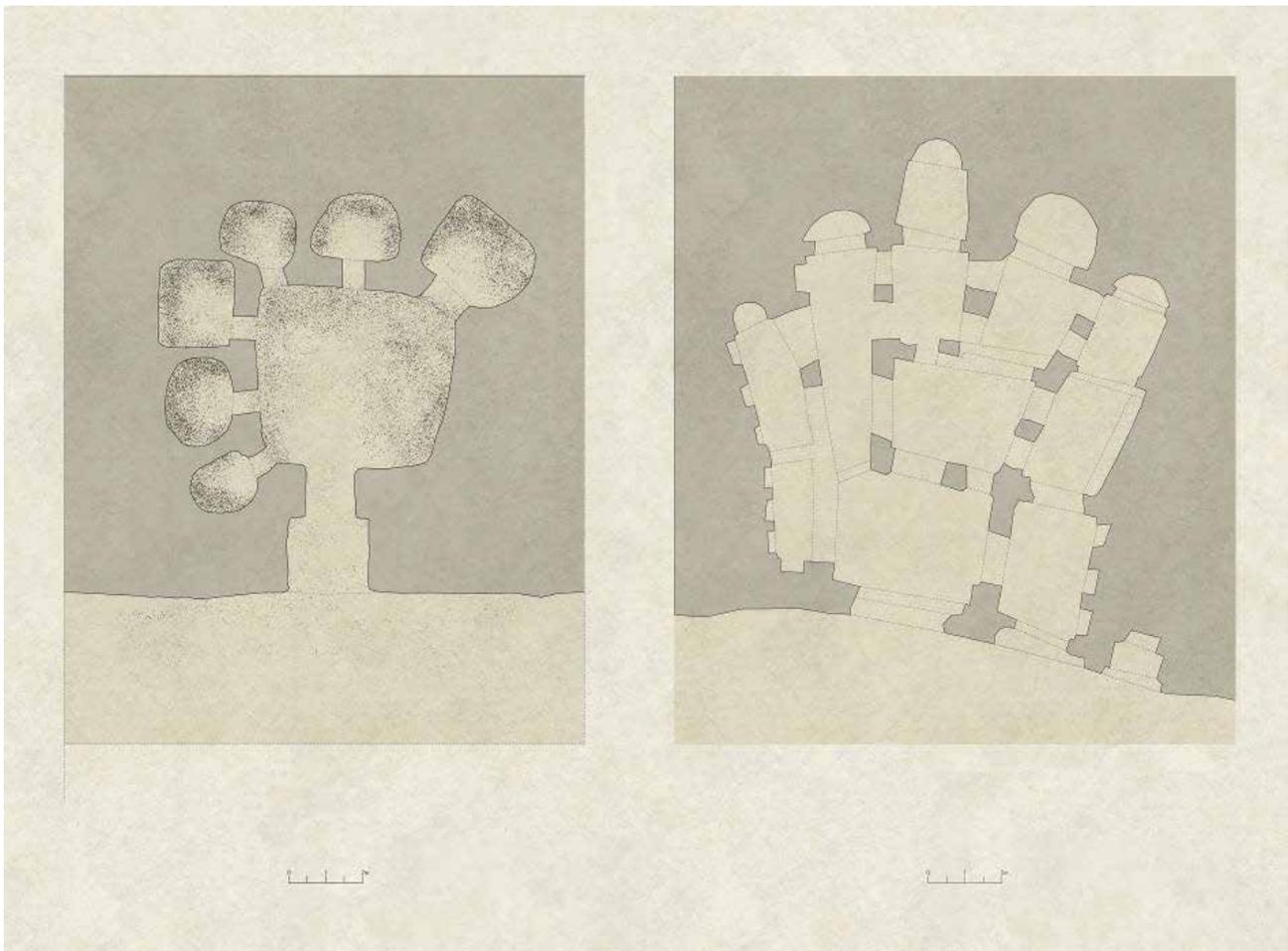
### **The Pantheon’s door**

«Louis Kahn, who saw with singular acuity, remarked: one thing disturbs me about the Pantheon, that big entrance door» (Venezia 2012, p. 22), referring to the betrayal that inevitably suffers any central type that, by its nature, would require a rigid symmetry – geometric, tensile, figurative – with respect to the center of the composition. Pantheon’s door, however, does not only clash with the central type, whose perfection would not admit any other entrance than along the vertical axis, emerging from the underground as in Boullée’s cenotaphs<sup>5</sup> or descending from above as when entering the chambers of a buried city, but also with the very idea of a place that, in its settlement principle and in the forms of its space, evokes the depth of the earth where any relationship with the outside is precluded except for a small disc of sky placed at the zenith.

Looking closely, chapels, exedras and niches around the center are carved into the thickness of the wall and offer themselves to the observer as incursions of the space of the into the thickness of the wall. This not only seems of considerable size, but from inside the Mausoleum is not allowed even an estimate of its true thickness.

However, it must be remembered that the subject of the discussion is an architecture and although symbols and allegories are, in this case, allowed by definition<sup>6</sup>, the thickness of the circular septum has the precise purpose of collecting and dissipating to the ground foundation of the horizontal components of the loads of the hemispherical calotte.

The static device of the wall tracing, according to compositional needs, the inner or outer edge of the septum, which therefore appears thicker than it actually is, produces a perimeter wall that can be ‘excavated’ by retreating. Thanks to these gaps, chapels and exedras around the hall seem to be excavated from the solid as are the niches in the walls of the rupes-trian dwellings, apparently heedless of tectonic issues and conceived as offshoots and appendages of the interior space. With the exception of the pronaos necessary to weave a relationship between the hall and the urban space, the epidermis of the building seems to indicate the intention of its creator to deal with a ‘cavity’ in the broadest sense, to construct «a building conceived solely from its interior [...] that brings it closer to the logic of construction through excavation» (Algarin Comino 2006, p. 58) (T.d.A.). So ‘caved architecture’ shows one of its most interesting characteristics: lacking the technical problem, static constraint and issues related to the

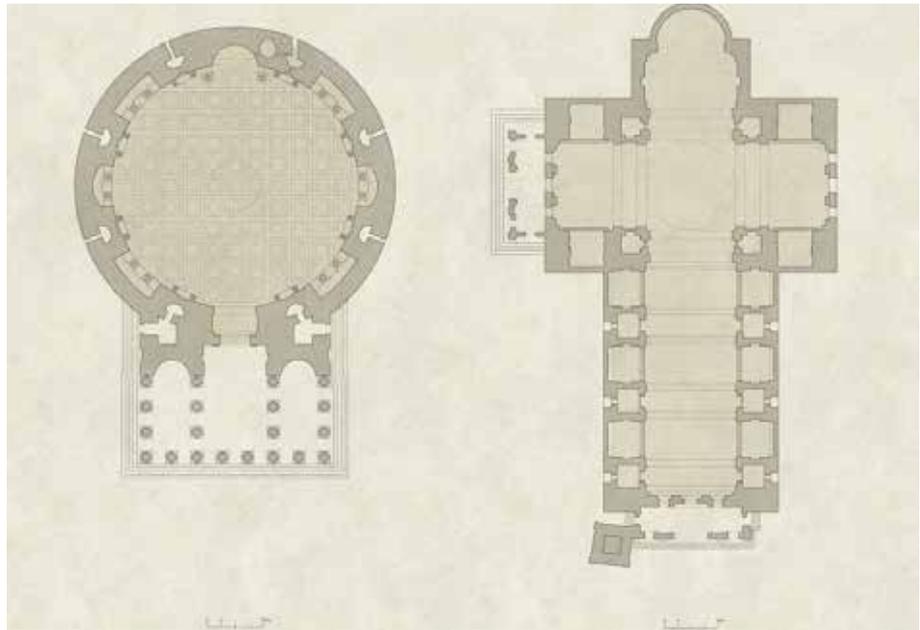


**Fig. 1**  
Examples of rupestrian architecture on typological variations. Left: Tomb of the necropolis of Pantalica. Right: Church of Santa Candida in Bari; note the fan-shaped layout guided by the sources of light. Author's drawing. [Smithson 1979, p. 7].

shell, the space is not generated by definition of what is built but it is the space itself to be built by subtraction; this freedom is then counterbalanced by the elaborations on the type and the constraints imposed by it. And as in the caverns, leaving the city behind and with our backs to the enormous door mentioned by Kahn, our height in relation to the earth's surface sinks to the only available measure: the oculus height.

### The Alberti's wall

We do not know if Leon Battista Alberti had foreseen the 'buried nature' of the building, but in *De re Aedificatoria*, proposing a constructive analysis of the Pantheon's drum, he considered that «those empty spaces, which incompetents would have filled [were] occupied with niches and openings» (Grassi 2007, p. 115). Alberti was probably aware of the fact that that wall thickness was required by the horizontal forces of the roof, and he sensed that, as happens in the territories of art, every technical problem is basically an artistic problem; the internal articulation of his basilica of Sant' Andrea in Mantova suggests this. Directional space is defined by three elements: a coffered vault and two walls into which the chapels are excavated. The technical problem is similar to the pantheon: the barrel vault of the same span as the central nave directs horizontal loads that would have required a considerable wall thickness or the presence of counterforts. Alberti adopts the same constructive expedient as Agrippa's Pantheon: a load-bearing wall that, by incorporating counterforts, disappears between the limits of the nave and the exterior of the building, producing 'solids' that overcome the voids of the chapels, expressed through «a large wall that, through successive lightening, becomes almost a grid» (Grassi 2007, p. 120),



**Fig. 2**

Left: Agrippa's Pantheon. Right: Basilica of Sant'Andrea in Mantova. Notice the similarity in the wall articulations. Author's drawing.

[Webster 1997, p. 36].

just as the voids of the chapels of the Pantheon sink into the thickness of the wall. The light comes – as in all churches – from above, and there is nothing that suggests – in Mantova and, again, in all churches – that the purpose of the windows is nothing else than to capture the light – scarce and precious – giving up their potential to establish a relationship with the external space. Inside the basilica of Sant'Andrea, the 'wall of Alberti' reiterates the idea of a hollowed-out space, illuminated by the 'thermal' windows – half-moons shaped – that indicate nothing to the inhabitant about their position with respect to the ground. Conscious or not, Leon Battista Alberti caved out the basilica space of Sant'Andrea.

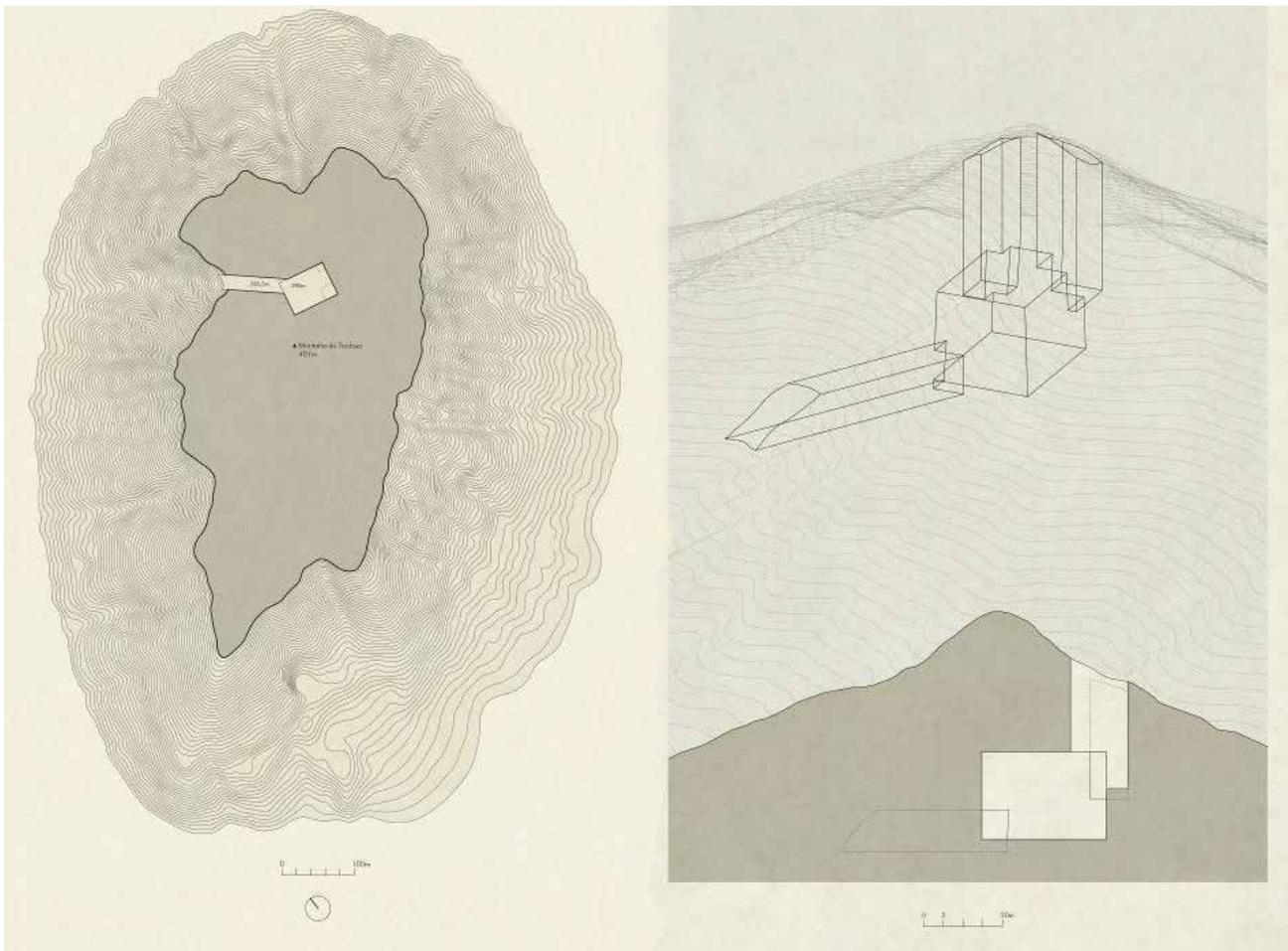
### Chillida's void.

Rock excavation and «the opening of a mine [...] are ritual operations often marked by a surprising archaicity [and this operation leading into the belly of the earth] always involved religious ceremonies» (Eliade 2018, p. 50). Maybe Eduardo Chillida's utopian intuition of «creating an interior space inside a mountain that could offer itself to men of all races and colors, a great sculpture to tolerance»<sup>7</sup> does come precisely from an archaic restlessness to which certain artists seem particularly sensitive.

Chillida wants «a temple» (Algarin Comino 2006, p. 274) hollowed out of the solid. Some previous works anticipate and seem to confirm the idea that the void, understood as a delimited space, is to all intents and purposes a sculptural material. The purpose is not so much to quarry the rock, but in directing a mining operation already in progress, giving form to the 'void' that «miners [unconsciously put] inside the mountain when they extract the stone» (Algarin Comino 2006, p. 275).

After a survey among the mountains that for size, position and geological nature could host the sculpture, the choice fell on Tindaya, a mountain of volcanic origin composed of trachyte, a magmatic effusive rock, located on the island of Fuerteventura in Canary Islands.

The walls of the long sides of the hall slightly converg towards the "roof", in such a way that the short ones, at plumb, took the form of an isosceles trapezium. However, these small angles are not perceivable, if not in their optical effects, due to perspective aberrations: this narrowing of the roof produces in fact a 'distancing' of the ceiling that expands the space



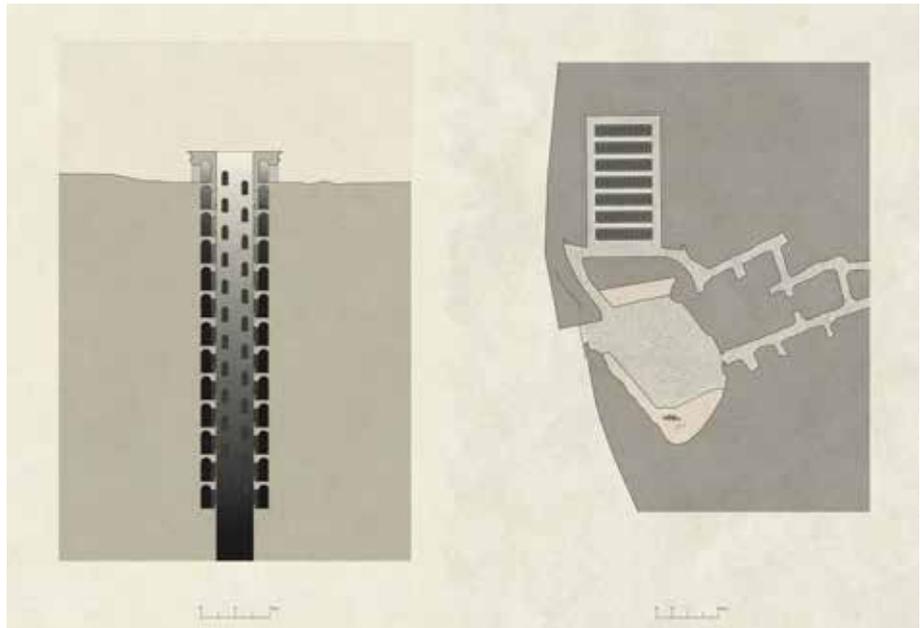
**Fig. 3**  
Project for the Sacred Mountain of Tindaya by E. Chillida. Author's drawing. [Smithson 2001, p. 113].

of the room vertically; in addition, the bell shape follows the fan-shaped distribution of light that, as in many older cases<sup>8</sup>, guides the excavation of the cave by orienting the walls on the directions of the light sources.

Three galleries connect to the great chamber, two of which, assuming a vertical direction, convey the light from the top of the mountain to the interior of the hall; the third gallery, developed horizontally and oriented on an independent vector, allows access from the ridge of the mountain.

It's worth observing the volumetric relationship that these three elements establish with the central hall. For Edoardo Chillida void is a material moldable through the definition of its limits<sup>9</sup>; its actual presence is emphasized through the character of the excavation. The parallelepipeds that define the space of the two light wells, placed in correspondence of the two corners of the short side opposite to the access, present a definite gap: in fact, the internal faces are not coplanar to those of the room and produce, by 'Boolean subtraction', resurgences that seem to claim the autonomy and identity of each 'absence'; in other words, it is possible to identify the shapes of the void by eye, with geometric precision. In a similar but opposite way, the access gallery developing horizontally a little lower than the hall loses consistency connecting to the hall, where it is the floor governing the Boolean operation, defining its rectangular shape in its entirety.

Unlike Chillida's alabasters, where the idea of the void remain confined to the minute scales of small stony elements, the sacred mountain of Tindaya suggests an idea of space that, gaining the dimension of the monument, trespasses towards the territories of architecture, recalling that «the internal volumes have a concrete presence in themselves, independently of the image and structure of the material that encloses them, almost as if they



**Fig. 4**

Left: Saint Patrick's Well in Orvieto. Right: Plan of the Mausoleum of the massacre of the Fosse Ardeatine. Plan of section +1,20m. Author's drawing.

were formed by a rarefied substance lacking of energy but very sensitive to receive it» (Moretti 1952-1953, p. 10).

It is the shape of the emptiness, «the space of the cavern [that] ‘floating’ almost completely free of structural constraints» (Nicoletti 1980, p. 21). 21); it is the sacred well of San Patrizio at Spoleto sinking towards the groundwater of Orvieto; it is Wright’s Guggenheim museum that unravels with a similar downward spiral on the model of Dante’s *Inferno*<sup>10</sup>; it is the Mausoleum of the massacre of the Fosse Ardeatine, whose tomb hall hangs from the labyrinthic tunnels artificially maintaining itself underground, compressed by a rough and convex tombstone ceiling like .

These are the rupestrian architectures around the world where «no trace of human habitation has been found [and it is the character] of sacred places where, with the help of magically powerful symbolic paintings, rituals could be performed» (Espuelas 2011, p.25).

These are ritual places that differ in shape, type, and compositional principle – and they all look alike.

#### **A side note upon *the blind spot***

Notwithstanding the ifs, buts and all the ritual formulas typical of indemonstrable investigations – those that are not made of numbers and calculations but of words and reasons and whose unspoken purpose consists in orbiting around a subject without ever really setting foot on it – the writer believes it’s good to remind that what has been exposed is not the reality of things but its reflection<sup>11</sup>.

Architecture – its essence – cannot be observed directly<sup>12</sup>.

As with the mask of Medusa, we are allowed to see only a reflection, a vague approximation, a partial description<sup>13</sup>. Because although theories are necessary for the construction of an idea – or of a building – these, like the wooden ‘centina’, must disappear once the work is completed, leaving to the forms the task of directing loads and suggestions<sup>14</sup>. And that’s because the nature of things in the world – and man – is varied and unpredictable and, despite our constant demands, reality does not seem inclined to harness itself in theories; indeed, it refuses taxonomies, avoids categories and dodges any scheme, because «gray is my friend every theory, green is the golden tree of life»<sup>15</sup> (Goethe 2015, p. 99).

## Notes

<sup>1</sup> The ‘similarity’ exposed in this essay should be understood as a ‘quality’ peculiar to some architectures whose interaction between type, layout and character recalls other buildings, places and spaces. See among others Marti Aris (2010, p. 187) and Focillon (2002, pp. 67-83).

<sup>2</sup> This is not meant to deny the usefulness of scientific classification tools, nor even lessen their role, but rather to focus towards that region of distant consonances that elude the narrow grids of traditional models of analysis.

<sup>3</sup> «The appearance of a work does not mean the overcoming of the one that comes before, [but] the construction of a historically defined fragment of truth that approaches the previous work» (Gregotti 2009, p. 70)

<sup>4</sup> Several authors have directly or indirectly dealt with the topic of hollow space, among them are Boullée 2005, Espuelas 2011, Venice 2011 and 2012, Algarin Comino 2006, Nicoletti 1980.

<sup>5</sup> Boullée elaborates several versions for Newton’s Cenotaph, thinking more and more about the requirements of an absolute central type. One of the latter version presents a burrowed access that emerges at the center of the spherical room (Boullée 2005, p.22).

<sup>6</sup> In *Architecture* Adolf Loos exposes the differences of purpose and results that exist between Art and Architecture, concluding that «Only a small part of architecture belongs to art: the tomb and the monument» (Loos 2005, p. 254), not because the discipline’s principles disappear, but rather because values such as metaphor, symbol and meaning come into the design.

<sup>7</sup> «Hace años tuve una intuición, que sinceramente creí utópica. Dentro de una montaña crear un espacio interior que pudiera ofrecerse a los hombres de todas las razas y colores, una gran escultura para la tolerancia» Taken from the newspaper *El País* of July 27, 1996, translation by the author.

<sup>8</sup> See, among others, the fan-shaped rupestrian structures of the Monastery of the Madonna della Scala in Massafra, the church of Santa Candida in Bari, and the churches of San Vito and Santa Barbara in Matera. See Nicoletti (1980, p. 195).

<sup>9</sup> The Basque artist had addressed the same subject in many small sculptures prior to the proposal for Mount Tindaya, including the series *Omenaje to Wolfgang Goethe*, the alabasters *Mendi Huts I* and *Gasteiz*, and the marble *El profundo es el aire*.

<sup>10</sup> In *Divertimento* Francesco Venezia (2012) imagines the Guggenheim Museum of New York plugged in the rocky bank of the city of Orvieto, next to the well of San Patrizio.

<sup>11</sup> «Every point of view is partial [and there is no way] of seeing reality that does not depend on a perspective. There is no absolute, universal point of view» (Rovelli 2020, p. 190). In the face of this uncertainty, despite the lack of universal footholds, structuring our routes on these landmarks remains the only possible way to navigate, and this is because «points of view [...] communicate, knowledges are in dialogue with each other and with reality, they modify, enrich, converge [and] our understanding of reality deepens» (Rovelli 2020, p. 190).

<sup>12</sup> Any «question [...] formulated within the same ‘scale’ of axioms, will remain in the usual world [...] and will have a demonstration or a refutation. But if its writing requires a different scale, then it will run the risk of belonging to that submerged world, infinitesimal but latent everywhere, which is neither provable nor refutable» (Martinez 2021, p. 55). In other words, any statement can be elevated to the rank of an axiom and, consequently any axiom loses its validity once the plane of its references is abandoned.

<sup>13</sup> Each law describing a phenomena has a field of existence beyond which its validity, inevitably based on the approximation of our language, gives way to other truths, each confined to its own domain. This phenomenon allows new scientific theories to invalidate the previous ones, while these maintain their validity if confined within the domain of reference (Kuhn 2009).

<sup>14</sup> The metaphor of the centina is a direct reference to the analogy proposed by Carlos Marti Aris in *La centina e l’arco. Pensiero, teoria, progetto in architettura* (Marti Aris 2007) through which he establishes both the decisive importance of a solid and coherent theory and its instrumental role.

<sup>15</sup> «There’s still no simple way to remove our experience [...] from the characterisation of the physical world. [...] Because we lose sight of the necessity of experience,

we erect a false idol of science as something that bestows absolute knowledge of reality, independent of how it shows up and how we interact with it» (Frank, Glaiser, Thompson 2019).

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Adriano Dessì

**Divine Water. The rite of "descent" in the Architecture of the Well. Semantic transpositions in the works of Francesco Venezia and Aldo Rossi**

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Abstract

The present paper tries to highlight certain characters of the Architecture of Holy Well starting from the Sardinian experience assumed as one of the first excellent signs of the architecture of Rite in the Mediterranean. In the Pagan rites, mostly than into the Roman-Christian subsequent experiences, the role of nature, the divination of its resources but also its figurative interpretation, they entered to belong to the idea of space to the point that the Architecture of Well could be considered as the ritual Sardinian Architecture's crowning point, at least until the Basilica period.

So, the paper is to be seen over the track already outlined by a certain Italian culture that sees the architecture as a continuous experience which has his roots into the most archaic spatial manifestations and also sees the rite as the first design form of architecture.

Keywords

Well Temples — Holy Well — Water — Archetype — Descent

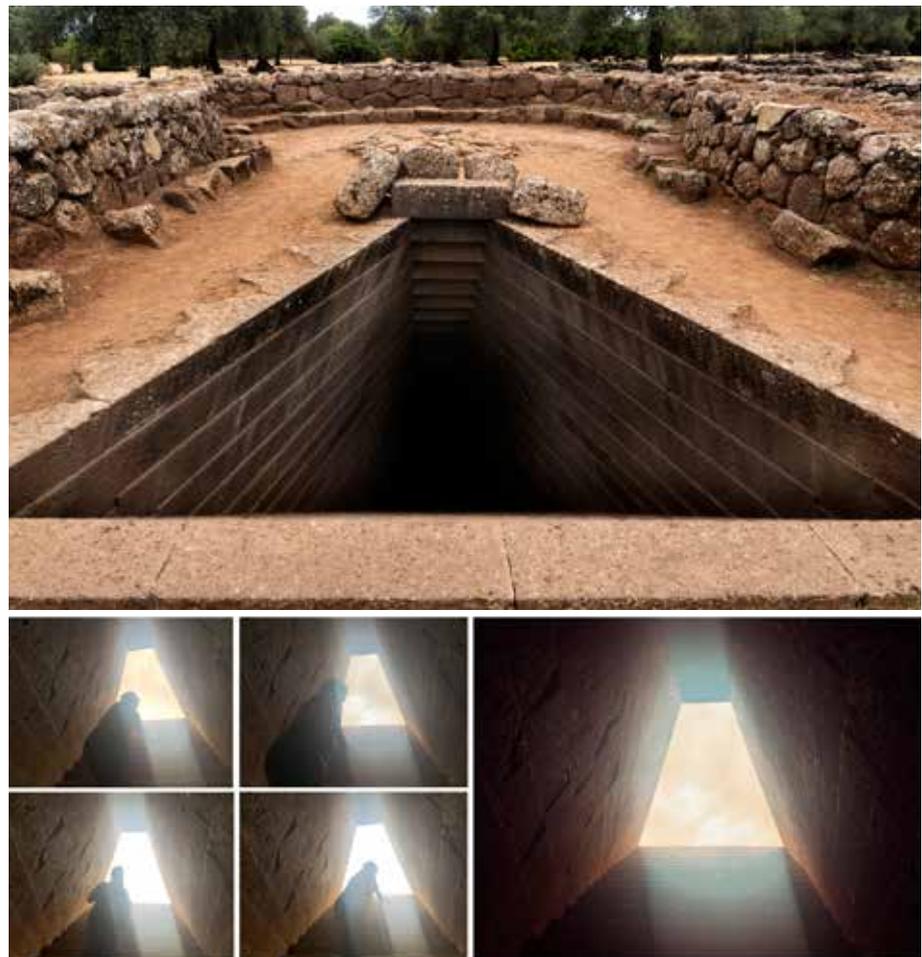
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**Identity between Rite and Space in the Holy Well**

Perhaps for the very first time, the Holy Well – a case that not only will not be repeated but significantly weakened – represents the really original element of the Sardinian landscape if we consider its emancipation from the pragmatic, functional, productive and proprietary idea often considered the cornerstone of its creation, mostly from the Roman domination. Starting right from that ‘anti-classical’ descent of the Sardinian civilization process – and, consequently, of the settled space – repeatedly invoked by Corrado Maltese to explain its customs, living cultures and its own rites, although many of them are still present in the contemporary, that we are allowed to highlight certain characters and, also, a certain influence over the ‘post-modern’ architectural culture.

The introduction of the indissoluble link between the natural resources management – and the same interpretation of nature – and their symbolic-figurative meaning, establishes that ‘spillover’ between prehistoric and historic communities of Sardinia in respect of which it is not longer the immature graffito or the bronze figurine to ensure the main representative form of community, but the space itself and the social behavior in that. Dissociated from a function strictly connected to the existential needs of the Nuragic civilisation, mainly the food and the military ones, the Holy Well seems to be the stronger expression of that civilisation, much more than its opposite and emerging figure, the Nuragic Tower.

It is precisely this characterization of ‘exceptional’, disconnected from its everyday dimension – temporary and ephemeral – finds the main reason precisely in the ritual climax, that makes it primary element, constant presence, and constantly adapting, in all the successive civilisations.



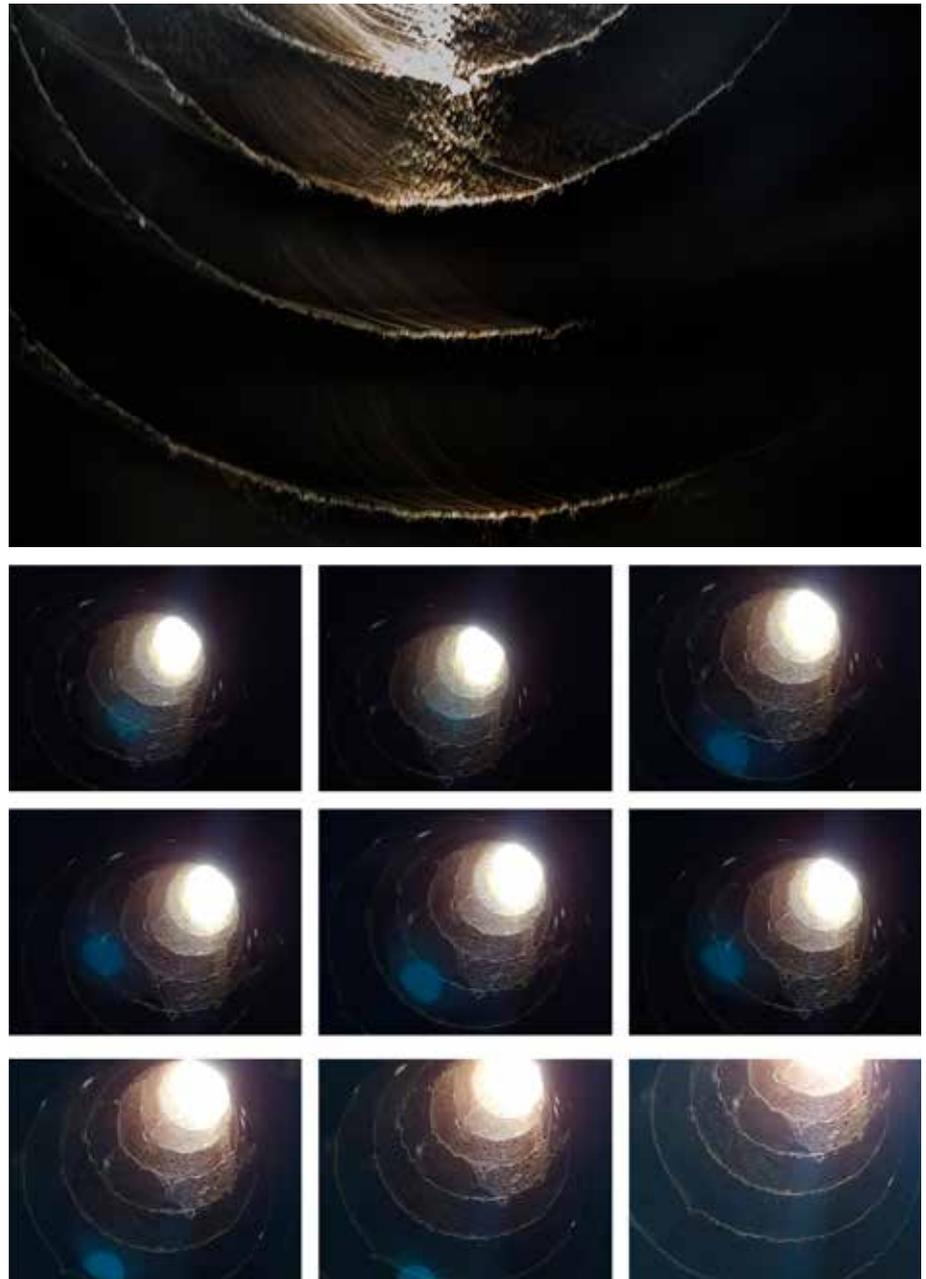
**Fig. 1-2**

Summary of the photographic reportage on the Well of Santa Cristina of Paulilatino. External view of the staircase vestibule; series on the entrance seen from the inside.

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In fact, the Rite of Water ‘that has been handed’, becomes an architecture ‘that has been handed’ and that acquires new forms mediated by the cultures of different times of history and by the new needs, but always with a common code. The ‘round’ architecture of well and the issue of depth entrance to reach the water, have always been present throughout the centuries: the medieval ‘cuba’ of Islamic origins, the covered well of churches squares, the Catalan terraced and fountain-wells, have been the clear evolution of the Holy Well during its progressive passage from being a funeral-divinatory element to a libation one; the libation became the main rite from the Roman to the Modern Period. The divinity of Water was evoked into the Well through the ancient propitiatory rites of rain, spread all over the Mediterranean area, but mostly through the choice of the catharsis places, linked to the rite of descent, of the return to the Source as a return to the ‘origins’. Into this interpretation it is possible to explain the succession of the two main spaces of the Holy Well – the staircase vestibule and the hypogean chamber – in which are represented at the time ‘the descent’ and ‘the stasis’, into the womb of the Earth Mother.

The first spatial experience materialises in the geometric-trapezoid slot, laid out along an enclosed cleaning and sunk into the thickness of the ground, in which the large entrance and the progressively narrow descent – and that becomes closer in all the dimensions – combines the symbolic aspect, made of clear anthropomorphic allusions and of a space that becomes figure and natural monument, with that ‘panic abstraction’ linked to the progressive construction of the darkness, of the cavity and also of the loss of the earthly coordinates. The second one occurs in a subterranean space, but also circular in plan and with a concave shape, that combines



**Fig. 3**

Summary of the photographic reportage on the Well of Santa Cristina of Paulilatino. Detail of the entrance seen from the inside.

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the millenary need and technical skill in building wells with the symbolic aspect of maternal womb that accepts the life.

About the interpretation of forms, it is not insignificant the ‘uterine’ form of the enclosure, axially open in front of vestibule, that divides the well’s area from nature, especially from woods and pasture lands.

**The Rite of Death as return to Earth: the descent as space of “transition”.**

The functional duplicity of the Holy Well has been present in the main archaeologist theories since the half of the nineteenth century (initially and until at least 1924, it has been seen as tanks by Taramelli, from 2008 it has been definitely seen as Well-Temples by Usai, De Palmas and Webster), suggests non only the exceptional architectural fact, but the permeating of the divinatory rite into Neolithic societies. However from disinterested times, the overlapping between the burial and the well place has been a really important field of research as like as the identification, into the Sardinian construction culture, of a common *modus* and code with others similar

and contemporary cultures, mostly in the Mediterranean: in 1904, Albert Mayr, impressed by the strong similarities to the Mycenaean *Tholoi*, interpreted the Santa Cristina's Well like a really domed-tomb. In fact, as many historical theories show starting from the earliest Neolithic representations, the punitive rite linked to "non-return" from the well is not just an expression of the physical and earthly death, but mostly of the spiritual and "superhuman".

The *Sardus Pater*, but also the bronze warriors and the well-known "Giants" found into the funerary wells, show, in addition to their divine abilities, disproportionate eyes and arms, "exalted" where not multiplied by the magic functions of the water element.

The pagan Priests and the Wise Men considered water also to be a decisive instrument of law: in the case of any crime committed doubt, they forced all the community people to going down to well as a purification action – but also as a punishment; the "non-return" was a proof of guilt.

### **The stone for an abstracted construction. The isodomic form and the role of decoration.**

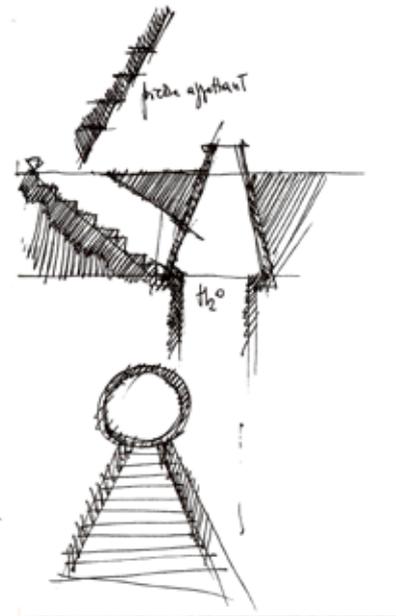
A very main role into the spacial research in this Architecture falls to construction, to a *tékton* which is linked to searching for time and space that are not in real time and real space. Aldo Rossi described it on the pages of *Quaderni Azzurri* as an «ancient presence, enough ancient to be future, because it is not clear if it is caused by a certain mind, machine or wisdom perfection». The research in the construction ways and in the accurate realisation suggests the ritual character of architecture reaching the figurative and symbolic peaks, mostly if we compare them to the contemporary tectonic practices.

An exceptional, in fact, that is difficult to find in its contemporary architecture, like as Nuragic towers, huts, *domus de janas*, still indissolubly linked to a primitive *modus* of building which starts from a basic and archaic *tholos*, urgently needed for defense, shelter and burial.

In the Holy Well's architecture the archetype is made of a precisely sculpted *tholos* which is enhanced by the isodomic construction in which, as stated Francesco Venezia, «...is repeated the trapezoidal figure starting from the single stone's form to the staircase-vestibule's one, in the plan and section viewing». He shall even referred to the Santa Cristina's Well, in the Central basaltic Highlands of Sardinia, near Paulilatino, which represents in some way the "model" of this kind of Architecture. In 1955 Cesare Brandi wrote about it: «in this place everything is incredible, the stones, the elegance of construction, in comparison with it the Atreo's Grave in Mycenae, that is much more bigger, seems like a countryside work, nor can it be imagined that the good Nuragics might have called an Achaean architect».

Close to the Santa Anastasia Well, in Sardara, was discovered a decorative fragment probably belonged to some frame solution of an upper holy niche; it is made of a geometric and serial pattern, a sort of tryglyph *ante litteram*. However, the name of 'Temple' was attribute just since the excavations of the largest archaeological area in Sardinia, that of Santa Vittoria in Serri, in the Central Hills, due to its accuracy of construction and the stone-base over the underground chamber; in the Holy Well *Su Tempiesu*, we can find an interesting variation of a monumental substruction with main facade, characterised by a large triangular pediment close to arch-shaped solutions. Subsequent studies showed precise geometrical relations between plans and elevated structures, proving the consolidated manipula-

perché non si sa dettata  
da quale perfezione di-  
mente, di macchina o di  
sapienza -  
E il contrasto con la natura  
perché il taglio della pietra  
sembra di un'altra civiltà -  
dono sempre affascinato  
da questo sistema di  
discesa mediante scale  
per entrare in uno spazio  
che è illuminato dalla  
luce zenitale - E qui il  
rapporto è tra il cielo  
e l'acqua, così vi deve  
esser un giorno nell'anno  
in cui la luce entra  
perpendicolarmente  
nel cono e nell'acqua -

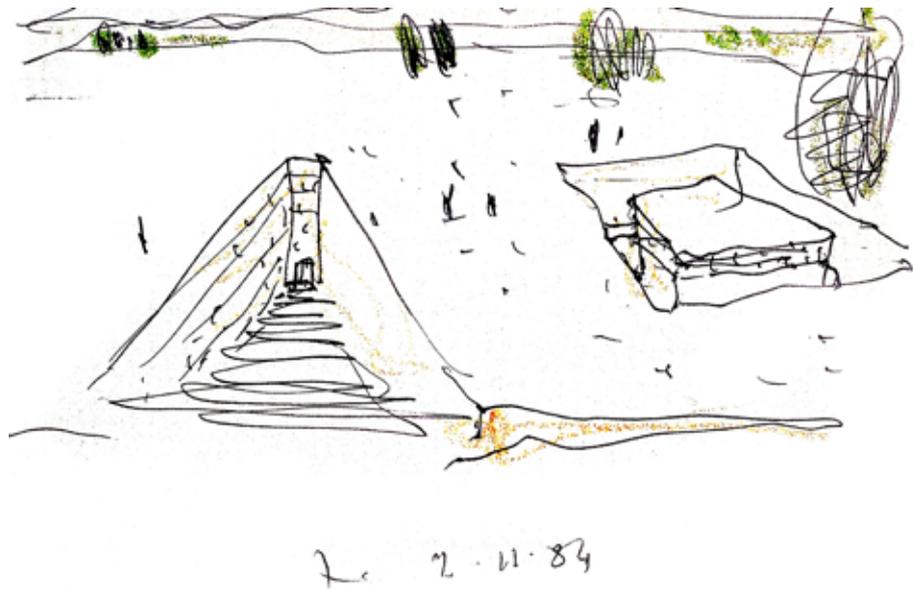


**Fig. 4**  
Reproduction of Aldo Rossi's  
Quaderni Azzurri, n. 33, 1987.

tion of proportions and measures linked to astronomical references, as we can usually find into Mediterranean and pre-Christian cultures.

#### **Continuity in the contemporary design: the Archetype of excavation, the Hypogeum and the “weight” of zenith into Venezia’s and Rossi’s work.**

Starting from the idea of Francesco Venezia: «the subterranean world, which better than any other express an essential reference for the human condition, it is, in the memory, a primal perception of building. Each of us, while is thinking about the earliest building form, thinks about digging», and from that of Aldo Rossi, which identifies in the Holy Well’s architecture the apical experience of «the descent space for entering the place illuminated by zenithal light», we can understand not only a renewed and embedded regard for archetype, but also a main characterisation of a settlement culture, the Mediterranean, indissolubly linked to the ritual of space. The question that still today can be putted on this archetypal form – and implicitly on architecture of rite – is particularly useful into the rediscovery process of the basic principles of the architecture in itself and of finding a new central role into design of the original materials like earth, water and light. From these two ideas it doesn’t remain only the informative description of direct experience, but mostly their design intents proved by the unfinished analogical process – through the journey sketches – between the archetype and the architectures which they were designing at the moment. We may identify a precise moment in the Francesco Venezia’s work, at the beginning of 80’s, in which the important reference to this archetype is reflected in the role of the material to capture the time and in the material expression into hypogeum. It appears a growing conviction, already present in the previous years, that one of most important objectives of an architect would be finding the way to put the hidden forms of the subterranean world in the contemporary time and revealing them through the construction. Even if in a tectonic of extrusion or in a ground modeling, instead explicitly of hypogeum, we can find clear reference to the space of descent and shadow in the eroded walls of the Gibellina Archaeological Museum’s patio entrance (1981-87); to those issues in addition to the presence of water in the great cracks of ‘Hidden Gardens’, always in Gibellina (1986); to the shaded de-



**Fig. 5**  
 Francesco Venezia, sketches of hypogeum forms (Cerveteri).

scent followed by deep doors on earthly thick walls and isodomic stones into the artificial arena of little open-air theatre in Salemi (1983-86).

However, it is at the beginning of 2000's that the Venezia's research and work into hypogeum found a practical and direct application in the recovery and spatial adjustment of the Cathedral of Caserta's Crypt well described in *Nel profondo della Cattedrale. Caserta 2010-2014*. In this case, it is in the concrete walls of the new exposition rooms that is impressed the dramatic and erosive action of the water and of the sand that reveal the layers below, evoking the temporality interpreted in the meaning of the long sedimentation process of material. This renewed role of material temporality of the hypogeum pursued by Venezia, inevitably intersects the continuous research in the field of relationship between the light and the empty space in architecture, not only to design devices for the expositions, but mostly for linking the exposition itself to the symbol and measure of the time. It is still during the beginning of 2000's he designed the exposition for the Venetian Palazzo Grassi titled 'Gli Etruschi', characterized by a big truncated-pyramid skylight which compacts in the middle the brown architectural space of the main room; and also between 2012 and 2015, even if markedly referred to the Egyptian culture, he designed the installations for the 'Salone della Meridiana' of the National Archaeological Museum of Naples and the well-known big pyramid built in the center of amphitheatre of Pompei in which was contained the exposition titled "Rapiti dalla Morte"; in particular those two last works have been completed during 2014, the year in which he traveled again in Sardinia and he held a *Lectio Magistralis* at the Cagliari's Faculty of Architecture opened proper with a presentation of the Paulilatino's Well with many clear references to it.

Due to this interpretation we may better understand the last Aldo Rossi's consideration on the Quaderni Azzurri pages about the visit to the Santa Cristina's Well: «and there is the link between sky and water. It must be a day of year in which the light goes perpendicular into the cone and the water». The two Quaderni pages dedicated to the Well opened with the really close similarities between it and the entrance cone of the Carlo Felice Theatre in Genova, relating to zenith light excavating the thickness of the architectural mass, but mostly in comparison with the Fontana Monumento in the Segrate Municipality square, in which – even if it is showed a meaning inversion be-

tween the descent and the rise, the space in elevation and the hypogeum – it is clear a composition of very similar elements and the exaltation of symbolic circular and triangular forms that sustain a suspended pathway in which manifests the «the slow water leaching on the material».

In order to support the argument, the Holy Well's Architectural Experience is seen as an opportunity, when it is continually being discussed the role of the Rite in architecture, to review the archetypes as one of most important references for the architectural project. As Alberto Campo Baeza writes, in fact: «the light is matter and material (...) it leads our perception of time perforating the space created by generally massive structures, that needs to be hold to the ground to transmit the force of gravity» and insists: «the Ancients required the light from above, what I call 'vertical light'. (...) This is the dimension of that kind of light which penetrates the shadow, it is the extraordinary case of Pantheon».

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Claudia Tinazzi  
***L'azzurro del cielo - The blue sky - of Modena.***

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Abstract

The projects built by Aldo Rossi represent a coherent biographical journey that, as it unfolds, more explicitly clarifies an original process of composition and decomposition of discrete pieces within a typological reasoning of architecture that is essentially aimed at interpreting a whole host of ever-changing themes. At the same time, his written reflections produced during the same timeframe, jotted down in the Quaderni Azzurri contain some profound general insights into the concept of life and death, partly conditioned by the serious car accident that left him bedridden and immobile in hospital for a significant length of time. With this in mind, the extension of the San Cataldo cemetery is what we perhaps still to this day believe is the original example of this process of assembly and disassembly as played out in the urban dimension; but this primordial machine of Modena is also the direct consequence of those existential reflections on death and the structure of his deeply marked, ailing body as a series of discrete elements - fractures to be put back together.

Keywords

Aldo Rossi — City of the dead — Typology — Composition — Memory

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In mid-1971, in April, on the Istanbul road between Belgrade and Zagreb, I was involved in a serious car accident. Perhaps it was out of that accident, as I have said before, that in that small hospital in Slavonski Brod, the design for the cemetery in Modena was born, just as my youth came to an end. (Rossi 1990, p.22).

Without any particular emphasis – as is proper for any architect's design process – reason and emotion, logic and autobiography lay out, in a tight and at times disorienting dialogue, Aldo Rossi's initial reflections – both written and drawn – on the topic of life and death. Reflections that, in our eyes, unquestionably coincide with one of the most important projects in Rossi's poetics: the San Cataldo cemetery in Modena, designed in collaboration with Gianni Braghieri starting with the 1971 competition. The great city of the dead – still unfinished to this day – which, in the clear urban metaphor, distils the procedure of arranging and recomposing volumes, fragments of architecture or pure forms according to a profound typological reasoning, already exercised in the many projects that were precursors to his contribution to Modena and intent on addressing the interpretation of the theme of death and the rite of burial within the modern city. A method that was already consolidated and known to critics despite the scant number of works he had built up to that point<sup>1</sup>, with the Modenese project marking not only the creator's declared transition from youth to a more mature stage of life, but also the deviation necessary to allow for his architecture to take on an increasingly autonomous character, made particularly evident by the introduction of colour alongside his rigorous white, marking the moment when he started to gradually gain an awareness of the role of colour and material that later became decisive in his subsequent architectures<sup>2</sup>.

To those engaging with Rossi's oeuvre today, it is clear that for the Milanese architect, some projects more than others contribute to the almost yielding evidence of a strong link between individual occasions, specific architectural themes, more disciplinary musings and more general and often personal questions, deeper meanings, existential questions, finally approaching that «baseline emotional nucleus», the original canvas for his *Scientific Autobiography* in which certain "chosen" projects considered iconic in Rossi's journey – one of which is the San Cataldo cemetery – become a running theme, the thread of a line of thinking that almost becomes an obsession which he returned to time and again in order to establish the definitive link between life and architecture.

These are two parallel souls in the figure of Aldo Rossi – not, as many have often proposed, two distinct periods following on from one another, but two souls sharing a weighted coexistence to do justice to a precise idea that is also the most original image of that *architecture of the city* a title so hotly competed for between monuments and residences, between architecture and humanity. In every one of his projects, it is as if one of the two terms momentarily prevailed over the other, according to the reasons for the interpretation of the theme, both of them – translated into reality and imagination – remaining ever-present, yet alternating their roles and importance in the search for a certain adequacy of expression, a compositional clarity that uses an ever-changing hand to trace Rossi's way of describing – or rather, interpreting – the world.

In the increasingly valuable *Quaderni azzurri* number 9 bears the title *Architecture the Modena cemetery. 5 August 1971 - 10 October 1971* with a number scribbled just above it: "40", Aldo Rossi's age, confirming – should there still be any need – his continuous overlapping of thoughts, life and design in a single drawing that is drawn by the mind even before the hand has produced it. The first few pages of the slim notebook divulge his thoughts on the matter:

This collection of buildings, taken as a whole, constitutes a city; in the city, the private relationship with death once again becomes a civil relationship with the institution. As such, the cemetery is still a public building, with all the necessary clarity and rationality of pathways that that entails, and with a proper use of land, extremely closed-off by a wall with windows. The melancholy of the theme means that it is not far removed from other public buildings. (Rossi 1999a)

The osteological project, the construction of which started in 1976, is interpreted by Rossi and Braghieri as a fragment of the city, part of it yet separated from its context; a vast and imposing skeleton stretched out across the landscape as in the most abstract image, irremediably conditioned by its creator's reference to that car accident which, forcing him to remain immobile in a foreign hospital room contemplating the fractures of his body, became its perhaps involuntary figurative origin, waiting to be pieced back together into a new unity.

But beyond any singular and autobiographical image, the project – which won an international competition that saw the seamless juxtaposition of revolutionary visions, on the one hand, and purely functionalistic exercises on the other<sup>3</sup> – is configured as a vast, open-air enclosure which, at almost exactly double the size of Cesare Costa's Monumental Cemetery, to which it is connected by means of a mechanism located below the Jewish cemetery, combines volumes that are monumental in both line and mass in a composition that transcribes the rite of places of death in a story that is an



**Fig. 1**

Aldo Rossi. The cemetery in Modena, September 2017. Photo by Annalucia D'Erchia.

urban route; the sacred space of memory in a city.

The landscape, here the physical boundary between the city and the “simple” outskirts<sup>4</sup> without any particular quality – «largely undistinguished»<sup>5</sup> in Rossi’s words – is an indispensable instrument of the project not so much for any particular intrinsic value, but rather due to the clear, critically chosen dialogue as masterfully conveyed to us visually by the photographic campaign that Luigi Ghirri produced on several occasions<sup>6</sup> in the infinite construction site in Modena. Even in those faded, opaque or sunbaked colours so typical of the Modenese photographer’s technique and poetics, the vast windowed enclosure inhabited by *abandoned architectures* that are almost metaphysical in nature confidently reaffirms its post as a solitary sentinel of the passing of time, straddling the status of building site and ruin.

As in Rossi’s own lucid words (1999a) «larchitecture, often driven out of urban centres, found the cemetery as a subject to be a lofty undertaking, quickly surpassing the individual monument and making it sublime, just like hope, ‘ultima dea’, fleeing from the tombs».

In its many subsequent versions, the project never strays too far from the original idea of a familiar architecture of monumental dimensions, a docile and protected enclosed form, almost a founding city imagined in its entirety in one fell swoop – a city as a final resting place for the dead and one of memory for the living – which establishes urban relationships through entrances, pathways, pauses or long perspectives that envisage a unity between the Christian and Jewish cemeteries, together with the new extension; in this project, the analogies with the spaces of the city, perhaps even of an ideal city, are translated into the design of an extensive facility in which houses and monuments, streets and squares alternate like lines

**Fig. 2-3**

Aldo Rossi. L'architetto e la città, MAXXI Rome – section dedicated to the Modena Cemetery Project.

and points on a vast urban scene to convey the intimate link between life and death, because «this house of the dead has a time that is linked to life». (Rossi 1999a).

The galleries of the columbaria, spread over several levels around the perimeter of the enclosure, like streets of the dead – or rather, deck-access blocks of flats – are defined in the honest interpretation of the typological form that is necessary even before the geometrical form; in the centre, meanwhile, the representation of the rite of death intertwines the spaces for collective ceremonies in a tight sequence: the shrine to those who fell in war – a cube «with the structure of a house with no floors» that is an abandoned house – the lined-up bodies of the ossuaries – composed in a «regular succession inscribed in a sloping triangle» – the mass grave – a cone whose ancient form is that of a «collective tomb» – at the end of the ceremony.

Shadow, the final actor in the project, throws the geometry of the spaces into relief, creating sharp perspectives, measuring the places that are compressed or dilated in various parts, demonstrating the strength of that *Architecture of shadows* admired a few years previously, in 1967, in the work of Étienne-Louis Boullée and transcribed with a clear sense of identification in the introduction to the. *An essay eon Art*: «The Architecture of Shadows thus becomes the link and the search for the principles of architecture in nature that is B.'s primary concern.» Moreover, it is difficult for the writer to imagine the Modena project ever coming to fruition without the fortuitous "encounter" between Rossi and Boullée<sup>7</sup>. At the same time, shadows become such a marked stylistic signature of the design of this project that they overturn their canonical relationship in the many axonometric areas in which large black silhouettes rush towards us.

«The material of the cemetery is concrete, the plaster of houses and factories. Where use requires it, stone – both white and grey – is used»<sup>8</sup>.

*The blue sky* which was the motto of the project submitted for the competition – an explicit reference to Georges Bataille's novel (published as *Blue of Noon* in English) – is actually interpreted specifically in the chromatic definition of the triangular rooftops of the large, inhabited boundary to establish an ideal fixed background, the memory of a possible blue sky in Modena.



**Fig. 4**  
Aldo Rossi. *L'architetto e la città*,  
MAXXI Rome – Project for the  
Marchesi Chapel at Bergamo  
Hospital, 1978.

After designing the San Cataldo cemetery, Aldo Rossi continued – in discrete episodes – to engage both his architecture and his thinking with the theme of death, including closer to home, in Lombardy. In the continuous parallel between the *chouse of the living* and the *house of the dead* – between the city and its memory – in Ponte Sesto (Rozzano), the Milanese architect imagined lending form to that civil sense of the end of life which, in his realistic adherence to the Lombard character, becomes a place in the city or indeed a part of it – a city whose deepest nature he revives.

Although it is but a small project, I could write a great deal about the cemetery in Rozzano cemetery, even comparing it to what I created in Modena. Unfortunately, it is nearby a horrible cemetery from the 1960s, and certainly has nothing like Costa's cemetery or the Jewish cemetery in Modena around it. (Rossi 1999b)

Rossi contrasts the complex yet silent concrete-clad “machine of death” – which perhaps seeks, albeit unsuccessfully, to work on the utopia dreamt up in Rozzano itself in 1959 by Nanda Vigo for a futuristic prototype of a vertical cemetery<sup>9</sup>, – with a new fragment of the city: quiet, modest, civil

and profoundly collective, the result of those *pastoral journeys*<sup>10</sup> interpreted as a tangible opportunity to listen to the memory of the places most familiar to him in great depth. A small urban project that seems intent on using just a few gestures to restore a more human dimension, one of silence and remembrance, even in this strip of land squeezed by the most recent transformations, establishing a polite dialogue with popular tradition so earnest that it may in fact confuse contemporary visitors as to the exact chronological order of the two cemetery buildings.

The project report – which, as is often the case with Rossi, goes far beyond a simple description of the envisioned architecture, in this case embarking upon new reflections on the various possibilities of the “idea of the cemetery” – presents a bold reaffirmation of Rossi’s “credo”: «this is the authentically civil character of the cemetery, a part of the city where hope has not fled – as our great poet said – but rather where hope has been sublimated into that incomprehensible feeling that we have towards the dead»<sup>11</sup>.

In the light of this, the extension to the cemetery, built between 1989 and 1999, is defined first and foremost as the construction of a road, an avenue with every last urban element carefully designed, right down to the lampposts and benches, linking the entrance to the cemetery with the small chapel located at the other end. Even in the context of this small project on the southern outskirts of Milan, where it borders with Pavia, the civil rule of architecture becomes a metaphor from which to glean the more general meaning of the project.

Very few signs make up the extension, which quietly, unassumingly doubles the surface area of the existing cemetery, in an attempt to blend in with the surrounding space: a path is marked by an aligned series of porticoed buildings which house the columbaria, dropping down from two storeys to one as they approach the sacred central space, serving to accentuate the strength of perspective and the perception of the ritual journey. The two collective buildings round off this highly ordered composition, following the pattern of the general design and positioning themselves to mark the focal points of a plan underpinned and governed by a precise geometry. The chapel and crematorium stand out as distinct from the burial volumes, representing the rite of death in the narration of a space shared by a community, once again the consolation of remembrance.

No pretence of sacredness seems to have pursued in this project: on the contrary, a domestic, intimate, down-to-earth character defines the stylistic signature of the general composition, except for the definition of the central places which necessarily take on, as already mentioned, a collective value. The avenue, which is almost perfectly symmetrical, concludes with the place where the ritual is performed and, in the median, changes to accommodate the crematorium, a filtering space that eases the transition between the avenue itself – with its almost urban character – and the area for burials on land, more traditionally linked to the rural landscape. This space, enclosed by an old wall made of Lombard bricks, is the place where in the initial sketches for the project, Rossi envisioned placing a series of chapels for the nobility; indeed, he included it in many of his preparatory drawings, echoing and anticipating his studies for the family chapels in Gussano (1980) and Lambrate (1995), as well as the almost unknown chapel for the hospital in Bergamo<sup>12</sup>.

The study of pure geometric forms, paired with the iconic idea of creating the suggestion of a home, define the different projects for family tombs with fifteen years between them, both different yet ever united by the idea

of a possible unique characteristic, namely that of a home “for the dead”; with this in mind, whilst in Giussano the interior section conveys the theatrical tale made expressive by the wooden reconstruction of a Roman door, Lambrate lies on the other end of the scale, with the small house-cum-tomb – bereft as it is of any decorative intentions – sculpted into its peremptory form of a parallelepiped with a pyramid roof. Bricks, stone and iron – in other words, the catalogue of materials so dear to Rossi’s heart in defining the character of his architecture – here firmly remains that which most faithfully marks its physical belonging to his home region of Lombardy.

Three different scales thus summarise Rossi’s experience with the theme of death through design, bringing us back to that idea of the *architecture of the city* which encapsulates and summarises all possible interpretations thereof. A founding city, an urban project and a domestic space employ different weights and measures to express different facets of the civil value of a theme which for Rossi, was suspended between life and memory, between reason and its celebration.

## Notes

<sup>1</sup> Please refer to the critical readings on this topic which from that moment on have also been a point of reference for Aldo Rossi himself: Bonfanti E. (1970) - “Elementi e costruzione. Note sull’architettura di Aldo Rossi”, in: *Controspazio*, n. 10, e Savi V. (1985), *L’Architettura di Aldo Rossi*, Milan: Franco Angeli, 1985.

<sup>2</sup> As noted by Ferlenga A. in the context of the conference “Spazi Sacri: Il cimitero San Cataldo di Aldo Rossi e Gianni Braghieri”, 27 september 2019, Cersaie, Bologna.

<sup>3</sup> The results of the competition and some projects are collected in *Casabella* n. 372 december 1972.

<sup>4</sup> The term refers to the “naive functionalism” faced by Aldo Rossi within the *L’Architettura della città*.

<sup>5</sup> Rossi A., Q/A 9 op.cit. The notebook begins with the first inspection of the Modena cemetery on the occasion of the collection of the documents of the Competition Announcement.

<sup>7</sup> The first photos of Luigi Ghirri at the Modena Cemetery are contained in *Lotus International* n. 38, 1983.

<sup>8</sup> In particular, in the definition of the “Exalted Rationalism of B.” in which Rossi clarifies his interest in the relationship between logic and art, rationalism and autobiography.

<sup>9</sup> Rossi A., “relazione di progetto per l’ampliamento del Cimitero di Modena”. In: A. Ferlenga (1999b), *Aldo Rossi. Tutte le opere*. Electa, Milan.

<sup>10</sup> The project is published in: *Domus*, 423, febbraio 1965.

<sup>11</sup> The term “pastoral journeys” refers to what Rossi told about projects in the Lombardy region that remain a constant commitment even when engaged in projects all over the world. In: Rossi A., “Q/A”. In: Id., *I Quaderni Azzurri 1968-1992*, op. cit. 38, 20 ottobre 1988-27 febbraio 1989 op.cit.

<sup>12</sup> Rossi A (1999b), “relazione di progetto per l’ampliamento del Cimitero di Ponte Sesto a Rozzano”. In: A. Ferlenga, *Aldo Rossi. Tutte le opere*. Electa, Milan.

<sup>13</sup> The model and some almost unpublished drawings are exhibited at the exhibition “Aldo Rossi. L’Architetto e la città”, edited by Alberto Ferlenga, MAXXI Rome 10 march 2021 > 17 october 2021.

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Federica Conte  
**The hidden city: Chacarita's cemetery**

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Abstract

In this essay a characteristic thought about one of the first Clorindo Testa's work is going to be discussed.

He was one of the most important Italo Argentinian architects of the XX century. The cemetery of Chacarita, like many other cemeteries sited in the huge Metropolis of Buenos Aires, will be interpreted as a real "city in the city". Only venturing into this parallel world, this thought about what is in between life and death shapes up through the language of Architecture. From the main entrance a layering of different periods and styles accompanies us to the heart of the cemetery, where the construction of the *Sexto Panteón*, dated 1958, takes place. This is just the first stop of an endless path where light effects and corridors labyrinthically animate the "eternal" space of the underground.

Keywords

Cemetery — Memory — Clorindo Testa

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Every single Art have been tried to narrate, with the most heterogeneous languages, the ritual of life and inescapably that one of death.

Literature has met the challenge of what's comes from this invisible rite of passage that takes hold in human imagination.

Words have talked about the silent lives of people from the underground<sup>1</sup> and drawn the space around burial sites<sup>2</sup>; the painters have interpreted its shadows and the sculpture has tried to catch its changelessness.

Architecture, however, shapes something nobody can know: it's the bridge between the land of the living and death and it clouds the strict limit which sets them apart.

From the cemetery as a complex system to the great national monuments built for the war victims, Architecture has the aim of staging a play made by memory and oblivion, matter and spirit, lights and shadows. It shows humans new pathways, thinking about the future.

Precisely in this dynamic and complex perspective, the essay will show one of the possible ways of reflecting on the theme, with particular reference to the cemetery of Chacarita in Buenos Aires. Here, a young Clorindo Testa has given voice to the silence of the contemporary necropolis.

Every society, regardless of their own belief, culture started with burial rites<sup>3</sup> It is interesting to note how René Girard considers this constant metamorphosis of the human being for reaching this conclusion.

He underlines that «non ci sia morto in società che non diventi una grande risorsa della vita». Here, a great anthropological revolution underlines something relevant for understanding the key issue: «ciò che è fecondo sul piano culturale, non è la coscienza naturalistica della morte o il desiderio che si ha di fuggire [...] ma è la rivelazione della morte come



**Fig. 1**  
Focus on the entire Chacarita's cemetery area.

sacro, come potenza infinita, più benevola, in fin dei conti che temibile, più adorabile che terrificante.» (Girard 1983).

In this view, Architecture builds the complexity of the ritual spaces, as the only *Art* capable of giving an ordering *sense* to every single element: from the archetype of the mound<sup>4</sup> to its variations; from the temple/sarcophagus to the domus as a place of worship.

Cemeteries serve as a metaphor for a rite made by hopes and peace where the addressee is “us”, humans. In this immense forest that is the city, we cross the destiny saying: «qui è sepolto qualcuno. Questa è architettura!»<sup>5</sup> In the deafening noise, the silence breaches Buenos Aires city, creating something unexpected. The invocation to the Silence *is just an establishment of the Word*<sup>6</sup>, the architectural one, which replies to the frenetic and confusing noise of the big Argentine capital.

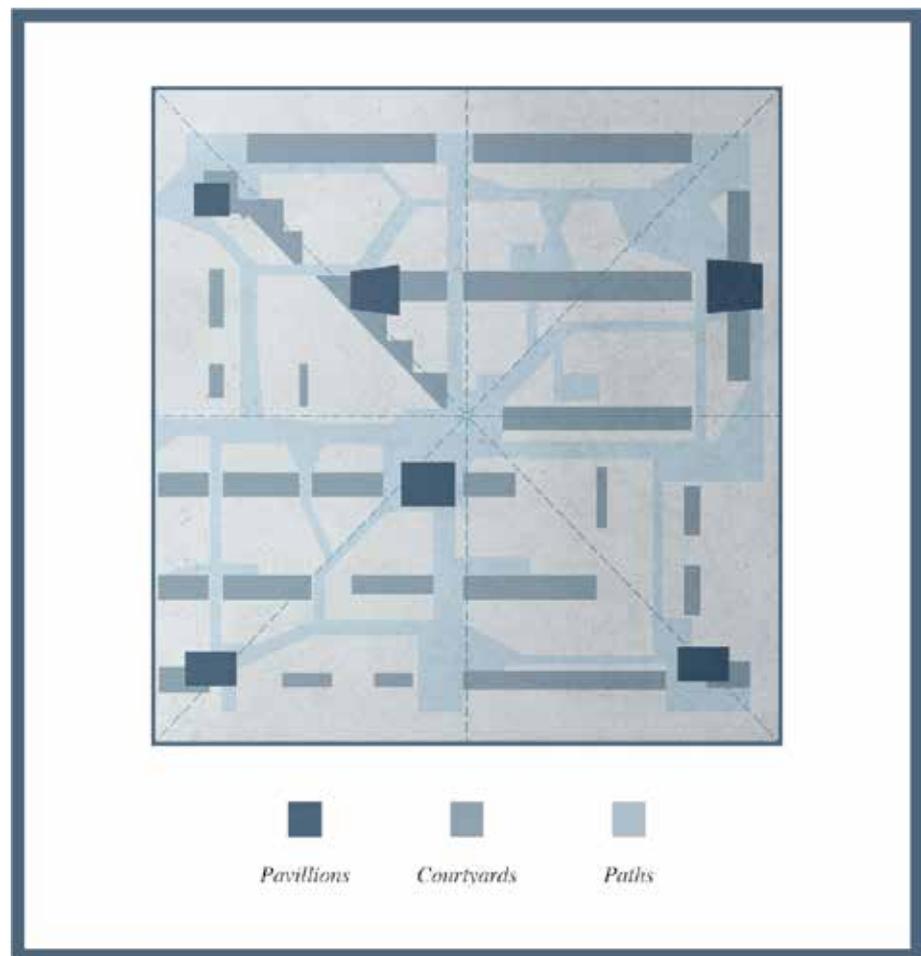
The most famous cemetery in BS is probably the Recoleta's one but this essay will focus on another case, another city in the city: the Chacarita's.

The yellow fever was spreading like wildfire around the capital, where the cemeteries of Recoleta and Parque Patricios were still not enough to bury people dying for this terrible illness.

For this reason, from 1871 the municipality of Buenos Aires decreed that a new cemetery would be built in the Chacarita's district, from where it got its name.

Only between 1920 and 1960 Buenos Aires's population increased from 1 million to about 3 million. In less than half century a new addition for the cemetery was necessary. The area of the new necropolis was becoming bigger than it started.

This is just an example of one of the interventions that the municipality had to start at that time. Clorindo Testa took part to this project, which represents in a sort of sense one of the saddest interludes in Argentina's history.<sup>7</sup>



**Fig. 2**  
Critical redrawing of the master plan.

In my opinion, it is necessary, for a second, to introduce this eclectic character who was Clorindo Testa.

Challenging and particularly creative, he becomes one of the most important players of the XX century in South America. He was a very controversial figure about whom there is still a heated debate. Maybe, the Banco de Londres y America del Sur and the Biblioteca Nacional de Buenos Aires are his masterpieces but his long career as an architect, apart from that one as a painter or in general as an artist, we could say, allow him to experiment with construction. From the small to the large scale.

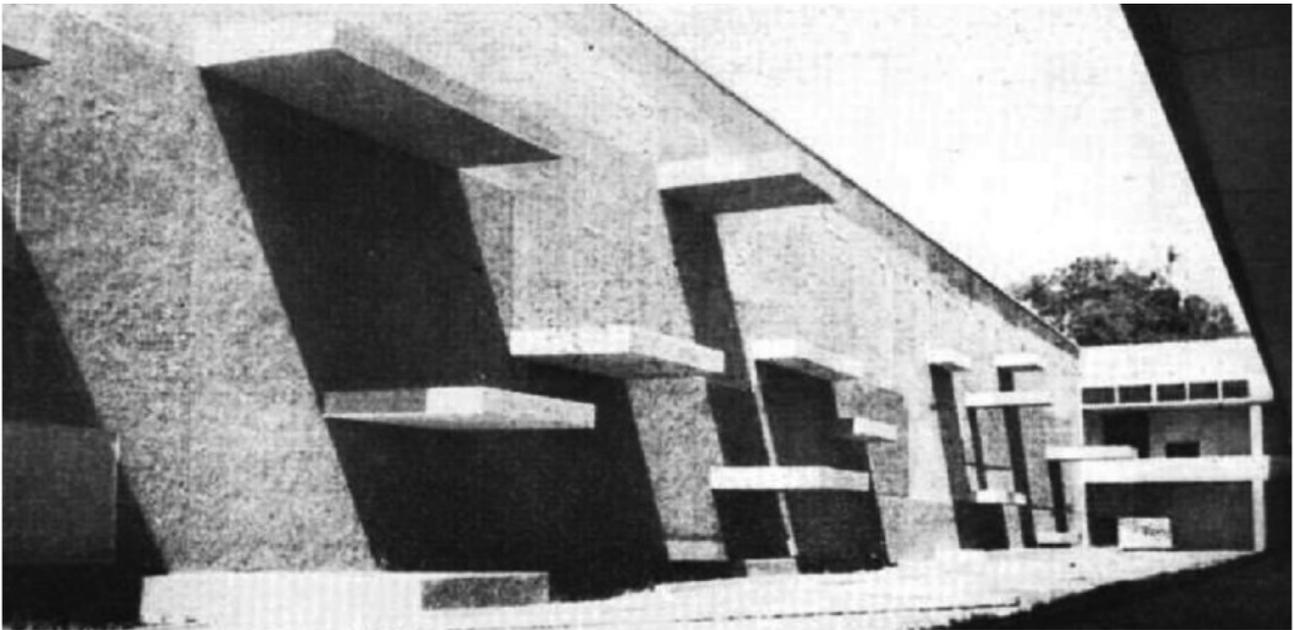
Every single project teaches how the new fragments, which are expression of a language that is only apparently of breaking, are linked in harmony although the city has a XIX century urban scheme.

It is necessary to narrate the exciting story through the Chacarita's cemetery going back a few years after Testa's graduation at the Facultad de Arquitectura of Buenos Aires. As a very young architect he quickly took part in the project of the new master plan for the capital. The Post-War context was very productive: a lots of architects, as Itala Fulvia Villa, were called to join this huge change of the Chacarita's area and to modernly rethink about its old design.

After coming through the monumental entrance of the cemetery, a combination of noble and statuary chapels precedes the immense empty space that opens in front of the visitors, suddenly surprising them all.

Our path is interrupted and the limits of the cemetery disappears.

The city of the "other life" that Clorindo Testa imagines, starts at the ground floor: it is composed by a system of pavilions where each of them has a different identity.



**Fig. 3**

Clorindo Testa, Chacarita's cemetery. Photography with the view inside the big dig courtyards. (Nuestra Arquitectura n.379, 1961).

They represent the only one access to the Underworld, where creativity and harmony of the shapes guard hundreds of urns.

The design process allowed the “other city” to live only where the city of the living ends. In this point twisted pavements and flower gardens take place and the city of the Dead digs and takes its own shape, being reborn from the underground.

Picture n.2 shows how through a geometrical process of decomposition, the squared area will be conceived as a set of triangles, as a diamond, where the big portals harmonically take their place, spaced out by cuts in the ground. The walls play to carry out level changes.

This extraordinary composition hides again, from an overhead view, the heart of the project.

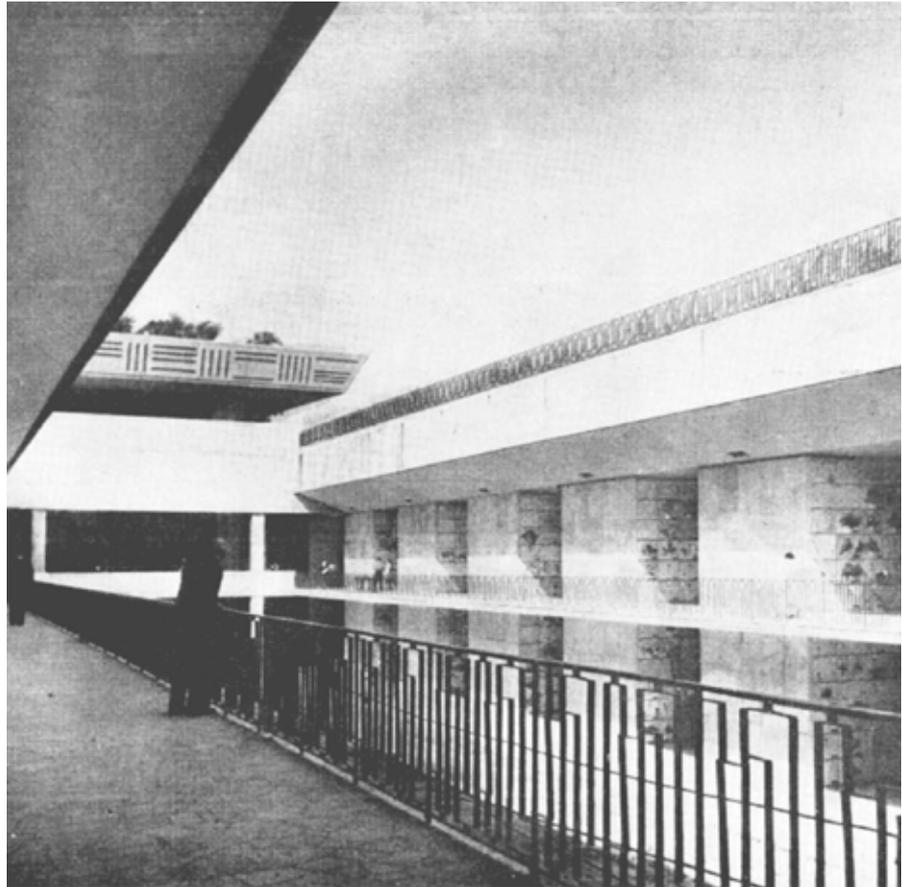
The path to the underworld is a real catharsis, not only emotionally but also physically conceived, and it finds out when we arrive to the lower floors.

The wide concrete stairs cross each other: the space – it is piranesianos in its complexity and finitude – allows the visitors to have a crossed view, from inside out. The great texture of the wall pierced by a multitude of small hole introduces what is going to happen in the heart of the cemetery. The iron railings, made by simple geometries, guide us along the whole way. The hammered concrete, rough and imprecise, has been sculpted with decorations in the underground spaces of transition where, the light rays projected to the floor, gradually disappear, as the night progresses.

The weight of the concrete dematerializes exactly when the construction begins: Testa has learned very well what indirectly Le Corbusier has taught him: «Puissent nos bétons si rudes révéler que, sous eux, nos sensibilité sont fines»<sup>8</sup>.

In this game of dug gardens, 12 meters beneath the ground, the architect regards them as if they were *patios* through which the deceased's home can takes bright light. Its shiny power plays a key role in the entire project, especially opposed to the imperviousness of the concrete.

The catacombs are an important reference: here Testa rethinks about them, changing their dark and claustrophobic nature that becomes something open and luminous. Designing a cemetery had presented certain logistical problems to be resolves, one was thinking about the system of the air circulation: the incredible inventiveness of the architect promoted a double system, one for the single urns and another one for the visitor's area.

**Fig. 4**

Clorindo Testa, Chacarita's cemetery. Photography with the view from the first floor under the ground.

(Nuestra Arquitectura n.379, 1961).

He turned ejection tube into decorated monoliths, with a specific position for the balance of the formal design composition.

In the original design, the big courtyards had to host big pools of water to reflect lights directly on the marble walls of the urns.

During construction this idea was abandoned, extending the green area: on this way the courtyards become beautiful hanging gardens, that is what we can see today.

The deep courtyards books resemble walls where over-sized shelves (fig. 3) rhythmically become graduated notches of hypothetical yardstick that emphasizes the height of the two underground levels.

The project has three different floors. While as we go down, a rarefaction of the materials is determinate. The level where pavilions are is the solid object that is going to be lighter at the first floor under the ground thanks to the courtyards and the corridors where visitors can still have free movement.

When you arrive at the second floor under the ground, the last one, however, the solidity of this object breaks up: three of the eight triangles evade, reducing the floor area.

Spaces became reduced and the only point to go from the norther part to the southern is the geometrical center of the square. It is slightly away from the vertical axis where the grand staircase reminds us to go back, to the ground floor.

In a sort of sense, the heart of this city of Dead always gives visitors a chance: following the hypogeum labyrinthic path or to go back to the world of the living.

Cemeteries, as the Flores's one, are little known works of this author. Here his sensivity as a painter and his expressiveness as an architect becomes something explicit, despite he tried for all his career to take them away.



**Fig. 5**  
Caricature of Yellow Fever. (from  
Cara y Caretas, 1899).

Clorindo Testa is the narrator and at the same time the reader of this story that comes from another dimension: the transcendental experience of death.

This device of hiding the heart of the project underground reminds me a particular stylistic choice that Ugo Foscolo used for writing *I Sepolcri*: thanks to *ipotiposi* – a figure of speech – he used to describe places that were apparently sketched. In this way these places would be anywhere in the world encouraging readers to imagine. That is thinking out of the box.

The project gives visitors, who can be careful of not, to have right in front of them only the incipit of his architectural narration.

And even if painting did not find his place here, architecture and sculpture give rise to the *phénomène de nature plastique*<sup>9</sup> from where the research of the *poetic sense of the art* starts.

The path through the vault becomes a space who overtakes the need of burying: the immense underground city ends up to be the destination of a travel that goes beyond the dimension of reality.

At the down of his career, Clorindo Testa was able to eloquently address the issue of the relation between life and death, underlining an important theme: memory does not reside in material object but in what, through great works, every human can find the freedom for imagining and remembering.

## Notes

<sup>1</sup> Foscolo U. (1926), *I sepolcri. Liriche scelte*, Romeo G. (edited by), Antonio Trimarchi Editore, Palermo.

<sup>2</sup> Edgard Lee Master, *Antologia di Spoon River*, edited by Girolamo Romeo, Antonio Trimarchi Editore, Palermo, 1926

<sup>3</sup> «The tomb is none other than the first human monument erected around the expiatory victim, the primeval cradle of significations, the most elementary and fundamental one. There is no culture without a tomb, there is no tomb without culture». Taken from the book Girard R. (1983), *Delle cose nascoste sin dalla fondazione del mondo*, Adelphi edizioni, Milan, pp.108-109

<sup>4-5</sup> Loos A (1972), *Parole nel vuoto*, Adelphi edizioni, pp.253-255.

<sup>6</sup> Arís C. M. (2002), *Silenzi eloquenti. Borges, Mies van der Rohe, Ozu, Rothko, Oteiza*, Christian Marinotti, Milan.

<sup>7</sup> The Chacarita cemetery has undergone numerous changes since 1886, the date of its foundation in the area that today falls under the name of Parque de los Andes. In 1886 it did not even fall under the name we know today, but as “Cementerio del Oeste”. In 1913 it was radically enlarged and in 1918 the part of the English Protestant cemetery was separated from the German one. After the Second World War, starting from 1958 the Sexto Panteòn was built and there are additions and demolitions up to 2017.

<sup>8-9</sup> Le Corbusier, *Entretiens Avec Georges Charensol 1962 et Robert Mallet 1951*, Fremaux & Assoc. Fr

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BoKyung Lee

**A dialectic in a state of rest.**

**The project for a new Pesaro cemetery by Luciano Semerani and Gigetta Tamaro.**

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Abstract

This essay proposes an interpretation of the project for a new Pesaro cemetery developed by Luciano Semerani and Gigetta Tamaro in 1979. The fundamental reason why it is considered important to reflect on this unrealized project lies in the exemplary way in which the two architects conceived and developed the project's forms, pursuing an analogy between those of the "city of the living" and those of the "city of the dead". This analogy defines the project's metahistorical space, favouring, in other words, the conception of a symbolic space to which the political task of passing on the common learning on death is entrusted to the life of the city, while each individual is guaranteed a spiritual request which allows him or her to keep a dialogue with the deceased alive.

Keywords

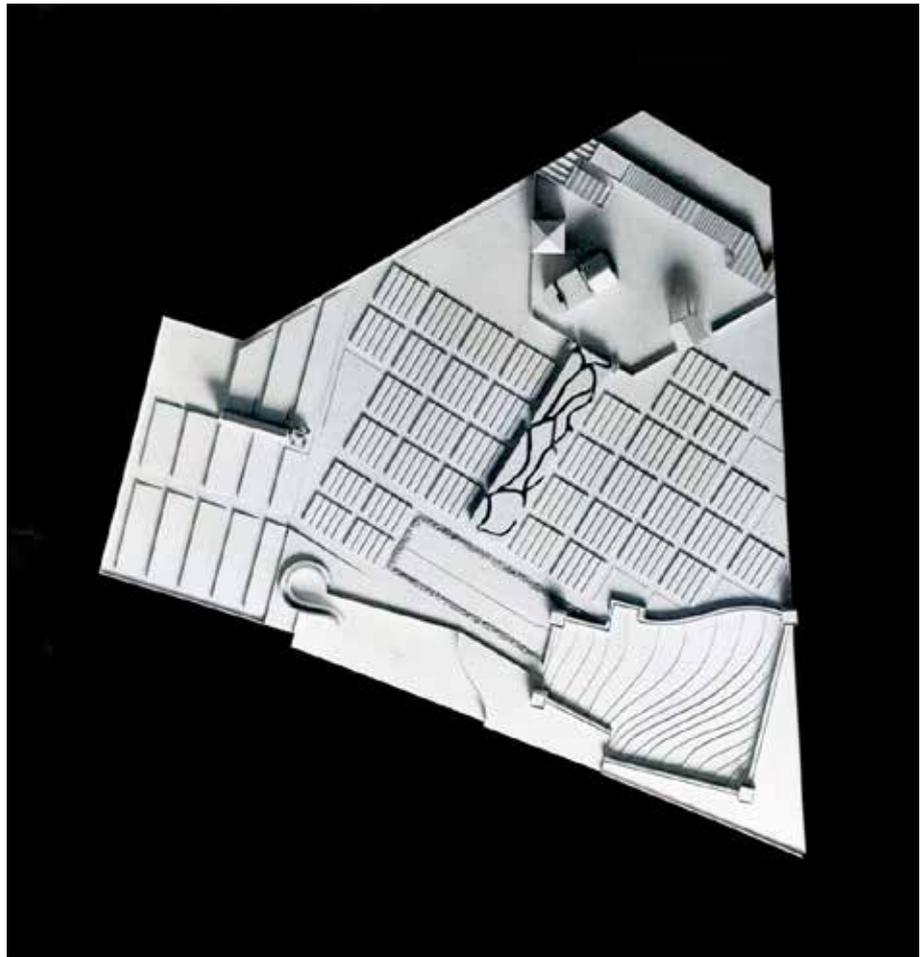
Cemetery Architecture — City by Parts — Urban Memory — Experience of the Symbol — Cult of the Dead

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We have been educated in the cult of the dead at least in the forms that our Catholic cemetery of Saint Anna allows. Another spirit (other spirits?) hover/s over the Jewish cemetery, or the nearby Muslim cemetery, the Protestant one, and even the Greek Orthodox one. [...] Perhaps also for this reason we thought of a cemetery like that of Pesaro as an imitation of a walled city, those immobilized, eternal simulacra which are in the arms of saints or nobles, patrons and protectors of Medieval and Renaissance cities. There is no other kind of architecture which finds its *raison d'être* in memory, as much as a cemetery does. Our cemetery has been built by assembling finished models, prototypes. Built through references to our other works of architecture, but inside the layouts of different cities. [...] The cemetery is thus the synthesis of all the works of architecture and all the cities that we know (Semerani, Tamaro 1983, p.113).

These words by Semerani and Tamaro were written with the intention of explaining the underlying reasons and forms of the Pesaro cemetery project and they highlight at least two fundamental issues which influence the relationship between architecture and burial places. The first question directly concerns the representation of the project idea. In this case, the idea of the cult of the dead. How should this idea be represented? The second question is one inherent to the theme of memory, or rather, the choice of cultural materials necessary to develop the project. In other words: how did our two architects deal with the relationship between memory and their cemetery project?

On the theme of memory as a reservoir of images and forms to draw on for a new design configuration, Semerani and Tamaro are crystal clear, as can also be deduced from their words above. Their purpose was to compose, within a single recognizable form, a group of figures drawn from their own repertoire, together with other figures found in urban history and in that of Pesaro in particular.



**Fig. 1**  
Project for a new Pesaro cemetery,  
model.

In Pesaro, Semerani wrote in *Progetti per una Città*,

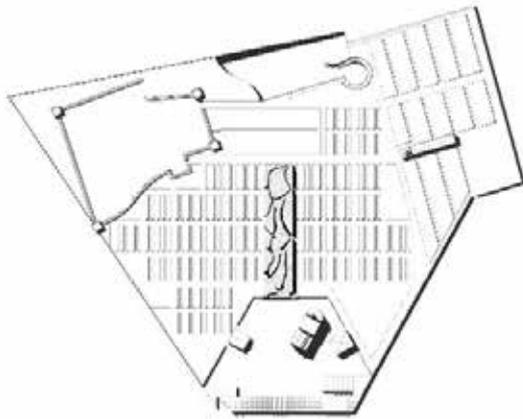
«the morphology of the built-up area is given by the juxtaposition of residential villages with characteristic elongated blocks on the quadrilateral layout of the Roman city. The pentagon of the walled city dates back to the construction programme of Della Rovere; at one vertex of the pentagon lies the Malatesta fortress. The ancient city is also cut asymmetrically by a *cardo* and a *decumanus*, upon which the Roman *insulae* stand.» (Semerani 1980, p. 74)

This juxtaposition of urban forms is transfigured in the cemetery project, in which the shape of the sacred enclosure recalls the pentagonal figure of the Renaissance city.

The following figures are *juxtaposed* within the *sacred enclosure*: a monumental entrance, it too enclosed in a further enclosure, in which 4 main volumes gather and onto which a *linear wood* has been grafted which stretches northwards to the centre of the cemetery.

To the east and west of the *linear wood* are arranged, in serial groupings, the buildings for burial in *columbaria*. Their ground plan follows the idea of the foundation of those Hellenistic cities known as “settlements in rows”, with the monotonous repetition of residential *insulae* on a Hippodamian Plan. But it is in a reference to the bourgeois city of Trieste, with its Borgo Teresiano and the axis of its Grand Canal, that this urban layout draws its morphological and figurative peculiarity from.

The *linear wood* leads north towards the area for the *children's graves*: a *city of childhood* denied with a *fountain of life* at the centre. Further north, immediately after the *city of children*, an area for the burial of people who have died of infectious diseases is arranged. To the west a *city of the rich*



**Fig. 2**  
Project for a new Pesaro cemetery,  
plan.

has been designed, identified in an enclosure resembling a *castle town*, in which areas for the tombs of aristocrats and the wealthy with their own private chapels are laid out. On the opposite side, to the east, lies the *city of the poor*, with burials underground. A crematorium is located more or less in the centre of this area. Here «the burial fields gently sloping towards the sun are terraces alternating with rows of fruit trees (the leaves will fall in winter; the colours will alternate) here and there a cypress as on the hills leading from Pesaro to Urbino.» (Semerani Tamaro 1983, p. 113)

As a whole, therefore, the ground plan evokes a walled city, consisting of parts contained within a recognizable form, interlocking and grafted onto the traces of an imaginary Roman layout from which unwind, along hypothetical roads of development, the areas of expansion which are reminiscent of real urban villages and rural landscapes. In other words, the overall image of the cemetery imposes itself on our gaze as a composition of urban figures similar to a *città per parti*.

We know that the Pesaro cemetery project was born within the relations which Luciano Semerani entertained with the political administrations of this city of The Marches since the early 1970s. These relations were born and grew with the development of a *Detailed Plan for Pesaro Old Town* drawn up in those same years by the Gruppo Architettura.<sup>1</sup>

The cultural orientation in which the cemetery project is inserted is therefore that of urban studies. A cultural position which, since the 1960s, had posed the theme of the re-foundation of architecture starting from an analysis of urban phenomena as material for architectural design.<sup>2</sup> As is known, the richness of this cultural orientation consists in providing architects with solid theoretical support for their design practices, and at the same time nurturing aspirations for authorship of their inventions. In this cultural orientation, the relationship between city, theory and design rediscovers, in the studying of monuments, an unexpected speculative force which springs from a fresh contact with reality. The monument is seen as the most authentic testimony of permanence in an urban reality, a symbolic dimension capable of sublimating the dialectic of the forms of life which gradually settle within the city's form, restoring a heterogeneous, rich, and complex image. Consequently, the monument is seen as a symbol of collective memory and the continuity within which a city changes over time.



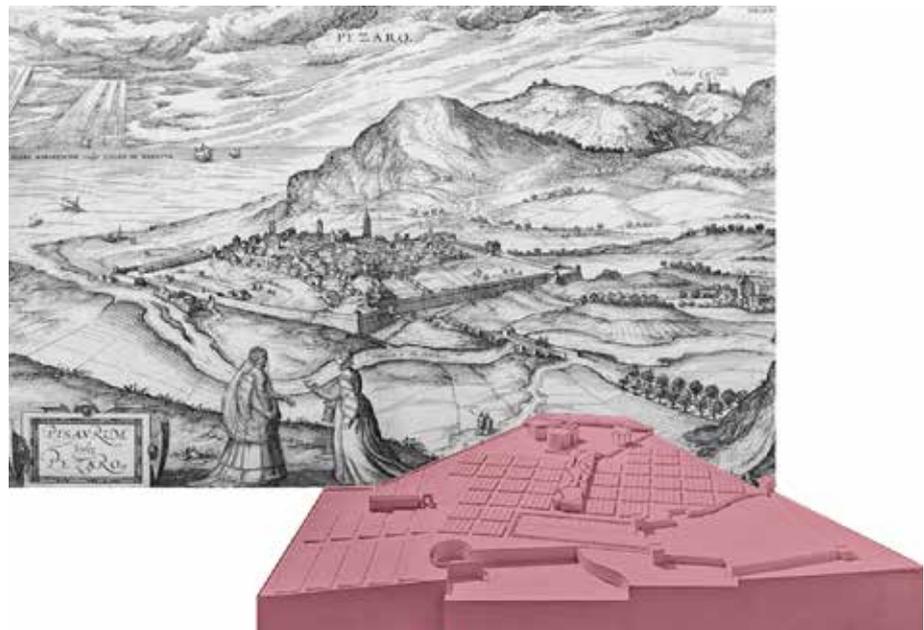
**Fig. 3**  
Giorgio De Chirico, *The Archaeologists*, 1968 .

Furthermore, as Georg Wilhelm Friedrich Hegel had already shown in his *Lectures on Aesthetics*, architecture is an eminently symbolic fact and as such is intrinsically intertwined with the practices of memory (Hegel 2012, pp. 1589-1652). Architecture means making monuments. And the monument, as is well known, always has to do with warnings and exhortations and above all, as Adolf Loos wrote, with a memory of the past and with death (Loos 1999, pp. 241-256).

From a study of urban phenomena to a search for the deep reasons of architecture in Semerani and Tamaro's *theoretical project*, the *transition* to the project of the cemetery as an urban monument with a clear heterogeneous imprint is therefore obligatory. We can now return to the initial questions: how did our two architects deal with the relationship between memory and design? How should the cult of the dead be represented?

When asked about the relationship between memory and design, Luciano Semerani tried to indicate some possible answers – as well as through the design practice shared with Gigetta Tamaro – in *Progetto Eloquent*, a book published in 1981. We must first of all remember that, in this context – and more generally in the reflections of Semerani and Tamaro's projects – memory is poetically understood as an implacable laboriousness of thought, the fruit of a gift given to the human race by the gods.

In fact, as Aeschylus recounted, to free humans from their condition of perennial poverty, Prometheus gave them *logos* and *techne*, thereby triggering industriousness and a desire for redemption in their minds. And above all thanks to the links between thought and *techne* – as Monica Centanni explained when commenting on *Prometheus Bound* – humans are now able to activate the «fruitfulness of memory and therefore the constructive faculty of poetry» (Centanni, 2007, pp. 930-931). Therefore, memory constitutes the web of experiences already unfurled in the past which allow the present to be transformed by means of new ideas with a poetic content. This is equivalent to saying, in Plato's words, that «knowing is remembering» and that memory, as Umberto Galimberti explained, is «above all a *re-agreement* which generates *unity* from dispersion and in unity traces that subjective and objective *identity* which Western reason has called *Me* and *World*. Neither are facts of reality, but constructions of memory.» (Galimberti, 2005, p. 76).



**Fig. 4**  
Project for a new Pesaro cemetery,  
model.

When in *Fiducia nella Retorica* Semerani wrote that architects operate using «architectural facts, which pre-exist, in a new design operation» (Semerani 1981, p. 7) he is in fact reaffirming the ancient Platonic *admonition*. But how do they operate? Going to extremes on reasoning, according to Semerani there are two possibilities which this operation of referring to the memory of what has *already been done* allows:

«On the one hand an autobiographical reassembly (or recycling), which the individual artist carries out by re-manipulating his own production and on the other, the resumption using very different operations (the “out-of-scale” or “*contaminatio*” for example) of decoded but recognizable phrases for the historical urban code of belonging.» (Semerani 1981, p. 9).

As is well known, in the indefinite interval between two extremes, multiple compositions can develop, characterized by a different proportion of the parts involved. Semerani and Tamaro, while explicitly declaring their interest in the operations of recovering the materials of the memory belonging to the second operating mode, nevertheless did not hesitate to overlap and intertwine the two design methods in planning their cemetery. Despite this, the associative links which the two design methods are able to evoke – and therefore to pass on – through the figures of the project, can easily provoke misunderstandings. In fact, associative links very often continually drive us to search for similarities between the forms involved, which are certainly important and testify to the *extent* of the project, but risk weakening the deeper connections which underlie them. What are these deeper connections? One thing is certain. If we now look at the project as a whole, we see that figures of historical origin have been pushed and brought together side by side in a *sacred enclosure* to keep the memory of something else alive and at the same time express a symbolic tension with respect to the theme.

With this montage of recognizable figures, within the enclosure and by means of the enclosure, Semerani and Tamaro *shape images of cities* which – to use the language of Walter Benjamin – *halt* their ephemeral content in the eternity of an ambiguous but living image, be it adorable, melancholy or cruel (Benjamin 2007).



**Fig. 5**  
Piero della Francesca, Resurrection, 1465.

The tension between these two worlds – *historical* and *symbolic* – becomes even deeper if we reflect on the fact that we are dealing with *figures* which are the progeny of a historical, political and personal order, *gathered* within a *sacred enclosure*, which presupposes the end of every historical event and the opening of a metahistorical space of eternal salvation. Borrowing a famous expression of Adorno, we could say that the figures of the project, like Benjamin's thought-images, are locked within a «dialectic in a state of rest» (Adorno 1972, p. 239) capable of composing a relationship between different yet coexistent temporalities. An impossible composition?

«To articulate the past historically» Benjamin wrote, «does not mean knowing it as it really was. It means taking possession of a memory as it flashes in the instant of danger.» (Benjamin 1995, p. 79) Therefore, the gaze that demands the assembly of forms of this *camposanto* is that of *pietas*, the same one which the angel of Benjamin's story poses on the ruins of the past for which he «would like to restrain himself, raise the dead and mend what is broken.» (Benjamin 1995, p. 80) As for Walter Benjamin, so too for Semerani and Tamaro: testimonies which carry forms within them will never be safe. Only a revolutionary action «has the gift of igniting the spark of hope in the past, which is penetrated by the idea that *even the dead* will not be safe from the enemy should he win. And this enemy has never stopped winning.» (Benjamin 1995, p. 78)

Only a revolutionary action – a revolutionary project – can attempt to knit together, as the Pesaro cemetery project does, the historical and conflictual occurrence in which the forms of architecture and the aspiration to eternity that these same forms claim in the presence of a *progress* without *tradition* that wants to reduce them to shreds without hope. Revolutionary are the

«energies that appear in aged things» (Benjamin 1973, p. 15). Forms of the past simply ask, like deceased loved ones, not to be forgotten.

In terms of the space of salvation we must also read the allegorical words of Semerani and Tamaro when they say: «This large cemetery, all located on the slope of a hill in Central Italy, is a small walled city in the hands of a saint.» (Semerani Tamaro 1983, p.113)

Thus, in the end, the overall image does not appear as a simple assembly of parts resulting from a significant additive process. It appears as an image with its own theoretical armour and its own poetic intentionality. A bit like the archaeologists of De Chirico, who impressed Ernesto Nathan Rogers for their «chest full of landscapes – and in which his face – is erased like theirs to become an impersonal meditation.» (Rogers 1997, p. 47)

At this point, if we return to the overall image of the cemetery, we can see that it is organized by means of two main images: the large *sacred enclosure* and a *profane enclosure*. We have already talked about the *sacred enclosure*. The *profane enclosure*, on the other hand, is what defines the monumental entrance to the cemetery. Within it are 4 volumes: the actual entrance building is a re-presentation of the body of outpatient structures, illumined with industrial sheds, of Cattinara hospital in Trieste; the building for Catholic worship, on a basilica plan, and the building for the worship of other religions and for non-believers, square in shape, are both drawn from the project to fit out the San Giobbe area in Venice;<sup>3</sup> the Famedio, where the illustrious names of the community are reported, is «an idea drawn from a painting attributed to Domenico Veneziano kept at the Pesaro Art Gallery» (Semerani Tamaro 1983, p. 113).

The two *enclosures* define two conformations of space, but must be understood as two *Worlds*, separate and united at the same time. The *sacred enclosure* is organized through a bilateral spatial configuration, with a central axis, defined by the *linear wood*. This *wood*, located at the centre of the cemetery, recalls Dante's metaphor of the *dark wood*, an archetype lodged in the collective memory. A labyrinth in which sooner or later «we all find ourselves in the middle of the journey of our life – and we all feel to a greater or lesser extent as an experience – exceptional and alive within us from the direct memories of our childhood as a typical condition of disorientation, terror, anguish and indecipherability.» (Semerani 1981, p. 28)

The *profane enclosure*, on the other hand, alludes to a spatial configuration of a radial type with an empty centre and defined elements surrounding it. A central void which alludes, at the same time, to the foundation of a spatial, religious and political order.

In identifying the *sacred enclosure* and the *profane enclosure* we can recognize the primordial spatial experiences with which Leroi-Gourhan identified the *origins* of humankind's tendency to spatialize the places of domestic life in a bilateral sense, and the organization of community places in a radial sense (Leroi-Gourhan 2018, pp. 364-406). The same primordial logic is transfigured to the cemetery project through an archaeology of figures characterized by a powerful ideal geometry.

And, in this context, this mental archaeology cannot fail to evoke the *Resurrection* of Piero della Francesca. We can thus return to the theme of representing the cult of the dead.

The idea of the cult of the dead that this project wishes to represent is contained in the revolutionary idea of the *Resurrection* of the dead. From the iconic suggestion of the Risen One, the project draws the central axis of the fresco that springs from a spatial void. *Axis renovatio mundi*, this is

how the Risen One rises icastically over the edge of the now empty Roman tomb, unexpected, disorienting, and, as Roberto Longhi wrote, with a *sylvan* face. In Catholic worship, the death of Christ indicates access to eternal life. In the project it is the *sylvan wood* which opens up to the *camposanto* – the cemetery, a prelude to the Garden of Eternity.

## Notes

<sup>1</sup> The Gruppo Architettura was formed in 1968 and broke up in 1975. Its members included Carlo Aymonino, Costantino Dardi, Luciano Semerani, Gianugo Polesello, Gianni Fabbri, Raffaele Panella and Mauro Lena. Luciano Semerani focused on the project for the *Detailed Plan for Pesaro Old Town* in 1971, also in relation to the theory of the city by parts, in his book *Progetti per una città*, Franco Angeli 1980.

<sup>2</sup> Urban studies found a neat summary, an expression of research shared by a group of architects, in the theoretical writings of Carlo Aymonino and Aldo Rossi.

<sup>3</sup> The project for a new Pesaro cemetery by Luciano Semerani and Gigetta Tamaro dates back to 1979. From the point of view of production and design inventions, 1978 and 1979 were two particularly fertile and important years for these two architects from Trieste. In fact, during the same period, they finalized a project for a new hospital of SS. Giovanni e Paolo in Venice, a project for the San Giobbe area in Cannaregio, also in Venice, and a project for the town hall of Osoppo in the province of Udine. As we know, out of this tetralogy of projects, only those for the hospital in Venice and the town hall of Osoppo were ever built.

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Eliana Martinelli  
**Shared landscape, transposed landscape.  
Cemeterial settlements of the Islamic Mediterranean**

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Abstract

The essay starts from theoretical observations on the general meaning of the cemetery as *other* city, considering the symbolic, morphological and settlement constants of ancient cemeteries in the Mediterranean Islamic world. The city of the dead is always related to the city of the living by analogies and juxtapositions, in line with Islamic cosmology. Both Istanbul's Ottoman graveyards, internal and external to the city, and the cemeterial settlements next to the gates of the ancient Fez, reveal this feature. The essay aims to point out some recurring compositional principles (the presence of a boundary, the relationship with the topography and the urban structure) and compare the different values to those of the European cemeteries. The goal is to identify practical tools for designing new landscapes of the dead

Keywords

City of the dead — Islamic Mediterranean — Urban morphology — Landscape — Cemeteries

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The study of the morphological features of burial places cannot overlook the evolution of the rites and philosophical thought related to death.

Mainly in the city of the dead, a collective sense of belonging to humanity can be found. Mircea Eliade (1965) defines the *homo religiosus* as a mode of existence common to every civilisation and always recognisable. The religious man believes in the reality of the sacred and its spatial identification; therefore, he fragments the space based on hierophanies. The profane modern man results from a secularisation of existence; however, he descends from the religious man. Consequently, in contemporary times, some attitudes ascribable to an ancestral sacredness, which recovers in the symbols a possible openness to the universal, remain.

The city of the dead is an architectural translation of these symbols, which constitute the spiritual heritage of every civilisation. Traditionally, it has been built as an absolute image of the city of the living, reproducing its constructive principles, site- and time-specific. According to Michel Foucault (2006), the cemetery is a universal heterotopia<sup>1</sup>, permanent in each society, and represents an *other* city, where every family own its black home (Foucault 1994, p. 16). Until the 18th century, cemeteries were located in the city centre, next to the places of worship. They hosted the burials in mass graves, except for some prestigious tombs. In Europe, the building of real cities of the dead started from the second half of the 19th century. The aim was to comply with, on the one hand, the functional and hygienic needs established by the Napoleonic decree of 1804; on the other hand, the will to represent the new state and the middle-class power, *post mortem* too. Not by chance, the individual burials began to exist when society lost contact with the sacredness: when people are no longer sure of life after death, it becomes necessary to venerate the mortal remains.

Cemetery, as every heterotopia, is characterised by a boundary that emphasises the separation from the *other* space. This feature can also be found at the etymological level if we connect the physical place with the image of the afterlife, that is, paradise. The Latin term comes from the Greek *parádeisos*, which, in turn, derives from the ancient Iranian (Avestan) *pairidaēza*, a word that, as the Persian *firdaws*, names the enclosure without any religious significance. A type of Islamic graveyard is the *rawdah*, the so-called garden-cemetery, whose root defines it as the site to “domesticate” nature. Therefore, in the different cultures, paradise is represented as an enclosed garden.

In the urban Christian cemetery, the thickness of the fence is often “inhabited” by the tombs overlapped in height, building up an actual boundary wall. The presence of doors, from which usually the paths branch off axially, makes the fence penetrability impressive. Chapels, ossuaries and crematories are sometimes separated from the boundary wall, becoming monuments that evidence the hierarchic space relations. Indeed, the cemetery is shaped like a foundation town.

On the contrary, in the Islamic world, the enclosure is thin, windowed and almost non-existent. The reason is that the Qur’an desacralized the cemetery, transforming it into a garden open to the world of the living. «The most beautiful tomb», the Prophet affirms, «is that disappearing from the Earth’s surface.» However, the human inclination to glorify the dead, particularly the saints, led to the building of great cemeterial complexes and mausoleums (Burckhardt 2002, p. 98), which, once realised, can no longer be deconsecrated. Therefore, the Muslim cemeteries are gradually embedded in the progressive urban expansion, leading to interpenetration between the city of the living and the city of the dead. This phenomenon morphologically expresses the doctrine of divine Unity (*Tawhid*), well represented by the city structure: Islam does not distinguish between the sacred and the profane, so everyday actions and religious ones are blended, as the places dedicated to them<sup>2</sup>.

The burials related to the religious complexes are often considered for their value as monuments. On the other hand, the literature concerning the issue of the vast cemeterial settlements external to the ancient city does not exist from a compositional point of view. Often located on the hills in a panoramic position, they seem to reproduce nature and landscape informally. We can find relevant analogous compositional principles in the structure of the Islamic city<sup>3</sup>.

In the Ottoman city – here interpreted as an expression of Islamic one<sup>4</sup> – cemeteries, like all the open spaces, have a solid morphological value, determining the urban features.

Since the 15th century, the cemeterial groups of the *külliyes*<sup>5</sup> increased in number and opened the enclosure to urban life through windows, which allowed the view for short prayers (Cerasi 1988, p. 214). The *külliyes* were built around the mausoleums (*türbes*), devoted to representing the worship of saints. The *türbes*, often positioned in the higher points of the *külliyes*, constitute a unitary fragment (*teknik*<sup>6</sup>) of the more complex domed space of the mosques: typologically, they consist of a cube or octagon covered by a cupola. The juxtaposition of these components dominates the urban skyline, in a constant dialogue between the mausoleums, expression of vertical axuality, and the mosques, whose horizontal axes connect parts of the city at great distances. All the elements are related to the voids of the *meydans*<sup>7</sup>. The *türbe* lays on the urban space conceived as infinite, defin-



**Fig. 1**

Eliana Martinelli, The city of Istanbul in relationship to the cemeterial areas of Karacaahmet (eastward) and Eyüp (northward), 2021.

ing the place to accommodate a wooden tomb. According to James Dickie (1987, p. 76), the central space is comparable to an inner garden.

In addition to the cemeteries next to the mosques, we can find vast cemeterial parks outside the ancient city's perimeter. In these cases, the geometric definition of the boundary is not rigid: often, the limit consisted of a low wall retaining the soil, on which the tombs settle in visual contact with the rest of the city. The apparent informality of these spaces, basically used as urban parks, derives from a precise interpretation of the world: the Ottoman culture is aesthetically linked to contemplative fruition of nature and the uncontested acceptance of the pre-existing forms, both natural and urban.

In Istanbul, the built model of the Ottoman city, dense groves of cypresses fill the graveyards, representing sacred woods; for this reason, Pietro Della Valle defines Istanbul as the «city of cypresses» (Petruccioli 1994). In the composition of the Ottoman city, indeed, the trees constitute the counterpoint to the architecture<sup>8</sup>, achieving the same morphological value.

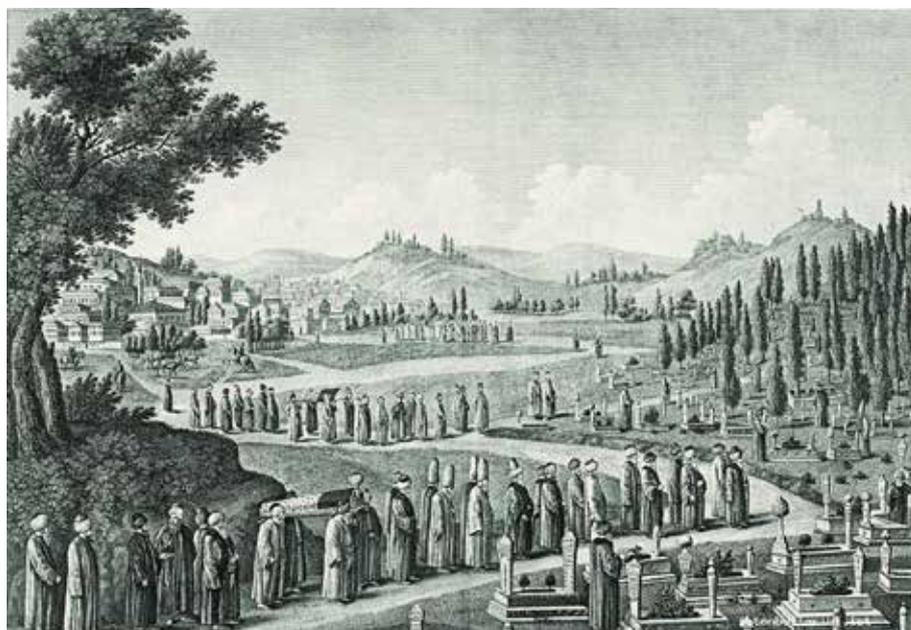
The more expansive Oriental cemetery, dated to the 14th century, with an extension of more than three hundred hectares, is that of Karacaahmet in Üsküdar, facing on the Bosphorus from the Asian side. Here the trees are alternated with the ancient burials, each one identified by a stone stem. This element is a transposition of the wooden stem fixed in the ground, which characterised the pre-Islamic Asian model. The tomb-canopies of the most well-off families refer to the Byzantine *fiâlas* (Cerasi 1988, p. 213). On the other side of Istanbul, in the European part, the Eyüp neighbourhood is an actual city of the dead included in the city of the living. The Eyüp Sultan Mosque, founded on the tomb of Abu Ayyub al-Ansari, Companion of the Prophet, has made the entire district a holy city. His vast graveyard faces on the Golden Horn, outside the ancient Constantinople's walls.

**Fig. 2**

Thomas Allom, Karacaahmet Cemetery, engraving (from R. Walsh, Constantinople and the scenery of the seven churches of Asia Minor, Son Fisher, London 1839).

**Fig. 3**

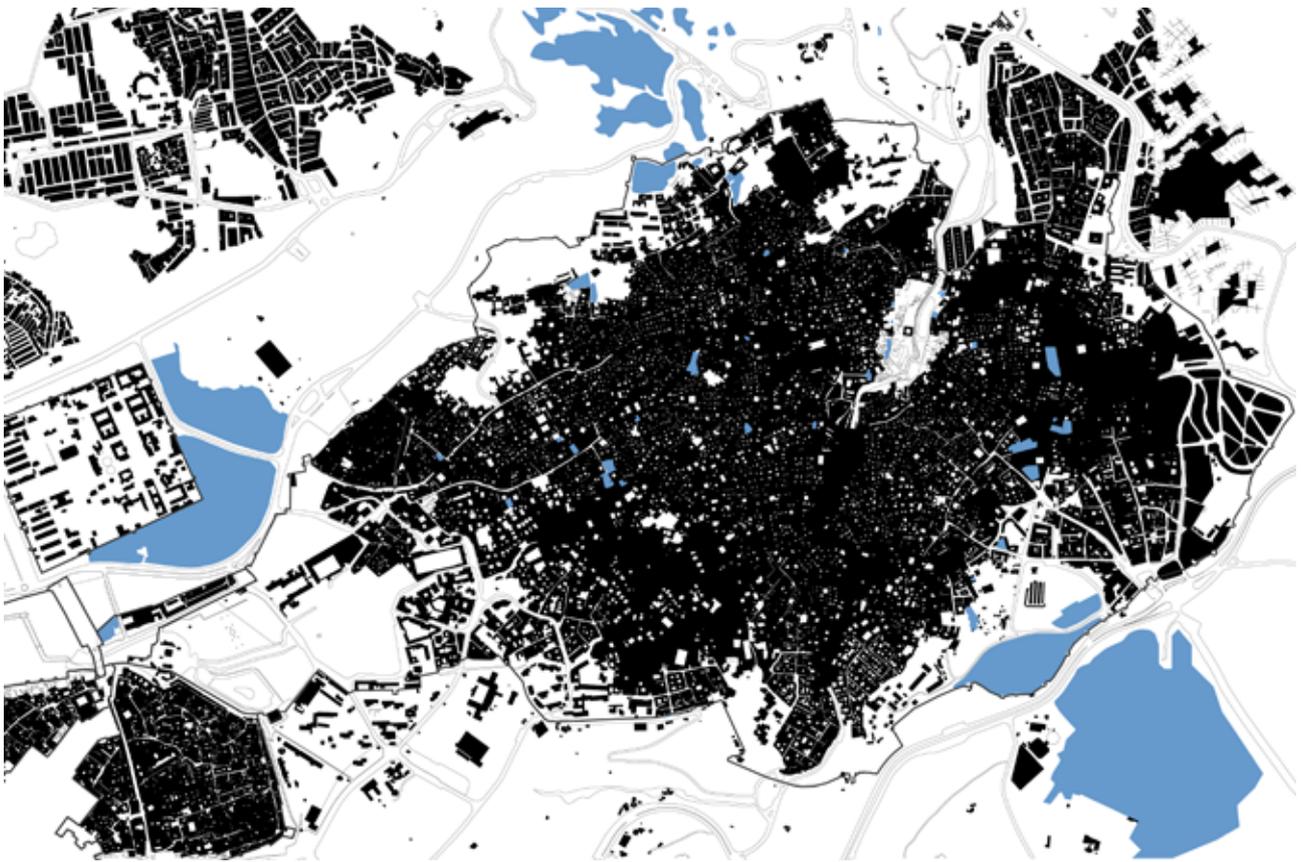
Mouradgea D'Ohsson, «Rites of passage in the Islamic cemetery of Eyüp», engraving (from Tableau Général de l'Empire Othoman, divisé en deux parties, dont l'une comprend la Législation Mahométane; l'autre l'Histoire de l'Empire Othomane, vol. I, De l'imprimerie de Monsieur, Paris 1787).



According to a construction principle of the whole city<sup>9</sup>, the cemeterial districts of Karacaahmet and Eyüp are built based on systems of axial and visual relation at a great distance, toward the sea and the emerging urban elements.

The city of Fez is an interesting case for what concerns the relationship between urban and cemeterial settlement. The expanded graveyards are located above hills outside the medina's walls, next to the gates, from which they also borrow the toponymy: Bab Ftouh, Bab al-Hamra, Bab Guissa<sup>10</sup>, Bab Mahrouk, Bab Segma.

These settlements are entirely part of the urban landscape composition. These wide, open spaces, entirely covered by white tombs partially coated with *zellij*<sup>11</sup>, have an essentially rural character but seem to reproduce the medina's architectural density at a different scale. The concept of volumetric unity, accepting variable heights and shapes, directly represents the Islamic Tradition, namely the Sunnah, which determines human activities and, consequently, the city construction (Burckhardt 2002, p. 160).

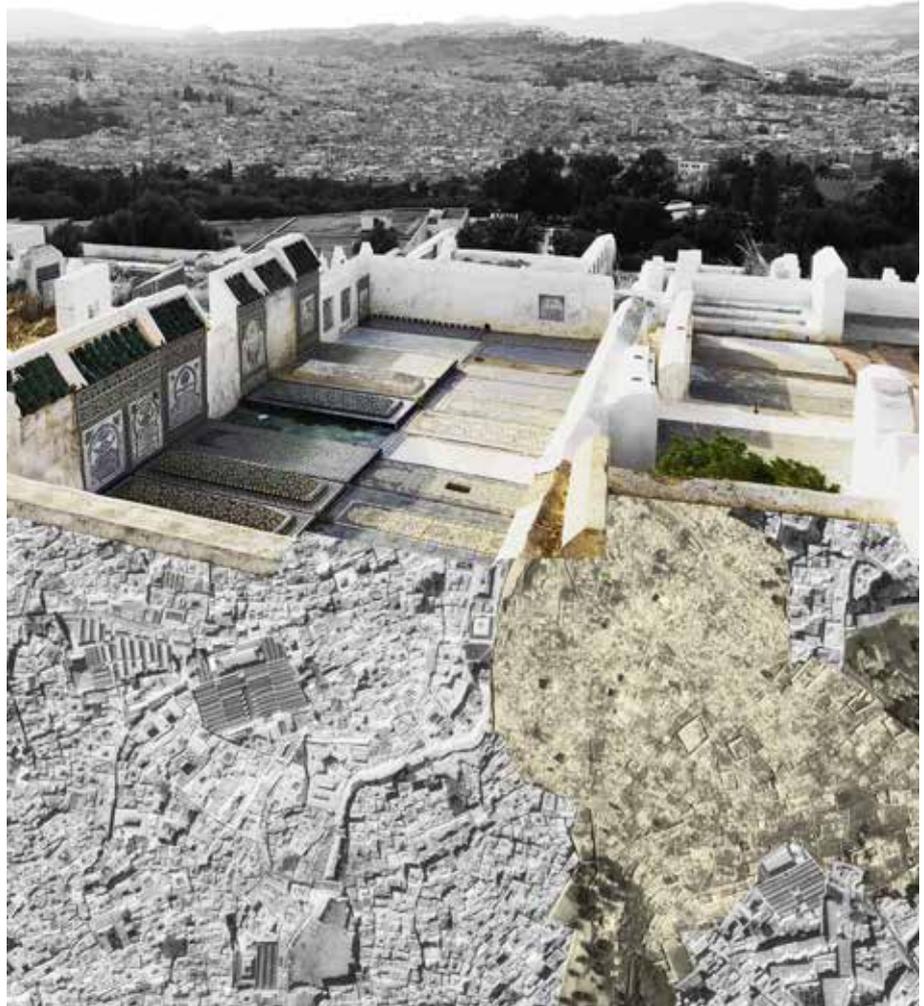
**Fig. 4**

Eliana Martinelli, *The medina of Fez and its cemeteries* (in light blue), 2021.

The cemeteries of Fez look at each other from different hills, and at the same time, offer a preferential point of view toward the medina. Like in the cemeterial districts of Istanbul, the burials are laid on the topography; in this case, the tombs crowd, filling the space uniformly up to the border. The most ancient ones are placed irregularly, as much as possible oriented toward Mecca's Kaaba. The vegetation is low and, for the most part, spontaneous and does not achieve a crucial compositional value.

The position and character of cemeteries, like little fortresses, contributed to the preservation of the ancient medina, not only as a unitary architectural figure, but also as urban structure. The photograph Bruno Barbey wrote in the forward to the book *Fès. Immeuble, immortelle*, edited with Tahar Ben Jelloun (1996): «Fès a été sauvée du béton par ses cimetières. On ne touche pas aux morts. Lorsqu'elle eut fini de pousser comme un arbre, de jeter ses rameaux en impasses, elle s'est corsetée dans ses remparts contre lesquels reposent les ancêtres<sup>12</sup>». Quoting the title of this photographic publication, we could assert that, in the case of Fez, precisely the city of the dead has made the city of the living «immobile, immortal».

The case histories here presented are not exhaustive of the variety of the Mediterranean Islamic cemeteries. However, they serve as examples of the role that these settlements acquire in the urban landscape composition. Even if considering the diversity of rites of the Islamic world, some shared features can constitute the premise to host “cities in the cities”, that is to say, to build new cities of the dead based on the transposition of different urban images, as expressions of diverse settlement cultures. Following the recent migratory phenomenon, a great debate started from the necessity to give burial to the members of always-more-numerous Muslim communities according to their rites and beliefs. Still today, a legislation problem, also connected to the various burial procedures, exists. Nevertheless, the

**Fig. 5**

Eliana Martinelli, «Analogies of form and surface: the medina of Fez and Bab Ftouh cemetery», collage, 2021.

rule cannot evolve without considering the human norm, deriving from the use and custom and translatable into forms.

In conclusion, we can observe some recurring principles: first of all, the presence of a low enclosure acting as a limit and retaining the ground, without any visual screen between interior and exterior; secondly, the relationship between topography and city, expressed in the replication of a different-scale way of settlement based on the visual connections; in the end, the comparison between mausoleums and minor tombs, almost anonymous and “domestic”, according to an aggregative logic, similarly to the city of the living. These elements are ascribable to specific ideas of urbanity and constitute attracting references to build new landscapes of the dead. As social and not figurative art, architecture acquired the function of exteriorising the faith in the Islamic world (Kowsar 1982, p. 28). This role can be proposed again in the crucial moment of death, the last occasion for a man to share his religious or cultural belonging.

## Notes

<sup>1</sup> Those places having the curious feature to be in relation with all the other places, but in a manner that allow them to stop, neutralise and invert the set of relationships summarised, reflected and mirrored by them (Foucault 1994, p. 13). For today's Western culture, the cemetery represents the higher expression of heterotopia, and heterochrony, where time stopped.

<sup>2</sup> An extreme case, in this sense, is the cemetery of Al-Qarafa at Cairo, the most ancient of Egypt, in which the integration between the two cities is complete. Despite its use, around one million people dwell it, in an extension of more than ten kilometres.

<sup>3</sup> According to Paolo Cuneo (1986, p. 89), the Islamic city is recognisable, more than in some recurring urban and constructive typologies, in the more integrated system of relationship between parts, able to combine and aggregate them in a unitary configuration, without denying the individuality of their components.

<sup>4</sup> Cfr. ch. *La città ottomana come una delle espressioni di città islamica* (Martinelli 2017, pp. 75-83).

<sup>5</sup> Ensemble of religious, social and cultural buildings, usually, but not always arranged around the mosque (Cerasi 1988, pp. 329-330).

<sup>6</sup> In Ottoman art, a component repeated in an architectural structure, a sculpture or a painting's composition.

<sup>7</sup> Vast urban open space, usually irregular in shape (Cerasi 1988, p. 330).

<sup>8</sup> In this regard, Le Corbusier (1966, p. 71) remembers a Turkish aphorism: «Où l'on bâtit, on plante des arbres» (where one builds, he plants trees).

<sup>9</sup> Cfr. ch. *Il sistema di relazioni e l'invenzione del suolo* (Martinelli 2017, pp. 149-187).

<sup>10</sup> Next to the Bab el-Guissa cemetery, the gigantic tomb's ruins of the Marinid Sultanate, which reigned from 1248 to 1465, stand.

<sup>11</sup> Glazed tiles made of terracotta, produced with the white clay of Fez.

<sup>12</sup> «Fez has been preserved from concrete by its cemeteries. Dead must not be touched. When it stopped to grow up like a tree, sprouting its little branches into blind alleys, it clung to its bastions, into which ancestors rest» (translation by the author). On this theme cfr. Pireddu A. (2021) – *Les pierres du temps. Le regard de Tahar Ben Jelloun, Bruno Barbey et Jean Marc Tingaud sur la médina*, in L. Hadda (ed.), *Médina. Espace de la Méditerranée*, Firenze University Press, Florence, pp. 25-41.

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Libero Carlo Palazzolo  
**Deep memories. The Parque Cementiri Nou at Igualada  
 by Enric Miralles and Carme Pinós**

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Abstract

At Igualada Enric Miralles and Carme Pinós give form to a landscape of pitiless poetry where death is evoked with solemn gravity. A trail descends between ruins and detritus along what seems like the dried bed of a river in flood as far as the final space where gaping tombs await. The fate that is in store for each of us is displayed without veils in an image worthy of Baroque theatre. The themes of the descent to the underworld, of the decomposition of the body and of the resurrection are not evoked by figurative devices but by an architecture suspended between construction and dilapidation. As in the Skogskirkogården, personal and collective memories are layered to give life to a landscape that is not simply geographical but also cultural, a landscape that more than any other represents the spirit of Catalonia as it exits forty years of dictatorship.

Keywords

Miralles-Pinós — Baroque — Landscape

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Un cementerio no es una tumba...  
 no es esa relación con el paisaje y con el olvido [...]¹.

The Cementiri Nou at Igualada by Enric Miralles and Carme Pinós is a geological landscape, an architecture of excavation consisting of sections stratified as in a *frottage*, but above all it is a cultural landscape pregnant with references and meanings. The absence of the boundary wall that had typified cemeteries since the nineteenth century assimilates it to the land art creations that nourished its genesis. Miralles and Pinós were already familiar with the works of Richard Long, Robert Smithson, Michael Heizer and James Turrell and the Urbino cemetery by Arnaldo Pomodoro. The project for the competition (1985) proposed a deep Z-shaped slash in the ground, recalling Heizer's Monumental City, a sign that dilated the path that led from the chapel to the burials and on to a little stream before losing itself in the landscape. It was a city dug into the earth as declared by its section resembling a urban street². The project was characterised by a zig-zag path and by a cross that hints at the presence of the underground chapel. An idea encapsulated by the motto *Zemen+iri*: in the Catalan word Cementiri the Z (the path) had taken the place of the C, while the T was replaced by a cross (the chapel). The theme of the path is central not only because it makes it possible to annihilate the perception of the cemetery boundary, but also because «ese signo es un modo de pensar lo natural, siguiendo la noción de precisión que comporta un camino. Corta como lo hace un sendero. Separando a los fluidos a su paso»³ and especially because it allows «alejarnos de los aspectos narrativos a los que los caminos en los jardines están acompañados»⁴.



**Fig. 1**  
Cementiri Nou Iguualada. The entrance (C. Palazzolo 1996).

However the link between cemetery and landscape brings to mind the Nordic *Waldfriedhof*, in particular Stockholm's *Skogskirkogården*. Miralles himself points out the importance that that project had for them: «Dedicamos la mayoría del dinero que ganamos del premio del concurso del cementerio de Iguualada en visitar los cementerios de Asplund y Lewerentz y sus obras, que me impresionaron mucho»<sup>5</sup>. During that journey he and Carme also visited the minor cemeteries of Lewerentz such as the one in *Valdemarsvik*: here the space is constructed by intervening with minimal – but essential – gestures on the topography while there is the flavour of an apparition about the little chapel with a star of hope glittering on its spire above the trees. But above all they were able to see how the masters of Nordic Classicism – whose exhibition catalogue Miralles almost knew off by heart<sup>6</sup> – are able to speak: of themselves, of the place and of the society to which they belong. An ability that Architecture always possessed and which seems to have side-lined today.

What the *Skogskirkogården* and the *Cementiri Nou* have in common is not just the path (initiatory? redemptive?) that, by focussing attention on the single stations, blurs perception of the cemetery boundaries or the shaping of the earth, but the desire that both reveal to progressively absorb collective signs and meanings in order to shape a cultural landscape. The architectures of Asplund and Lewerentz communicate their role thanks to iconographic apparatuses entrusted to painters, sculptors or extraordinary artisans. The signs are not always explicit, like the skull that serves as the lock for the *Woodland Chapel*, but each element contributes to allowing the architectural elements to “speak”: the lamps of the *Göteborg Law Courts* recall scales, those of the *State Bacteriological Laboratories* are like solidified droplets, and then of course is the inexorable clock beside the *Crematorium*. Miralles and Pinós, on the other hand, draw on the figurative heritage of contemporary art to evoke more profound languages and times and transform those signs into Architecture. As was the case with Asplund<sup>7</sup>, the journey also induced Miralles and Pinós to rethink the project; while maintaining the initial principles, what also according to Enric had been more of a proposal than a project, transformed itself after the Swedish trip – it became profoundly contextual. A place of memory takes shape, measuring itself against that “critical regionalism” which informed a large part of the architectural culture of those years, even if it was more regionalism than critical in many Catalan iterations. The paths are multiplied in the 1987 draft, while the abstract signs of land art are enriched by the enveloping curves of Catalan Modernism and of the rocks of *Monserrat*: the slash becomes a straight line – inexorable – and the urban section is transformed into a garden space<sup>8</sup>, while the few rectangular spaces are replaced by lots of triangles. Recognition of the dialogue between the curved public spaces and the individual lots that characterised the original *Park Güell* project is immediate, even the section of the vaults seems to spring from the fracture of one of Gaudí's *terravacuos*<sup>9</sup>. In order not to reveal the deception, the Z used for taking possession of the site and giving order to the project must remain hidden in the deepest layers of the *frottage*, like the triangles that are necessary in order to «acotar un croissant»<sup>10</sup>.

The possibility of a double descent and re-ascent pathway also offers different images of the mystery of life after death depending on the way followed through the park-cemetery: descent into the underworld, ascent to *Calvary* or beckoning to the heavens; in procession or alone ...



**Fig. 2**  
Cementiri Nou Igualada. The deep cut leads to the burial space (C. Palazzolo 1996).

But there is none of the serenity of the Nordic woodland cemeteries at Igualada. Everything at Stockholm leads towards the Elysian Fields and death is not elaborated, but organised and removed. It is only necessary to read Asplund's text on the Crematorium to understand how much attention he dedicated to this end<sup>11</sup>. Instead, at Igualada death is evoked with Iberian gravity. The fate that awaits us all is displayed without veils: lifeless corpses accumulate at the edge of an industrial area, in a sort of dump in which a river in flood has dragged every type of detritus. Only the wooden sleepers sunk into the ground recall how many they are, a memory destined to consume itself like every worldly thing; and the hollow that their consumption produces resounds beneath the feet of the visitors retracing that impetuous river towards the final space. There is no escape from that *cul de sac* where the gaping burials await.

The cultural voracity<sup>12</sup> of Miralles is nourished not only with architectural or figurative references but also draws on artistic literature. The uncovered tombs that await at the end of the path are inspired by Beato Angelico's Last Judgements, by Giacometti's sculptures, by Heizer's matches ... the apparently randomly placed slabs also recall the abandoned Källa cemetery. But rather than evoking the moment in which the bodies rise again, are a terrible and unsettling architectural *memento mori* like the two pictures in Seville's Ospedale della Caridad by Juan Valdéz Leal inspired by don Miguel Mañara. The decay of the bodies and the death that our society has removed are before our eyes. This work that is «dura en una época *light*»<sup>13</sup> evokes the words of André Chastel when he recalls that «uno dei grandi gesti dell'arte barocca fu [...] l'azione insieme teatrale e minacciosa che consiste nell'«aprire un sarcofago davanti alla corte»»<sup>14</sup>.

W. J. R. Curtis writes that at Igualada the characteristic features of its authors' language become the story of the feelings triggered when passing through that space<sup>15</sup>. In reality, the comparison with their previous architectural works reveals that in this project, perhaps specifically thanks to the specific function, Miralles and Pinós fine-tune their highly personal language. The *pathos* produced by the encounter with the decay, with the flow of things and with their wear and tear, leads them to investigating the mystery of the buildings' life, from ruin to the material that has yet



**Fig. 3**

The building elements that make these spaces materialise remain autonomous, they exhibit their own nature and their own dimensions scientifically, as do the individual constructive elements (C. Palazzolo 1996).

to make itself into Architecture, like the stones in the crypt of the Güell Colony that are waiting to be erected to become columns – one of the talismans of Miralles. The building elements that render those spaces material remain autonomous, they are their author's «objectos que se llevan en el bolsillo»<sup>16</sup>; once that pocket has been emptied, they scientifically exhibit their nature and their dimensions: ramps, steps, walkways ... are limited to crossing the different levels that they link together without being confused with them, without touching them; it is the same with the individual construction elements (bricks, beams, prefabricated panels ...). The joints between them dilate, giving a dramatic character to the whole that increasingly resembles a ruin, and not just because the vegetation insinuates itself into them. The times for the completion of the cemetery seem to obey Enric's admonition that the sole way of conserving a project is never to finish it, but this also augments the idea of architecture that offers the image of its own ruination.

Rather than Brutalism, the way the building elements are displayed recalls Giuliano da Sangallo's drawings of Antiquity, where buildings are depicted as ruins in precarious equilibrium in order to reveal how they were constructed. Their architecture, indebted to the forms of Constructivism or of Gimnasio Maravillas, leaves space for a highly personal language: from now on the projects of Miralles and Pinós would be the architectural equivalent of a page from Vesalius. In Igualada too «non abbiamo il simbolo della morte preparato da un predicatore per distogliere dalla vita terrena, bensì una illustrazione inventata da un artista fantasioso al servizio dello scienziato [...] per accompagnare una indagine inconfutabile sul mistero della vita»<sup>17</sup>. The life of buildings too.

The body that is subjected to anatomical investigation is not so much that of the works of Gaudí rather than that of the buildings of Catalan Minimalism – whose figures are the subject of unprejudiced dissection. In this way, in the place where everything compels reflection on death, what comes to life is the language that best represents the spirit of a Catalonia that can reaffirm its identity after forty years of dictatorship.

The accumulation of signs from the meanings and memories of every kind is such that years later Miralles will ask himself



**Fig. 4**  
Juan de Valdés Leal, *Finis Glorise Mundi*, from *Jeroglificos de la Muerte* (Hieroglyphics of death), Hospital de la Caridad, Seville, 1672.

**Fig. 5**  
A river in flood has entrained every kind of detritus, accumulating lifeless bodies too. Only the wooden sleepers sunk into the paving recall their number, a memory destined to consume itself like every worldly thing; and the hollow that their consumption produces resounds beneath the feet of the visitor following that impetuous riven towards the final space. (C. Palazzolo 1996).



quáles serían aquellas piezas que hubiera sido suficiente construir. Hay una parte del proyecto, que es seguramente menos conocida, que es muy importante. Son estas pequeñas losas que están cubriendo una pequeña colina que hay en la entrada, donde se colocó parte del movimiento de tierras proveniente del corte, donde hay un dibujo en espiral absolutamente irreconocible – su propia dimensión lo hace irreconocible. A lo mejor empezando por estas cosas hubiera sido suficiente para construir un cementerio»<sup>18</sup>.

Despite adding «Seguramente no es verdad. Lo que estoy diciendo son seguramente comentarios a todo pasado»<sup>19</sup>, is *verdad* which in the project for enlarging the Venice cemetery in 1998 it is a precise geometrical spiral that guides the pathway that invades the lagoon. For the extension of the island of San Michele, Enric – by now separated from Carme – again designed a “topography” intended not as a mere description of a place but as actually shaping it: rising from the water is an orography surrounded by a thin cement curtain, a petrified Running Fence that conceals the city and creates a place of meditation which, as poetically summarised by the motto, has «Per pavimento il mare e per tetto il cielo»<sup>20</sup>. Words that touch the Venice’s very nature but that did not convince a jury that was more inclined to espouse the «filosofia de la caseta i l’hortet»<sup>21</sup>. Miralles had noticed that a maze is drawn on the floor of the main chapel in the Asplund Crematorium, in from the places reserved for the family of the defunct: allowing the eye to lead the mind around its coils it is possible for a moment to forget the pain being felt and allowing space to be found for memory.

\*translation Michael Friel

## Notes

<sup>1</sup> «A cemetery is not a tomb ... the relationship with the landscape and with forgetting is not the same...» wrote Enric Miralles in a letter to Josep Lluís Mateo quoted in an article by Almalé Artal E. (2014), which also reproduces a large part of the competition drawings.

<sup>2</sup> Useful for the sections is Almalé Artal E. (2014), <https://homenajeenricmiralles.files.wordpress.com/2014/10/seccion.jpg>

<sup>3</sup> «that sign is a form of thinking naturally, following the notion of precision that makes a path. It cuts across like a trail, dividing the fluids as it goes», Miralles E. (1994a), p. 41; collected later with other writings in Miralles E. (2009b), p. 34.

<sup>4</sup> «distancing ourselves from the narrative aspects that accompany garden paths», Miralles E. (1994a) and Miralles (2009b), *ibid.*

<sup>5</sup> «We spent a large part of the winnings from the Igualada cemetery competition on visiting the cemeteries and works of Asplund and Lewerentz and I was greatly impressed by them.», Wiesner T. (1992).

<sup>6</sup> Wiesner T. (1992).

<sup>7</sup> For the final project of the Woodland Chapel Asplund reworked the Liselund pavilion which he had visited during his honeymoon. See Wrede, S. (1980) and Constant C. (1994).

<sup>8</sup> It is useful to compare the sections published in Almalé Artal E. (2014), <https://homenajeenricmiralles.files.wordpress.com/2014/10/seccion.jpg> with those of Zabalbeascoa A. (1996), p. 52.

<sup>9</sup> Lahuerta J. J. (1996), p. 22.

<sup>10</sup> «to lay out a croissant», Miralles E. and Prats E. (1994).

<sup>11</sup> Asplund E. G. (1940).

<sup>12</sup> Pinós (2009), p.79.

<sup>13</sup> Vázquez Montalbán M. (1987), p. 218. This is how he described Barcelona's Plaça de Sants, to the project for which Miralles himself had contributed when he worked in the Piñon and Viaplana office: «it is a hard square in a light age, opposed by the people and by the press, both steeped in the age-old principle of injecting nature into the city» and that «bears witness and pays homage to the truth of the urban look and makes no concession to the philosophy of the cottage and of the small garden».

<sup>14</sup> «one of the great gestures of Baroque art was [...] the action both theatrical and threatening that consists of 'opening a sarcophagus before the court'», Chastel A. (1954), p. 231.

<sup>15</sup> Curtis W. J. R. (1994).

<sup>16</sup> «objects in your pocket», Miralles E. (1994b), p. 111.

<sup>17</sup> «we do not get symbols of death prepared by a preacher as distractions from earthy life, but rather an illustration invented by imaginative artists in the scientist's service [...] to accompany an irrefutable investigation into the mystery of life», Chastel A. (1954), p. 240.

<sup>18</sup> «which parts it would be sufficient to build. There is a part of the project, that is certainly less known, that is very important. They are these small slabs laid on a little hill at the entrance where part of the earth removed from the cut is amassed, where there is an absolutely unrecognisable spiral drawing – it is too big to be recognisable. It would probably be enough to start from these elements to build a cemetery», Miralles E. (2009a), p. 26.

<sup>19</sup> «It is certainly not the truth. My words are comments *a posteriori*», Miralles E. (2009a), p. 26.

<sup>20</sup> «The sea as its floor and the sky as its roof», Levene R. and Márquez Cecilia F. (2019), p. 468-477, «Extension of the Cemetery of San Michele in Isola».

<sup>21</sup> « philosophy of the cottage and the small garden », Vázquez Montalbán M. (1987), p. 218;

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Andrea Valvason  
**The Muda Maé Cemetery at Longarone.  
Reconstruction: between memory, suffering, and invention**

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Abstract

Hollowed out of the belly of the mountain, the Muda Maé Cemetery at Longarone resembles a rediscovered ancient necropolis, a symbol of memory and rebirth following the dramatic events of the Vajont disaster in October 1963.

Questioning the meaning of this work, beyond what it stands for, means investigating the context which generated it and the problem of reconstruction in general, a theme constantly present throughout history in which certain fundamental questions of the architectural debate – still in progress – become explicit through real and binding situations.

The work exhibited here represents a possible direct manifestation of a design approach based on a dialectical relationship and continuity with respect to a specific story and context. The theme of memory linked to reconstruction assumes a key role in the understanding and development of the contemporary project.

Keywords

Cemetery — Vajont — Reconstruction — Memory — Landscape

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The cemetery, like the house, is a place where everyone is, for the most part, involved individually, with a certain familiarity. [...] This suggests that the cemetery, like the house, belongs to the intimacy of a personal patrimony, one that it is reasonable to expect should be used privately. (Canella 1984, p.2)

Reflecting today on the cemetery project for the victims of Vajont by Francesco Tentori, at the time a regular collaborator with Gianni Avon who also involved his Milanese friend Marco Zanuso, can spark considerable interest if included within a broader dimension to do with the theme of reconstruction<sup>1</sup>. This highly complex, eternally topical issue addresses the problem of the architectural project in its relationship with the city and with the various variations it can assume if considered as a unique expression of *urbs* and *civitas* and therefore as a built, historical and social context, in which the architectural work becomes the bearer of meaning by addressing the fundamental issues that are intertwined within the theoretical and operational debate of *making contemporary architecture*.

The Muda Maé Cemetery work must therefore be interpreted and understood according to the context, structured as it was on several levels, from which it took its form and within which it was inserted: a context where everything revolves around the human tragedy that found a concrete expression in the loss of homes, the city, and life.

On the night of 9 October 1963, in the mountain valleys on the border between the Friuli and Veneto regions where, nestling among the rocks, the Vajont Dam rises, a huge landslide broke away from the northern side of Mount Toc to fall into the reservoir of the artificial basin, generating a wave of water and mud which quite literally wiped out the entire inhabited area of Longarone, and also partially erased some neighbouring villages such as Erto and Casso, located upstream of the barrier.

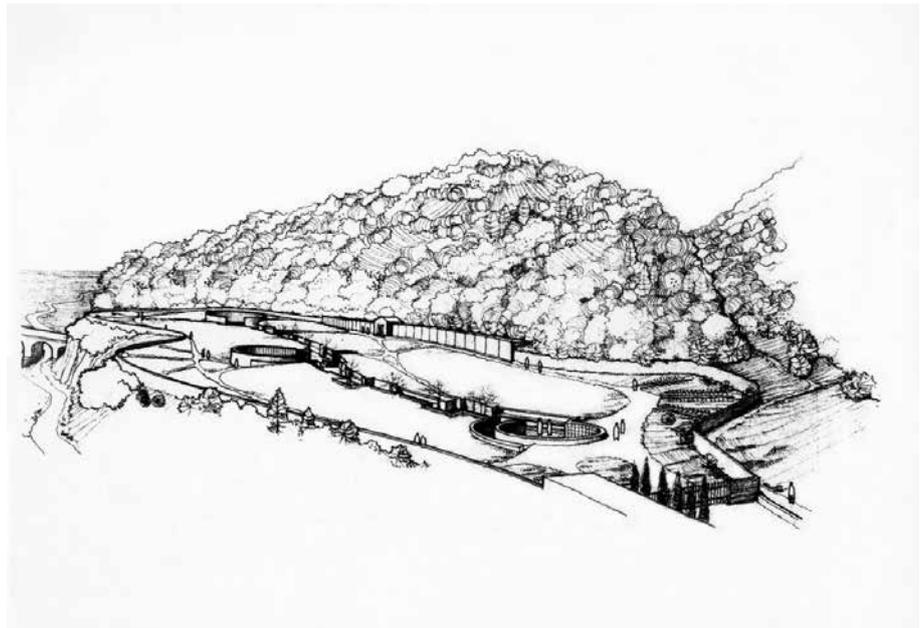


**Fig. 1**  
The “tabula rasa” of Longarone after the Vajont disaster (historical photo)

In the aftermath of the tragedy, the reconstruction plan and works were entrusted to a group of architects headed by Giuseppe Samonà who proposed a modernist intervention to rebuild Longarone, in a curt response to the diametrically opposed requests of the “survivors’ committee”, who hoped to reconstruct the urban fabric based on traditional models, moved more by a desire to regain possession of that family environment which they had seen dramatically vanish in the space of a few minutes rather than a philological restoration of the settlement.

The figures of Francesco Tentori and Gianni Avon made their appearance when the municipal administration called the latter to act as mediator between the two opposing factions, in the hope of speeding up the drafting of the reconstruction plan. The scenario which the two architects found was heavy with conflict, divided «between the models of uncompromising rationality of ‘technicians from outside’, and the vernacular aspirations of the local survivors» (Zuconi 2000, p. 89), inhabitants of a territory whose parochial but perfectly respectable mentality can be summed up by a verse of Pier Paolo Pasolini: «A no è àghe pi frès-cie che tal mè país»<sup>1</sup>.

Avon and Tentori succeeded in the enterprise through a careful and timely investigation aimed at mitigating the planning choices at urban and building levels while matching the inhabitants’ individual requests. Consequently, in the first months of 1965, the detailed executive project signed off by Samonà was approved: «In the fact of Vajont we weigh the difference between the planning of the institutions and that of the local community – a conflict between opposing cultures: the first standardizing, the second personalizing» (Pastor 2010, p.8).



**Fig. 2**  
Muda Maé Cemetery, perspective sketch (IUAV Projects Archive).

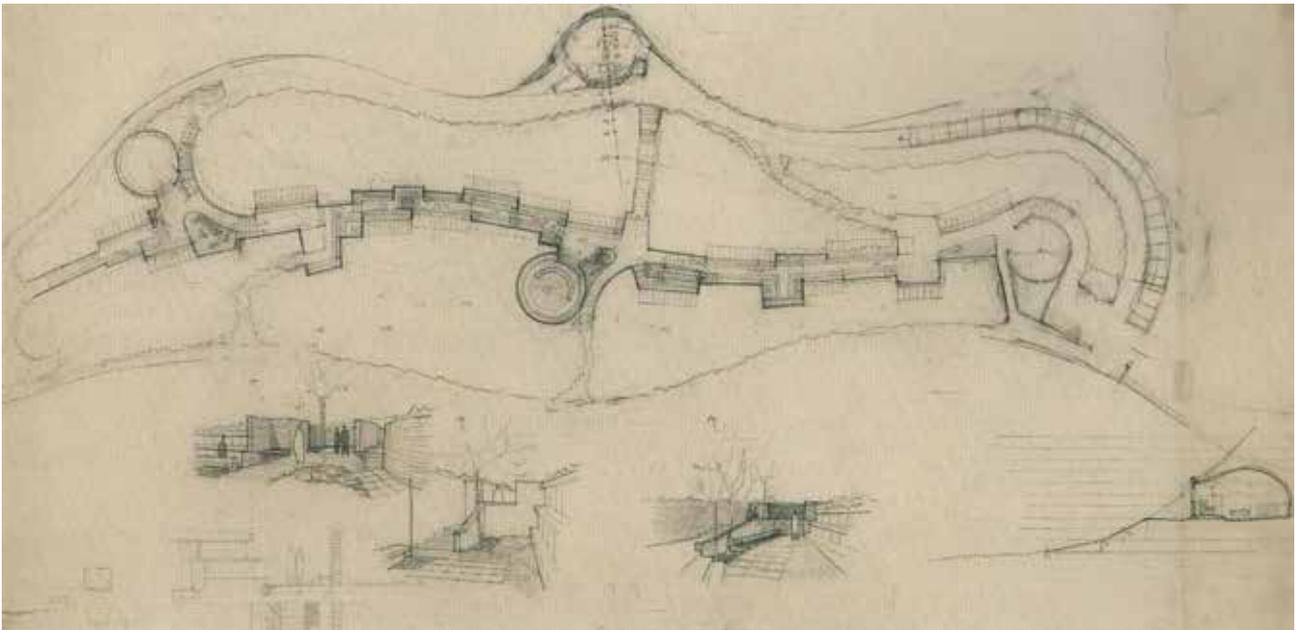
The attitude of humble self-denial with which the two architects carried out their work was symptomatic of the atmosphere which enveloped the Zoldana Valley in those years, where the suffering of the human condition was tackled with respect, fully aware of the desire for redemption among those who had survived the tragedy, whose only desire was to preserve their memory and recreate the essence of what had been lost.

Here we find the meaning of reconstruction which in its most basic sense can refer to an act of re-implantation, that is, a system of actions, a working method, an approach which, in the moment of doing, holds together memory, the present condition and a future vision for the realization of a contemporary work.

This type of approach can be traced in the design process which led to the realization of the Muda Maé Cemetery, the final moment of a work whose nature can be summed up in the words of Francesco Tentori: «It was undoubtedly the most interesting human experience of my life» (Tentori 200 p. 17).

Gianni Avon, Francesco Tentori and Marco Zanuso (an outsider who would have the opportunity to work on other occasions with Studio Avon) developed the project between their Milan and Udine studios, completing it in 1966 to be followed by the executive development phase and the realization which however would not begin until 1969, and ending only in 1972.

The cemetery is located on a steeply sloping terrain to the right of the Maé, a tributary of the Piave river, and mimics the form of an ancient substructure recently brought to light, composed of thick walls which «recall the boundary walls of mountain farms rather than the margin of a cemetery» (Acocella 200 4p. 117). The layout follows a linear, slightly curved pathway which respects the orography of the ground, in a structure strongly rooted to the site, becoming an integral part of it without altering the overall geography. The pathway develops completely below ground level, obtained by excavating the soil which becomes the built space within which the funeral rite takes place, the moment of the passage from life to death, its celebration and remembrance:



**Fig. 3**  
Muda Maé Cemetery, general plan, preparatory sketch.

From the first inspection, we could see that the land had a view coldheartedly focused on the huge expanse of gravel of the Piave valley (regularly almost devoid of water), and the dam which had devastated the thousands of inhabitants. It seemed to us that if the cemetery had been built with that view, it could not have provided that place of concentration and memory which is required when one goes to visit the grave of a family member. Hence the idea that it would be appropriate to dig the ground and create open-air environments surrounded by niches. (Tentori 1999, p. 20)

Fundamental elements of the ground plan are the ascending paths between the lower and ground levels, allowing a constant dialogue between the built environment and the natural landscape, and the three circular spaces, formally referring to the Greek *tholos*, which act as compositional hinges to which the cemetery pathway is attached, at the same time serving as spatial limits positioned at the beginning, centre, and end of the route: «From all these environments only the mountains can be seen, that is, the calm face of nature, not its threatening and distressing aspects» (Tentori 1999, p. 20).

The landscape and the naturalistic element do not play the simple role of a scenographic backdrop but become an integral part of the construction, an operating tool, a design material. This is due on the one hand to the siting of the structure and its internal development, and on the other to the use of the architectural elements described above through which the work becomes an open structure in which architecture and landscape coexist, collaborate, and fuse, bringing to life a unitary system whereby we can witness a reconciliation between man and nature in an attempt to restore a formerly compromised relationship in an interpretation of «landscape as anatomy»<sup>2</sup>, as if the forms of the one were an extension of the other, and vice versa.

The staging of the human tragedy intervenes here, understood in the poetic meaning of the term, in which the theme of memory is addressed through a design process and a compositional mechanism developed through a “silent” operation, generated, almost spontaneously, starting from the experiential, and from the events of which the cemetery is a direct witness: «So that the *collective trauma of those who remain* is also a *distressing awareness* of the need for every society to resort to the surviving morality to pass from a state of astonished affliction to a creative state promoted even by irrational spiritual resources» (Canella 1974 p. 2).



**Fig. 4**  
Muda Maé Cemetery, view from above (photo by Italo Zannier).

The control over the project at formal and figurative levels can be found both in the general scale of the ground plan, and in that of the details, where the construction techniques and the materials used come directly from the context and the site. The squared stone blocks of which the embankments and the walls that mark the internal pathway are composed are the same portions of rock removed from the mountain to graft the cemetery structure onto it: «The image of the return to the earth is poetically reinterpreted as an excavation into nature and a gesture of the material removed to contain the body: the first sign of man's architecture, like the mound in the woods which Adolf Loos spoke of. (Dorigati e Ottolini 1984, p.18)

Architecture and landscape in a dialogue with each other build a symbolic space for the contemplation of memory, recalled through the arrangement of a series of images which refer to the rite of death, to the history of which they are witnesses or to the context they are a part of: from the images of funeral pathways of ancient origin to those of the trenches or outposts hollowed out of the rocky walls of the mountains, dating back to the Great War and now an integral element of the Alpine landscape of this territory. Such a semantic charge was made possible thanks to the sensibility with which Avon, Tentori and Zanuso addressed the theme of the cemetery here, where the figure of the individual architect took a step back – so much so that the work cannot be attributed to any of the three designers from a linguistic point of view – to make room for the design, the architecture, and what this represents through the creation of a phenomenal device which generates images: visions that are abstract or real, tragic or happy, dense with memory but projecting into the future, images in any case imbued with hope, loomed over by the now calm figure of a scarred landscape.

By its very nature, the Muda Maé Cemetery is thus elevated to become a monument which is a place of memory and celebration:

Memory confers the measure of time on the things of space: all that time which lies before us. But it is the time of the dead, gathered in a consortium to warn us to be as alive as they were in their moment. Admonishing and remembering (*moneo* and *memini*) have the same root in Latin and from this the word *monument* as well as the concept it symbolically encloses acquire their value. (Rogers 1968, p. 137)

The issues addressed in this work, in particular in the design process,

**Fig. 5**

Muda Maé Cemetery, seen from the internal pathway (photo by Italo Zannier).

which concern the relationship of architecture with history and a confrontation with the context, the theme of memory, the relationship between landscape and construction, the theme of the image, a representation and symbol concretized in the action of passing on a value, of transmitting a memory, a teaching through that reciprocal exchange of contents which occurs between signifier and signified, can be traced back to the problem of reconstruction, analysed on both theoretical and operational levels. Reconstruction is to be understood in a broad sense, i.e. not referring solely to the operation of rebuilding, but interpreted as a critical action which guides the creative process from conception to realization, aimed at yielding a work of architecture based on the principle of continuity: «Our task is to arouse the dialectical synthesis of the complex cultural world in which we participate, creating an artistic environment which sincerely expresses today's reality (and problems)» (Rogers 1945, p. 69).

In the case of the Vajont disaster, these questions became immediately explicit and utterly tangible, where the response to the aforementioned themes was suddenly and urgently necessary so that the works produced became direct manifestations, concrete examples, of an operative way of thinking, some successful, some less so. However, it behoves us to reflect on the cultural significance of these interventions in which a certain inclination can easily be traced, a certain tendency to conceive the work of contemporary architecture as a calculated graft. A conception which can be extended more generally to what could be a viable direction in contemporary architectural design, even when it does not actually concern areas related to the need to reconstruct but ones which are nonetheless inserted within a space, a time, and a specific cultural context. With this, we wish to verify whether it is possible to transfer the theoretical assumptions determined by the reconstruction problem to a collective approach which directs the design action towards the development of an architecture for the city, that is, a work set within a circumscribed context: so that the pathos aroused in the face of the «defeat of the intimacy of places» (Rossi 2018, p. 18), loaded by dramatic contingent situations and transferred to the project, is the same one, appropriately measured, which intervenes in the critical and operational moment of making architecture extended to all

contemporary production, or at least to that of a Western origin. And without excluding, but focusing the right amount of attention on, that precious value of expressive freedom and «exquisite indifference» (Varnedoe 1990) which modern art has transmitted to us, and which today is plainly almost completely misunderstood.

Consequently, we have no wish here to enter into topics that lie beyond the scope of this essay, instead the intent is to look at the work of the Muda Maé Cemetery at Longarone from a broader perspective, through which it is possible to abstract founding principles that can be transcribed into general assumptions to examine while questioning ourselves to better understand the current condition of the architectural world, but also beyond it. One element of this project which can be seen as confirmation of the statements just expressed is the presence of an architectural language which is not easily attributable, not merely because it is a work prepared by several people, but above all because it was developed according to a principle of invention, and is therefore a culturally dynamic language which recovered, re-elaborated and recapitulated the elements of tradition, the territory and the history of the place, producing a coherent albeit completely new result, abandoning any personal idiosyncrasies to make room for architecture and its function.

The Muda Maé Cemetery is therefore a testimony, and at the same time a symbol, of a possible rebirth, established through a work whose meaning should be understood through the spirit and intention, «the souls of those who lived there» (Tentori 1968, p. 30) and weighed against such a human tragedy, bringing them back through a “silent” work which evokes both memory and hope: «The architecture represents this battle against misfortune, a charm against death, against fate, a show of resistance, a test of strength» (Semerani 1999, p. 63).

## Notes

<sup>1</sup> The theme of reconstruction is introduced here by referring to some research work begun within the Architectural Design Studio of a two-year Master’s Degree in “Architecture and Urban Design” at the Polytechnic University of Milan, under Professors Enrico Bordogna and Tommaso Brighenti, in the academic years 2016-17, 2017-18, 2018-19, and 2019-20. During these years, various degree theses on the situations of Amatrice, Norcia, and Camerino were prepared, including preliminary research work for projects that included in-depth analyses of the wide range of reconstruction episodes after natural disasters, such as that of the Vajont case under consideration.

<sup>2</sup> Zigaina G. (2014) – “*Paesaggio come anatomia*”. In: Magris C., Agostinelli F., Zigaina G. (eds.), *Zigaina: paesaggio come anatomia: l’incisione 1965-2014*, catalogue of an exhibition held in Trieste, Cervignano del Friuli and Udine in 2014 (the essay is from Zigaina G. (1995) – *Verso la laguna*. Marsilio, Venice). Lithostampa, Pasian di Prato (UD), p.27.

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Alessandra Carlini  
**Handing down the immaterial.  
Cremation themes for funerary architecture**

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Abstract

This paper aims to investigate how the practice of cremation can contribute to the configuration and resemanticization of places intended for the cult of the dead. We will identify those architectural features that are linked to the burial and the dispersion of ashes, capable of giving meaningful form to the impalpable matter of memory. Even though there is no longer a body to testify to human existence, we intend to demonstrate, through the concrete answers offered by architectural practice, how the burial of ashes can inform or modify the character of the modern cemetery, allowing a typological analysis rooted in compositional principles and archetypal images.

Keywords

Funerary architecture — Cremation — Typological characteristics — City-Cemetery — Nature-Cemetery

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The three images that open this text densify the echo of time in the silence and immortalize the transience of life in the stillness of the camera (Fig. 1). It is the cinema of Yasujiro Ozu<sup>1</sup>, and the film sequence marks the three ritual moments of cremation<sup>2</sup> – the burning of the body, the farewell of the funeral procession, the burial of the ashes – defining the horizon within which to investigate a funeral practice that aids reflection on the resemanticization of places intended for the cult of the dead.

Under the pressure of multi-religious and secular trends, of a changing Catholic sensitivity<sup>3</sup> and recent health emergencies, cremation is gaining more and more drive also in the West, placing particular typological-formal themes on the modern cemetery.

Where there is no longer a body to testify to human existence (Bachelard 1989, Sozzi 2004), it is the place itself that offers the physicality useful for transforming *absence* into *presence* (Schama 1997; Ricoeur 2004). Landscapes of ashes, new forms of memory, recover and renew the spatiality of the cemetery tradition<sup>4</sup>. The conservation within urns, apart from clear dimensional differences, finds imagery firmly anchored in the nineteenth-century and Mediterranean tradition of the city-cemetery (Ariès 1998), linked to the practice of burial in the ground creating holy-fields, and of burial in columbaria, generating walls and fences. In this way the dispersion of the ashes opens up ideas close to the Northern European tradition of the nature-cemetery, exploring the expressive potential offered by a domesticated vegetation to accompany the cult of the dead (Morin 2002; Grimal 2005), within spatialities modelled on the relationship to forest-clearing or on the rural dimension of the landscape. Places destined for the ashes in which the typical elements of the architectural



**Fig. 1**  
Frames from the film 'Kohayagawa Family Autumn' (Kohayagawa-ke no aki), directed by Yasujiro Ozu, 1961. Three ritual moments: the crematorium, the funeral procession, the burial of the ashes.

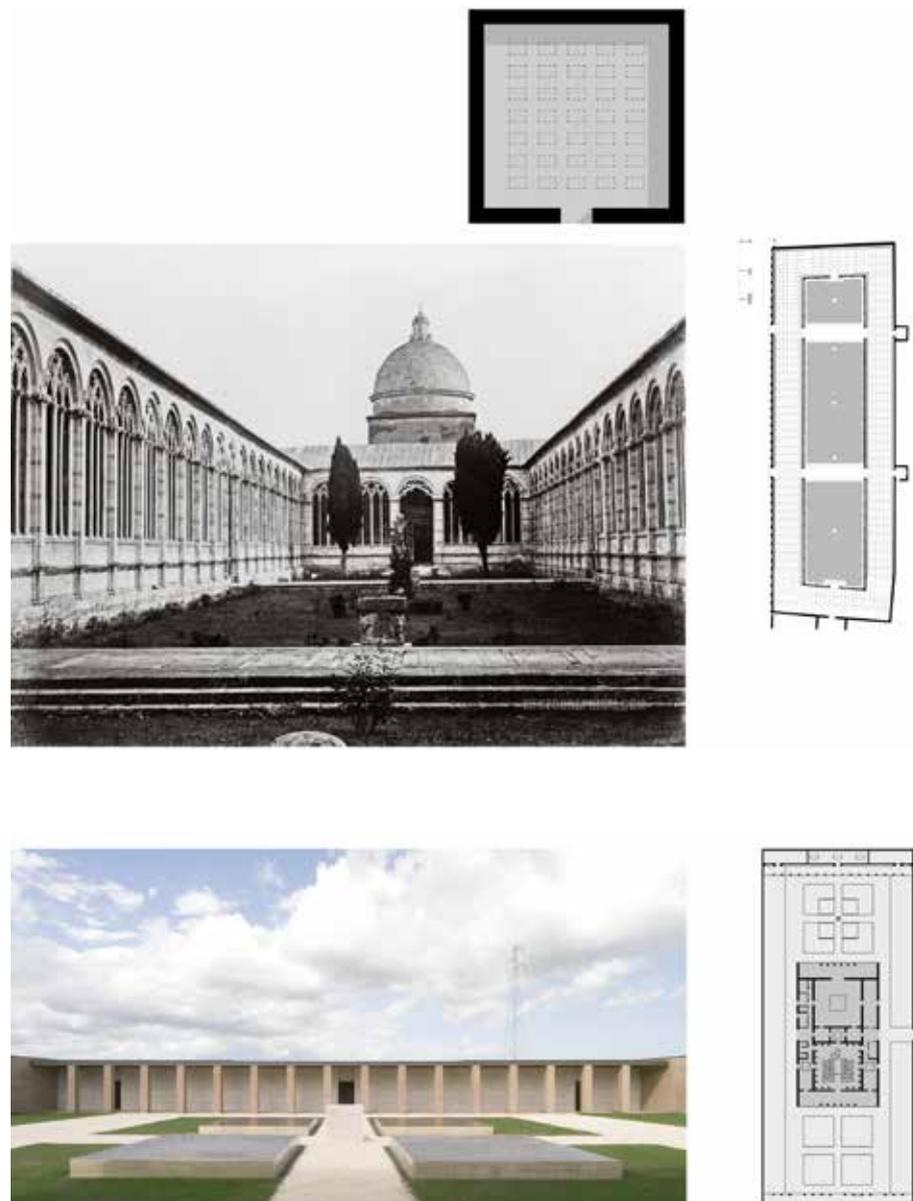
composition – collect / disperse, enclose / diffuse, thresholds to mediate and clarify, order of movement to orient and hierarchize – can still contribute to defining identity values and spatial characteristics of these new cemetery divisions.

### **Cremation and «work of the memory»<sup>5</sup>**

If, as anthropologists affirm, funerary practices serve to distance the inevitable disintegration of the body from the gaze (Morin 2002; Bachelard 2006, 2007) and the architectural manifestation of mourning expresses the containment of anguish in the face of death (Giedion 1969; Ariès 1998), cremation and the landscapes generated by the burial of the ashes present some particularities.

Firstly, in the practice of cremation the purifying fire acts on a still intact, uncorrupted matter, freeing what is perishable – the flesh (Morin 2002) – from the process of decomposition: cremation removes the connection between the matter of the *body and the matter of the memory* creating in relatives the fear of not being able to rely on the presence of a recognizable place capable of passing on the memory (Sozzi 2004, Urbain 1998). This change in scale, from the body to the ashes (Hintermeyer 2013), assigns a different value to the burial. The grave, which in the burial and entombment, is still a memory of the body that lies there, its measure and *monumentum* (Ariès 1984), loses its material consistency and, to assume the value of a sepulcher, is the very place that receives the ashes. As Edgar Morin (2002, p.139) observes «The apparent opposition between cremation and burial falls apart if we consider that cremation does not destroy the whole corpse: the ashes are in fact preserved».

If in the deposition of the urn a tangible trace can still be assumed to maintain the shape of the memory in space and time, in the scattering the ashes become one with the place of the dispersion, with the regenerative force of nature stretching out into a dimension without time. The aim of the architectural intervention then becomes what Simon Schama (1997, p.25) attributes to the patrimonial value of the landscape as a palimpsest in which «Memory [takes on] the shape of the landscape. [...] Absence [becomes] presence»<sup>6</sup>. The immaterial dimension inherent in the destiny of the ashes forces us into a «work of memory» (Ricoeur 2004) which is not satisfied with the mechanical reiteration of a memory fulfilled by the correspondence between tomb and buried body, but which must carry out, in time and space, a continuous exercise of remembrance. In this sense, the landscapes of the ashes increasingly renounce the strong individual characterization of the burial space, instead approaching the individual and collective dimension of the «work of memory» to keep together the recognition of the cemetery as a formal unit and the identification of the burial as a subordinate compositional variation, dominating the relationship between the parts and the whole.



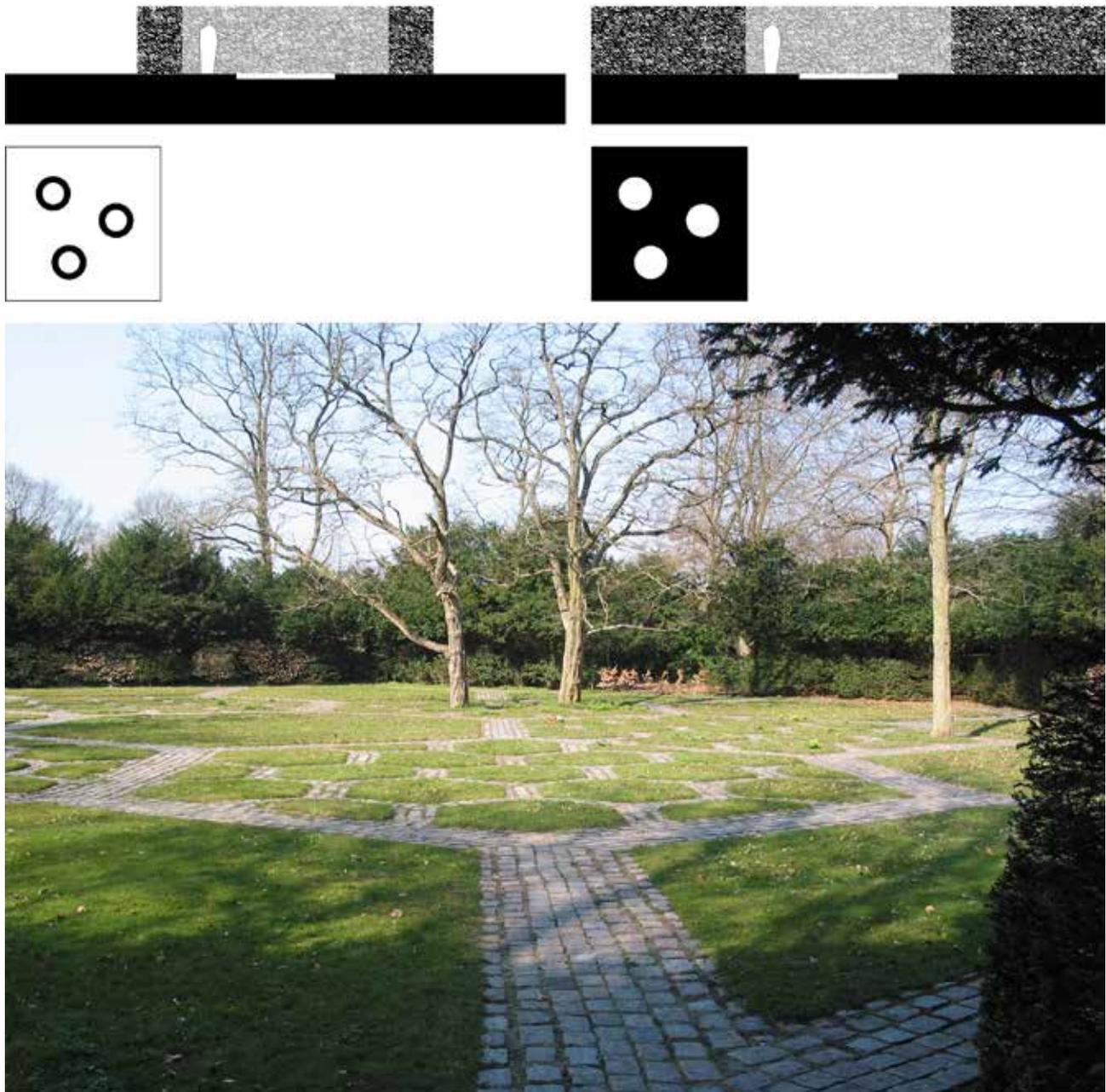
**Fig. 2**

Columbaria enclosures. Above: The Cemetery of Pisa (13th century) which serves as a model for the 19th-century and Mediterranean cemetery-city. Below: Crematorium temple of Parma, arch. P. Zermani with E. Tessonni (2009). The wall enclosure houses dovetail systems intended to house the cinerary urns. Drawings by the author.

### Fenced areas and woods for the deposition of urns.

In cultures that preserve the remains of cremation, urn and ashes have always been an inseparable unity. The object, the urn, transmits the memory both when it is placed in fenced areas, where the limit defines what is sacred (Ariès 1984), and when it is buried where nature itself is sacred and therefore indivisible (Eliade 2008).

In the first case, the evocative power of architecture is defined by the relationship between the funerary enclosure and the circumscribed space. It matters little whether the delimited and inward-looking space, destined to give meaningful form to mourning and memory, is anchored to a monumental or naturalistic setting; if it is a quadriporticus of urnariums that borders empty and sunny ground or if the definition of the open-air chamber is entrusted to topiary borders that embrace a lawn dotted with urns. In both cases, the act of defining a limit has ritualized a space, separating an interior governed by the laws of memory from an exterior, indistinct and free from memory; inside, so that mourning can find its most private dimension, the spatial tension is vertical, fusing the relationship between earth and



**Fig. 3**

Fences and clearings for the burial of ashes or for dispersal in nature: open rooms delimited by tree fences and clearings created within a continuous planting. Below: Mariebjerg Cemetery (Copenhagen, Denmark), arch. G. Brandt (1926-1936) (Photo © Gentofte Kommune). The ground for the burial of the urns is bordered by an intensive green border. Drawings by the author.

sky to remove the perception of life that flows around it. However, if the enclosure of the columbarium, proposed by Paolo Zermani for the Crematorium Temple of Parma<sup>7</sup> (2006-09), is solidly rooted in the model of the nineteenth-century cemetery and in its archetype, the Camposanto di Pisa (XIII century), due to its spatial features obtained through the use of tree massing, the most direct references are to be found in the work of landscape architects such as Gudmund Brandt, Carl Theodor Sørensen, Palle Schimidt, Sven-Ingvar Andersson, in that aesthetic of green architecture which, at the beginning of the twentieth century, serves as a breeding ground for funerary applications in Northern Europe (Latini 1998) (Fig. 2 and 3).

When the act of enclosing no longer defines what is consecrated to memory, the deposit of the ashes finds, in the model of the necropolis in the woods<sup>8</sup>, the possibility of embodying a more intimate relationship with nature by drawing on a primordial landscape. The clear precedent is the Southern Cemetery of Stockholm (1920-61), *Skogskyrkogården* (“Cemetery of the Wood”), created by Erik Gunna Asplund and Sigurd Lewerentz<sup>9</sup>: a manifesto, not written but modelled in the landscape to testify to



**Fig. 4**

Burials in the woods. Above: Stockholm South Cemetery, arch. G. Asplund and S. Lewrentz (1915). Study for the sepulchral area in a photomontage for a competition. Below: Berestein Cemetery, Graveland (Holland, 2000), arch. Sylvia Karres, Bart Brands, Marie-Laure Hoedemakers, Rudolf Zielinski. Cinerary stones strewn about the woods welcome the urns for the conservation of cremation ashes. Drawings by the author.

the equilibrium between artifice and nature, an expression of the mourning that takes place in the collectivity of remembrance. Recent burial experiments in nature (Berestein Cemetery<sup>10</sup>, Holland, Arch. Sylvia Karres & Bart Brands, 2000) take advantage of the size of the cinerary niches, much smaller than the coffin niche, to raise the urns inside memorial stones scattered in the indistinct space of the undergrowth, reaffirming the order of the multidirectional and undirected movement (Fig. 4). As often happens, the shapes date back time and, in the memory of the “already seen”, they are reminiscent of the image of ancient stones, planted in the ground to mark the place of burial and pass on the memory of the deceased.

#### **Mounds, gardens and borders for the dispersion of ashes in nature**

Choosing dispersion means manifesting a desire for direct reunion with nature. More than conservation in urns, the indistinct character of the scattering promotes a conception of death that finds relief in identification with the natural elements. It is to the evocative power of regeneration that the task of passing on the memory is entrusted (Fig. 5).

Mircea Eliade (1907-1986) often underlines the continuous interventions that, in the history of religions, see fertility cults and funerary cults intertwined. «[Often] life manifests itself through a plant symbol. This is equivalent to saying that vegetation becomes a hierophany – it embodies and reveals the sacred. [...] A fragment (a tree, a plant) is worth everything (the Cosmos, Life)»<sup>11</sup>.

When Sigurd Lewerentz builds the Malmö Cemetery<sup>12</sup> (Sweden, 1916 et seq.), a field sown with wheat is identified as a place suitable for the scattering of ashes. The agricultural landscape, in its cyclical change and seasonal renewal, becomes hierophany (Eliade 2008).

In the southern cemetery of Stockholm (Erik Gunna Asplund and Sigurd Lewerentz, 1920-61), a mound is raised in front of the crematorium and marked by a pine grove at the foot of which the ashes are scattered (Latini 1998). The cult of memory is accomplished through the evocative force of archetypal forms.

In Mariebjerg<sup>13</sup> (Gudmund Brandt, 1926-33), tree screens, with varying degrees of visual permeability, distinguish public, semi-public, private spatial dimensions in which the relatives can realise the rite of dispersion without the risk of accidentally walking on the ashes, protected also from the winds that might otherwise disturb them. The process of mourning trusts in nature,



**Fig. 5**

Dispersion of ashes in nature: gardens, mounds, fences. From left: Malmö Cemetery (Sweden, Arch. Sigurd Lewerentz, 1916 et seq.); Cemetery South of Stockholm (Sweden, Arch. Erik Gunna Asplund and Sigurd Lewerentz, 1920-61); Mariebjerg Cemetery (Denmark, Arch. Gudmund Brandt, 1926-33).

in its capacity for the consolation of mortality (Schama 1997).

It is in these precedents that the best contemporary architectural practices find reason, in which the rite of scattering the ashes takes the form of gardens bounded by vegetable borders or raised earth that evokes monumental mounds (Neubiberg Cemetery<sup>14</sup>, Germany, Arch. Emanuela von Branca and Adelheid Countess Schönborn, 2000; Nieuwe Ooster Cemetery<sup>15</sup>, The Netherlands, Arch. Sylvia Karres & Bart Brands, 2005). Inside the *garden of remembrances*<sup>16</sup> – the cemetery dedicated to accommodate the dispersion of the ashes – Water and Earth are the two elements that guide the farewell: water (sprays, streams, fountains) as a vehicle for accompanying the ashes and the earth (lawns, flower beds, cobblestones) as a matter of reunion with nature. An architecture that draws its own repertoire indifferently from primordial or domesticated nature (Grimal 2005), creating exemplary fragments of landscape quality that go beyond the limit of time and take on the meaning of burial in themselves (Eliade 2008).

### Conclusions

In the sunny clearings or in the shade of the trees in the undergrowth; defined by the stereometric limits of the urnaries or surrounded by topiary borders, the new landscapes of the ashes offer places capable of giving shape to memory, accompanying the unfolding of memory in space and time. Burying the ashes in urns gives rise to columbaria, grounds, memorial stones configured as ancient funerary signs, or it is nature itself that offers itself to dispersion, contrasting clearings from continuous planting and arboreal enclosures carved in the vegetation, conforming signs of water, bushes, grass and cobblestones. Models consolidated in architectural culture as well as more recent experiments outline a reference landscape capable of averting the risk of interventions resolved as a banal municipal service and reactivating architectural research in favor of alternative configurations to the intensive cemetery, in which the individuality of the burial is extinguished within the idea of collectivity.

Starting from what remains of a centuries-old idea and drawing from the deposit of history embodied in place, it is perhaps possible to imagine spaces for memory in which two dimensions can coexist: the collective one, the social identification of a community, its traditions, its long duration, and the individual one, linked to the intimacy of personal memory. As has already happened in history, rethinking burial places means renewing the cultural values of the community that creates them. «If every modern city presupposes a cemetery, every time an ancient cemetery is discovered, there is proof that there is a vanished city nearby.

The necropolis is the inverse of the city, depending on the case, the reverse or the obverse, since it, the idealized double of the city, is the perfect reproduction of the socio-economic order of the living». The sentence with which Michel Ragon (1986, p.45) opens the second chapter of *The space of death*, appears, for contemporary architectural culture, as a warning and, at the same time, an inspiration.

## Notes

<sup>1</sup> Frames from the film *The autumn of the Kohayagawa family* (*Kohayagawa-ke no aki. The End of Summer*. 1961), directed by Yasujirō Ozu (1903-63).

<sup>2</sup> Cremation is a funeral practice that involves the cremation of the coffin. In Italy, the adoption of Law 130 of 2001, in addition to regulating the construction of crematoria and redefining the methods of burial of ashes, removes the prohibition of dispersal in nature. Inside the cemeteries the following methods of burial of the ashes can therefore be envisaged: placing of the cinerary urns in columbaria of urnariums or inside niches on the ground; dispersion of ashes in nature in specially identified and configured spaces, known as *grounds for scattering ashes*, *gardens of remembrance* or *of meditation*.

<sup>3</sup> In countries with a Catholic tradition, cremation finds concrete possibilities of significantly intervening in the conformation of the cemetery landscape starting from 1963, when the Second Vatican Council issued the Instruction called *De Cadaverum Cremation: Piam et constantem* with which it is established that cremation is not in contrast with the Christian religion. Further significant steps in the direction of a wider acceptance of the practice of cremation occurred in 2007, when the Italian Bishops Conference, through the Episcopal Commission for the Liturgy, published a pastoral aid that integrates the fundamental ritual for the funeral. The subsidiary *We proclaim your resurrection* foresees, in the IV chapter, particular liturgies for funerals in case of cremation.

<sup>4</sup> For an in-depth analysis of the typological-formal characteristics of the Nature-Cemetery and the City-Cemetery, see: (Franciosini 2011), (Lotus 38 1983), (Carbonara 1958).

<sup>5</sup> Starting from two Freudian essays (*Remember, rework, repeat* of 1914 and *Mourning and melancholy* of 1918) the formula of the «work of memory» is used by Paul Ricoeur (2004) to express the distance between the mechanical operation of memory experienced as a compulsion to repeat, and the experience of memory lived as an exercise of *remembrance*. For an in-depth analysis of the theme, see in particular the third aporia of his treatment on the problem of memory (*Wounded memory and history*, pp. 71-98).

<sup>6</sup> For an in-depth analysis of the theme, see also Paul Ricoeur (2004), in particular the second aporia of his treatment on the problem of memory (*Imagination and memory*, pp. 63-70).

<sup>7</sup> Ferrari M. (2010) - *Figures in the fog*. Casabella, 791, 26-33.

<sup>8</sup> The model of burial in the bosom of nature is anticipated by the iconography of the tomb of Jean-Jacques Rousseau on the Isle of Poplars in Ermenonville. For an in-depth analysis of the theme, see (Teyssot 1983).

<sup>9</sup> There is ample literature on the project for the Southern Cemetery in Stockholm. See, in particular: Porphyrios D. (1983) - *Classic, Christian, Social Democrat. The*

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- <sup>10</sup> A description of the cemetery is contained in: De Leo E. (2006) - *European Cemetery Landscapes*. Mancosu Editore, Rome.
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- <sup>15</sup> For an in-depth analysis of the Nieuwe Ooster cemetery see: (Franciosini 2011).
- <sup>16</sup> Also notice how *gardens of remembrance* or *of meditation*, or how *grounds for spreading ashes*, are introduced into Italian legislation by Law 130 of 2001.

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Claudia Sansò

## The place of return. Settlement principles of the Islamic tomb

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### Abstract

The Islamic concept of *Ma'da* as “place of return” indicates the circular nature of Muslim ritual by denying a clear separation between a “ritual that follows” and a “ritual that hands on”.

In *Dar al Islam*, the sense of the sacred is translated to form not only through the buildings of the mosques, – the most representative spaces of Muslim collective living – but also through a large number of tombs/mausoleums.

The contribution proposes to investigate the construction of the Muslim tomb in the transition from ritual to architectural form in order to infer the role that the construction of funerary spaces (especially mausoleums) covers in the settlement logic of Islamic cities, where the spaces of ordinary life often coexist with the spaces of death.

### Keywords

Islamic ritual — Return place — Islamic tombs — Settlement principles

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«You shall not dwell in tombs made by the dead for the living»

Gibran Kahlil Gibran

In the book *The Prophet* by Kahlil Gibran, the migrant *Almustafà*, after spending twelve years in the land of *Orfalese*, returns to his native island, *Lebanon*, which represents the allegory of *Absolute Life*. At the city's port there is a ship waiting for him and people imploring him to stay. Gibran's telling is emblematic of Islam's conception of existence after death. «A moment: and in a brief calm of wind another woman will give birth to me» (1923). With these words *Almustafà* reminds the people of *Orfalese* that the time of death is always followed, through a very brief pause, by a resurrection, which is often a real reincarnation.

The transition from the living to the inanimate is translated in terms of architecture through the construction power of form which, in Islamic tombs, instead of delimiting the “sacred” space, emphasises its centrality to indicate the “point of departure”, the place of return. It is exemplary the case of the mausoleum of *Isma'il* in *Bukhara*, the oldest Persian tomb: a square pavilion, domed, open on all four sides with the intention of underlining the absence of a gerarchical axuality instead of an absolute centrality. The transformation of the deceased into an “ancestor”, as *Mircea Eliade* (1969) explains, corresponds to the fusion of the individual into a category of archetype. If, therefore, each man, having reached the “end of life”, must return to the original point where true *Life*, *Absolute Life*, awaits him, the rite that “accompanies” him to the place of return also becomes a rite that “passes on”. And yet, *Muhammad* declares «The most beautiful tomb is the one that disappears from the surface of the earth». Both for

the construction of the space dedicated to Allah and for that of the abode of souls, the only Koranic prescription is in fact the orientation towards Mecca: during life on earth, the faithful must pray looking towards the sacred city and again, just like an eternal cycle, in the life after death, the inanimate body wrapped in an odd number of shrouds (*kafan*), directly in contact with the earth, must be arranged so that the body resting on the right side looks towards the *Kaaba*.

In the tomb the soul is examined by the assistants of ‘Izrā’īl, the angel of death, about the deeds carried out during life. All souls will inhabit the tomb as a place of “passage” until the Day of Judgment, (Yawm al-Dīn). Those who have proved that they belonged to a man or woman of profound faith will be shown the beauties of the Paradise that awaits them. On the other hand, souls who confess to an impious earthly life will be foretold the pains of Hell. The Judgement of God will arrive and will weigh the souls by placing on the two plates of an eschatological balance (*mīzān*) the sheets on which the angels have written down all the good and bad works done in life. After the response, the souls will cross a bridge over Hell: the souls with the most unworthy deeds will fall down, those with the most meritorious deeds will continue on the path that will lead to a spring where they can quench their thirst before entering the Paradise garden.

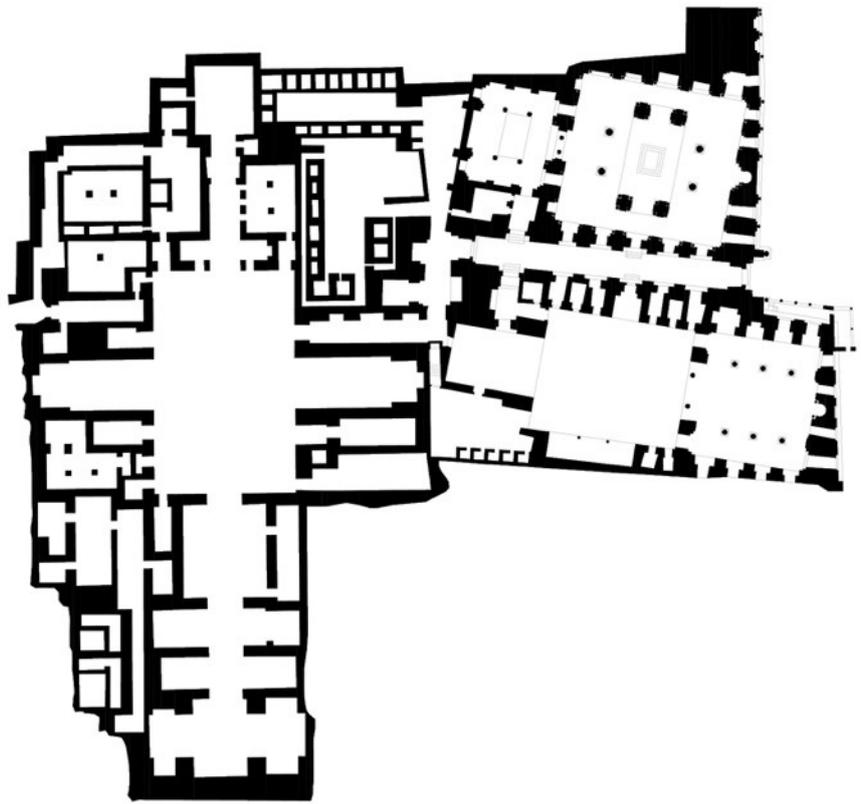
### **The edification of the Islamic tomb: settlement principles of the “place of return” monument**

Carlos Martí Arís affirms that «Every ritual refers to a form: the procedure through which activity acquires a stable form constitutes architecture. Hence the profound link between architecture and ritual, not only in traditional cultures where the organisation of space is a transparent reflection of a ritual referring to the cosmological order, but also in the modern world where architecture has lost its ancient sacredness» (1990).

Early Muslim doctrine forbade any architectural glorification of tombs because they were derived from improper Christian or Jewish customs. As Oleg Grabar (1989) reminds us, *taswiyah al-qubur*, «equalisation of the graves (with the surrounding land)», was considered the most appropriate expression of the equality of all men in death. Add to this the fact that the Prophet had said: «A building is the vainest of undertakings that can devour the wealth of a believer» and it seems almost inexplicable the large number of buildings constructed in the lands of Dar al Islam that have to do with the concept of the “sacred”: among them include many tombs and mausoleums. Titus Burckhardt (1989) suggests, however, that such generous building in Muslim cities can be traced back to the veneration of the wali, the saints, considered in the Qur’an not as dead but as «living without you hearing them», and the desire of caliphs and sultans to “pass on” their names.

What is built, therefore, is not an architecture that can “contain” the tomb, but a creation that is able to sign the place of return, so deserved by the one who lies there. The man who is buried no more than a metre under that piece of earth has performed such exemplary deeds in his earthly life that he has earned a monument as a reward at the moment of his death, or rather his passage to Absolute life.

In fact, some tombs are highly decorated pavilions, while others are buildings in their own right, sometimes attached to other facilities, with particular settlement patterns that differ according to the urban culture of the cities in which they are located. Two extraordinary examples, synthesising these distinct “urban grammars”, are the Qala’un complex in Cairo and



**Fig. 1**  
Qala'un complex building, Cairo.

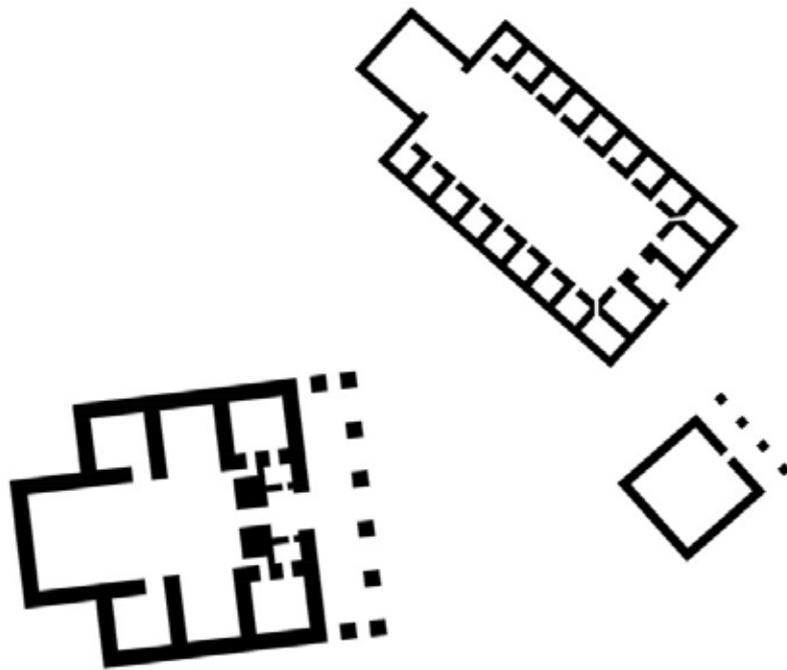
the Yldirim kullyye in Bursa, the former adhering to a “syntactic” composition in which a “closed” spatial order prevails, the second preferring a “paratactic” model that constructs “open” perspectives.

The tomb is an element/figure in these compositions.

In the building in Cairo, the spaces of the madrasa (Koranic school), the maristan (hospital) and the tomb are concentrated in a large plant. The madrasa and the tomb rotate as a single body inside the large complex, to support the correct orientation towards Mecca. A long corridor separating the teaching areas from the burial space, dedicated to the remains of Sultan Qala'un, leads to the cruciform iwan-type hospital, which was destroyed. The tomb building is constructed by mirroring the space – similar but not identical in shape and size – of the court and iwan of the madrasa. A small atrium advertises the space of the almost square hall of the turbah (tomb in Arabic), from which the Turkish term *türbe*, meaning “earth”.

In Muslim culture, both Arab and Ottoman, the sovereigns provided the city with public buildings and completed the work by erecting for themselves a monument to the afterlife as a “place of reward”.

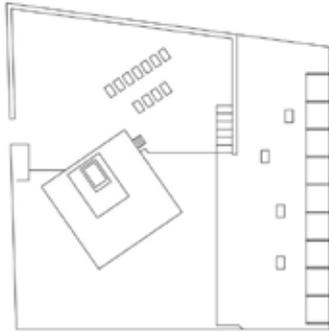
If in the Arab Islamic city the concentration of several spaces in a single syntax is typical of an urban fabric that assigns to the enclosure both the construction of houses and of public and collective buildings, the configuration of the Ottoman city is conferred on a dispositional mode that defines a topological system based on architectural objects “aggregated” in tension by the same space that separates them. In the *kullyye* of Istanbul, architectural complexes still follow a spatial logic of interiority. In this case, in fact, the tombs are located in a system of large enclosures arranged in succession: the *shan*, the mosque, the small garden/cemetery, as happens in the Fatih kullyye, for example.



**Fig. 2**  
Yldrim kullyye, Bursa.

In Bursa, on the contrary, these building complexes respond to an urban syntax that adheres to a spatial logic of externality, where the elements are not linked by a system of enclosures but by a “conjunction” entrusted to the unbuilt space that interposes itself. The formal system of mosque, madrasa and *türbe* resists by difference and by grain the thickening of the urban fabric around it. In particular, in the Yldrim kullyye, the three elements represent the figures of the composition: the mosque is placed on a podium slightly higher than the two elements of the madrasa and the tetra-style domed hall that defines the *türbe*. The mosque is placed with the orientation towards Mecca, the madrasa rotates 50° with respect to it and the small tomb building assumes the same position as the Koranic school but placed orthogonally to it. This triangulation generates a tension in which the tomb element participating in the urban grammar completes the tripartite composition. In this way a singular place is constructed through “solitary” elements, in which the urban space takes on a “sacred” character not only because of the theme to which each architecture responds but because of its meaning of “separated”, “set at a distance”. «The sacred is that which in itself remains at a distance, at a distance, and with which there can be no connection (or only a very paradoxical connection). It is what cannot be touched (or can only be touched without contact)» (Nancy 2007).

An interesting recent Islamic tomb construction is the Rafic Hariri Memorial, built in Beirut by the French firm Marc Barani<sup>1</sup>. In memory of the ex-prime minister of Lebanon, Rafiq Hariri, assassinated in 2005 during a bomb attack, not a building is erected but a square, a large podium next to the Al-Amine mosque. «The burial place of this public man will be a public space» (Barani, 2019). On the plinth, the eleven graves of Hariri’s



**Fig. 3**  
Memorial Rafic Hariri.

**Fig. 4**  
Memorial Rafic Hariri.



bodyguards that emerge in rectangular stone blocks, along with a large, taller square representing the former prime minister's burial place, are oriented, along with the large mosque, towards Mecca.

In the Islamic world, unlike the Western world, death is not considered taboo, and this is manifested in the way “death spaces” are established within the city, but they are spaces where life takes place, “special” spaces, or rather extra-ordinary spaces in a double measure, because they are distinct from the idea that builds the space of individual living by repetition, and because they are spaces in which the numinous “encounter” between the tangible and the intangible, between man and the divine, is staged<sup>2</sup>. These are the “sacred” spaces, where, as Károly Kerényi (2001) warns us, due to the full awareness of the difference between what is made real and what cannot be, the festivity takes place as a collective spiritual experience. By separating a part from the mundane whole in order to sacralise it, a choice has been made because one recognises an object, a form or a space that differs from the rest. «In the midst of so many other stones, a stone becomes sacred – and consequently finds itself instantly saturated with being – because it constitutes a “hierophany”, or possesses *mana*, or its form reveals a certain symbolism, or even because it reminds one of a mythical act, etc. The object appears as a receptacle of an external force that differentiates it from its environment and gives it meaning and value» (Eliade, 1968). The tomb/mausoleum thus participates in the construction of collective space, sometimes adjacent to the spaces of Koranic learning, sometimes through “paratactic” systems of several elements, together with the spaces of daily prayer, until it becomes an opportunity for the redefinition of a public space, offering the places of death to the unfolding of life.

## Notes

<sup>1</sup> See Marie-Anne Ducrocq, *La tomba di Rafiq Hariri a Beirut: la scommessa del vuoto*, "Compasses", n. 31, 2019.

<sup>2</sup> See Mircea Eliade, *Le sacré et le profane*, Gallimard, Paris 1965.

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Giuseppe Tupputi  
**The construction of the enigma.  
Dušan Džamonja and the Barletta's Ossuary  
of the Fallen Slavs**

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Abstract

The proposed essay investigates the architecture of the Ossuary of the Slavs in Barletta (1968-70), focusing on the work of the Croatian sculptor Dušan Džamonja and setting it in the Yugoslavian *spomenik* tradition. Structured according to peremptory principles and shaped into dynamic and rhythmically articulated masses, this commemorative architecture is able to offer the necessary quiet for contemplation without renouncing the pathos that is typical of commemoration.

The essay describes, on the one hand, the founding value assumed by the relationship with the landscape, and on the other, the intense dialogue between architecture and sculpture that animates the plastic composition of this work. The aim is to get closer to understanding the sense of a monument conceived in the form of an enigma.

Keywords

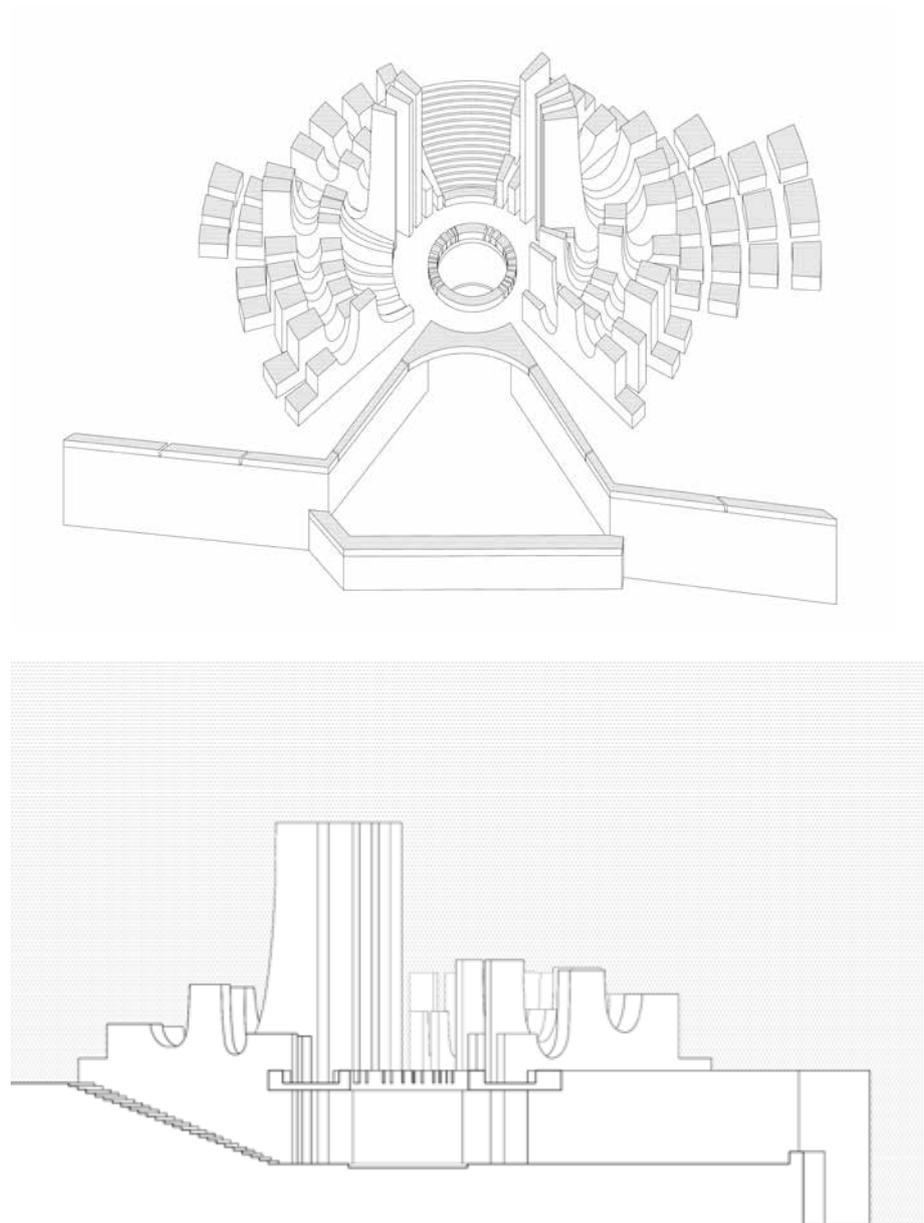
Dušan Džamonja — Spomenik — Architecture and Sculpture

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Arriving from the western coast, the Ossuary of the Fallen Slavs<sup>1</sup> of Barletta appears in the distance, resting on the edge of a slight slope facing the Adriatic Sea; it barely emerges, with its turreted shapes, from the lush cemetery vegetation. From the first glance, the monument impresses with the mysterious eloquence of its forms, which appear assertive, magniloquent, and also ambiguous and hermetic. But it is by approaching the memorial and crossing its interior spaces – full of symbolic-plastic figures never seen before and in which primordial and archetypal contents echo – that we open ourselves to the experience of the enigma.

Keeping together, within a single and coherent architectural narrative, the peremptory nature of signs and the hermeticism of meanings, this work (designed by the Croatian sculptor Dušan Džamonja) translates the tragic memory linked to the war events of the last century into the body of a sphinx. This is its peculiar and innovative characteristic; in fact, it is significant to note that the originality of the morphological-spatial contents of the Barletta memorial – which underlies its mysterious charm – is the result of a calibrated design, of a compositional strategy, which has been specifically designed to respond to certain conceptual and aesthetic needs, and therefore which is related to very specific political and cultural ideals, as well as to a specific trajectory of authorial research on the theme of the plastic composition of volumes in the space.

On the one hand, for Džamonja, the theme of memorials constitutes the culmination of a sculptural experimentation which, with these experiences, reaches its maximum monumental expression (Marchiori 1975) and its highest degree of artistic maturity<sup>2</sup>. On the other hand, this theme embodies a great semantic complexity, as «it combines the commemoration of



**Fig. 1-2**

Ossuary of the Fallen Slavs of Barletta. Overall axonometric and section of the monument. Drawings by Massimiliano Cafagna, Aleksa Korolija and Giuseppe Tupputi.

death [understood as an individual experience] with a very specific ideological conception [understood as a collective experience]» (Argan 1981, p.8) linked to Yugoslav context of the second post-war period.

In the ex-Yugoslavia, the Resistance to Nazi-Fascism merged into a Socialist Revolution which led the southern Slavic peoples (Serbs, Croats and Slovenes) to unify in the Yugoslav Federation, which immediately proposed itself as a modern country but independent from European capitals and Americans, socialist but independent from the Soviet Union (Argan 1981, p. 7). Soon, as a result of these developments, the feelings linked to self-foundation, unity and national autonomy spilled over into all areas of civil life in the country, especially the artistic ones, leading to the need to explore distant aesthetic horizons. from both European Modernism and Socialist Realism, and paving the way for what was later called the *Third Space*<sup>3</sup> of Yugoslav art.

In that particular historical context, the theme of commemorative architecture assumed an important role within the strategies of Tito's government, aimed at building the epic narrative of the newly formed Yugoslav Federation.

**Fig. 3**

Ossuary of the Fallen Slavs of Barletta. View from the west coast of Barletta. Photo by © Massimiliano Cafagna.

But, as Niebyl (2016) writes, in a newly unified country, «composed of both the victims of the recent war and some of their oppressor», the commemorative instance was also confronted with other ambiguities and contradictions. In fact, conceived as possible «sanctuaries for national reconciliation», the Yugoslav memorials required the experimentation of expressive methods capable of not transmitting hostility and enmity, but of opening up to a new phase of confrontation and cohesion between the different peoples and/or ethnic groups of the Federation. Furthermore, within an ideology which presupposed the self-management development of the state and which meant the socialist revolution not as a finished event, but as a process in continuous evolution – «which is social progress and class battle» (Mikuž 1980) – a more open relationship was sought with the interpretation of history and, therefore, of memory.

Contrary to traditional memorials, these sculptures give preference to a type of perception and understanding that is opposed to the presence of a single rational and always intelligible point of view; as in a poetic narrative, didacticism and even, or even warning, are replaced by pure spatial and formal values (Mikuž 1980).

The Yugoslavian *spomeniks* were conceived in order to shape spaces capable of triggering an unprecedented experiential relationship with the users, renouncing the model of a passive relationship towards the artwork and instead pushing the visitor to elaborate questions about memory, but without ever crystallizing it into completed forms.

These complex conceptual and poetic needs found expression in the audacious challenge of researching and experimenting with new compositional strategies and artistic languages between realism and abstraction, between reference to tradition and openness to modernity, between the symbolism of figures and the plasticity of forms, and, moreover, in the intersection between the knowledge of sculpture, architecture, engineering and land art. Džamonja faced this challenge by collecting and treasuring every dichotomy, every contradiction, every ambiguity and, aware that the contradictory formulation is the characteristic of the enigma (Colli 1975, p. 23), he placed them at the cornerstone of the formative processes of his works. But this is not enough. To give depth and substance to the enigma, Džamonja's



**Fig. 4**

Ossuary of the Fallen Slavs of Barletta. Entrance to the monument. Photo by © Massimiliano Cafagna.

intuition consists in drawing from a poetic imagination that has its roots directly in the interpretation of the «primordial formative processes», of the very ancient «memorials and cosmogonic signs», of *dolmens* and *menhirs*<sup>4</sup>, however enriched, as Mikuz (1980) writes, «by millennia of experience in the practice of architecture, urban planning, urban and landscape design».

It is thanks to the recovery of this «distant imaginary (the Freud's 'dark world')» (Semerani 2007, p. 28) that, pushing himself to the brink of the unconscious abyss of tradition, Džamonja manages to dominate the impetus of the representative tensions of his time, governing the passage from the poetic and ideological dimension to the sculptural and architectural one, from the pure 'will of representation' to the compositional techniques necessary for the development of each artistic practice.

In fact, it is by questioning the origin of these primordial forms that he rediscovers their founding reasons. As Giulio Carlo Argan writes (1981, p. 8), they consist in «marking the spatial centrality of a site that some past events have made sacred for a community that gathers there to celebrate its rites». This is the reason for which, the memorial, before being a form, is above all a place. There is no possibility of the rite outside of a space that is full of references to myth, and for this reason, in the monuments by Džamonja (as well as in all his sculptural work), the expression of ideological values linked to the «permanent revolution», to the unification of the Slavic peoples and the socialist proletarian masses find their mythological metaphor in the symbolism of the globality and movement of the sphere (Argan 1981, p. 8).

Both in Barletta, for the *Ossuary of the Fallen Slavs*, and in Kozara, for the *Memorial of the Peasant Revolution*, and in Podgarić, for the project (not realized) of the *Monument to the Revolution*, the theme of the circle divided into parts with different morphology is transposed from a symbolic principle – a metaphor of a multiple body in harmonic and dynamic unity – to a compositional method, an organizational model of form and control of space. On the other hand, the theme of the relationship between the basic module and the unity of the sphere is widely investigated by Džamonja as a metaphor for the relationship between individual and the masses, between the single and the multiple; but if initially this occurs through the assembly of elements such as nails, chains or small bricks, from the end of the 1950s, the investigation no longer appears linked to the ready-made but more

**Fig. 5**

Ossuary of the Fallen Slavs of Barletta. Interior of the crypt atrium. Photo by © Massimiliano Cafagna.

focused, instead, on the experimentation of more abstract plastic values.

In Barletta, the figure of the circle (in this case slightly deformed into an ellipse), adopted in the plan, becomes a device capable of assembling a plurality of sculptural parts, each of which has a different spatial meaning (Džamonja 1981, p. 78) but at the same time is integrated within the complete design of the syntactic and figurative unity of the whole. This ensures a harmonious dialectic between the *logical* form of the architectural-spatial structure and the *poetic* structure of the plastic forms of the monument. The visible part of the memorial – the one built above ground – is composed of the repetition of different sculptural profiles made of shaped concrete blocks in a radial series. Arranged on an elliptical plan, they constitute an articulated and compact mass as a whole.

From the outside, the principles underlying the syntactic composition of the work emerge in their limpid elementarity but, approaching the monument, the concrete shapes emerge from the whole they are part of, enriching and articulating, complexifying and deepening the semantic contents of the memorial. Within this compact mass punctuated by a radial and monotonous rhythm, the pre-compressed concrete volumes draw sinuous plastic tensions that press towards the center of the work.

Again, the attention to the dialectic between the repeated element and the overall form also and above all affects the definition of the internal spaces of Barletta's Ossuary, as the radial composition allows to stage a «convergence of perspective spaces» (Argan 1981, p. 12): each designed by different plastic rhythms, the interstitial spaces between the different concrete profiles are simultaneously directed towards the center of the work, as a metaphor for different individual experiences that merge into a community. On the other hand, as noted by Argan (1981, p.10), it is evident that another of Džamonja's main intention consists in the attempt to define «dynamic relationships between the core [...] of the work and its *periechon*», animating the internal space of the memorial through the grafting of calculated plastic pulsations, which alternate the suggestion of centripetal with centrifugal motions. In this sense, the introduction of slight deformations in the basic elliptical structure (obtained through the slightly asymmetrical arrangement of the concrete volumes) and the scanning of their increasing and diagonal rhythm (composed of forces directed at the same time to-

**Fig. 6**

Ossuary of the Fallen Slavs of Barletta. Perspective between the sculptural concrete blocks. Photo by © Giuseppe Tupputi.

wards the center and the sky) constitute two artifices that give «the whole an ascending rotational movement».

In any case, the fulcrum of the memorial coincides with the place of the crypt atrium, excavated at an altitude of about 3 meters below the ground level and accessible via an imposing granite staircase which is the space intended for collective ceremonies. Through two large bronze portals, from this place it's possible to arrive into the actual crypt, carved into the thickness of the same circular wall which delimits the atrium by containing the ground.

Here, flooding the space with a direct light that accentuates the contrast between light and dark, and sharpens the concave profiles of the shadows, the central oculus connects the chthonic world of burial and commemoration – the cave of memory – with the light and the luminosity of the air, of the abstract world of thought, in which the silhouettes of the concrete volumes stand out. From below, moving back into the perceptive field of the visitor, they transform into evident allegorical elements: seven obelisks stretched towards the sky.

Furthermore, in addition to the centrality and verticality of the atrium space – evident in the planimetric scheme – there is a further compositional direction – better identifiable in the section – which disrupt the balance of the project, orienting the space, as well as vertically (towards the sky), even horizontally (towards the sea). As Džamonja himself writes (1969), this «visual penetration» introduces a further spatial tension and accompanies the visitor into the external space of the terrace which, closed on two sides by the walls that embank the ground, appears strongly orientated, «looking towards the open Adriatic Sea and towards the homeland».

It is unexpected that, after having worked on a calibrated deformation of the planimetric asymmetry of the base plant, the symmetry returns in all its assertiveness – as a method of project control – within the modalities of structuring the system of paths and in particular of the visual and kinesthetic fruition of the memorial. In fact, almost borrowing from cinematographic techniques, the views that mark the main directions of the memorial's crossing are constructed through sequences of symmetrical central perspectives, since, as Kržišnik (1980) writes, this is «the simplest way to identify the movements of the visitor's psychophysical interiority and trig-

gering his kinesthetic experience».

Finally, by looking more closely at the concrete profiles, it can be observed that, if the unity of the architectural organism is built in the dynamic relationship between the overall spatial form and the repeated element, the plastic language of the sculpture works in the balance between abstraction and figurativism. The allusive dimension of the forms is immediately perceived, but the relationship between the parts is devoid of any decorative superstructure and hides the semantic contents and symbolic references within an abstract sculptural composition of volumes in space.

Everything happens under the concertation of light. After all, referring to the memorials of Džamonja, Argan (1981, pp. 12-13) writes:

The dynamism of the whole is not so much expressed by the diagonals and the gradual movement of the elements that form the monument, but by the infinite appearance it assumes in accordance with the intensity and effects of light at different times of the day: regardless of the symbolic meaning, it is like some immense tools for the live study of the change of light. Then, if in its immediate appearance, the monument recalls the tension of expressionist architecture and scenography, its deeper meaning refers to the 'solar' systems of the Mayan and Aztec monuments.

The Ossuary of the Fallen Slavs of Barletta is therefore a complex architectural narrative that is based on the rituality of movements in space, the relationship with the site and with the place, the symbolism of forms, the plasticity of volumes and the relationship with light.

The memory of the past tragedies, in this case linked to the pain of mourning and war but also to the ideology underlying the socio-political project of the former Yugoslav Federation, are deliberately transcribed in statuary forms which, on the one hand, aspire to be monumental, stable and lasting and, on the other hand, they reject any assertiveness and dogmatism, opening up to different possible ways of interpretation.

Structured according to calibrated compositional principles, but at the same time capable of «preserving some areas of insubordination» (Boulez 2004, p. 94); assembled through the complex articulation of a plurality of plastic rhythms channeled into a unitary body, this work appears powerful and at the same time harmless, «magnificent in its outer peace full of inner movement» (Kržišnik 1969). It gives us the opportunity of reflecting on a particular possibility of forms which, by interpreting the «illusory fabric of opposites» (Colli 1975, p. 29) that is the world around us, dissolves them into its own unity, disclosing the tragic and seductive fascination of the enigma.

## Notes

<sup>1</sup> The monument commemorates and collects the remains of Slavic soldiers who died during the First and Second World War in southern Italy and Islands.

<sup>2</sup> The Ossuary located in Barletta it's classified within of what art critics defined as the "third period" of Džamonja's work, which is the most mature and fertile moment of his artistic production (Protić 1980).

<sup>3</sup> Among the various texts dealing with the subject, please refer to Kirn G. (2016-2019)

<sup>4</sup> As Argan writes (1981, p.10), two of Džamonja's first memorial works (the December Martyrs memorial in Dubrava and the Memorial Tomb in Dachau) are inspired to dolmen and menhir, "of the reclining figure and the standing figure".

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Gaspare Oliva

## **Resistant memory, notes on some (un-built) monuments for the Italian *Resistenza***

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### Abstract

The contribution starts from the reflection on the memorial as architectural theme and from the highlighting of the role played by commemorative monuments of the Second World War in the context of post-war reconstruction, then it develops the comparative reading of three un-built projects for memorials dedicated to the *Resistenza*. These artefacts are united by a strong abstract character and a deep confidence in the ability of architectural forms, understood in their most essential connotation, to evoke historical events and adequately represent the values they exemplify. They are analysed according to different ways in which they decline a common commemorative program and to the relationship they establish with the surrounding urban space.

### Keywords

Memorial — Abstraction — Staircase — Ideal City — Geometry

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### **The memorial as architectural theme**

The commemorative action, remembering together for the purpose of collective reflection, constitutes the destination of the monument in general<sup>1</sup>, its reason. A theme presenting the significant peculiarity of the absence of any need for practical use.

The memorial, the type of monument we refer in this contribution, does not constitute a representative burial for an illustrious personality's remains; does not eternalize, through appropriate forms, the place of past important events: it is an architecture handing down in the absence of the object to be commemorated. Its aim is to evoke the virtuous action of an individual or a collective subject, or a socially or civilly significant event (regardless of the place in which it has historically happened) to represent and transfer the shared values exemplified by it.

The use of remembrance as a means guiding collective action, a peculiar alliance between Metaphysics and Ethics that concretizes itself in bending the former for the purpose of the latter, characterizes the statute of the monument itself on an ontological level<sup>2</sup>. This operation, in the case of the memorial, takes place with the highest degree of abstraction, precisely because of the absence of the object.

The memorials materialize in the space of the city a pause, an interruption, a hiatus that favours reflection and thought and that allows, through contemplation, recognition and identification with certain values.

### **Monuments in post-war Italy**

After the fall of the fascist regime, the re-founded Italian institutions had to deal with the reconstruction of collective identity through the transmission of new values which, sacralised in the *Costituzione*, had to constitute the foundation plan of the democratic society and the republican political course. To do this, however, it was necessary first dealing with political and cultural heritage of the regime, which had to be elaborated and therefore overcome, as well as recomposing the deep fractures left in the social body by the fratricidal clash of the civil war.

With these purposes, at the same time as the reconstruction of the destroyed cities, they have promoted the building of several commemorative monuments of the war events.

In the republican storytelling, the war, which Italy had begun alongside Nazi Germany and had concluded on the Allies side, was considered as a revealing epiphany of the true nature of the regime, that the country had tolerated for twenty years. The changed alliance was the plastic representation of the awareness that had led to the interruption of the fascist course. The conflict could be considered as a collective catharsis that freed the Italian people from the Cain brand of regime's support. This purification was sealed by the triple sacrifice of civilians died under bombs or in retaliation, of people deported to concentration camps and of partisans killed in battles or executed.

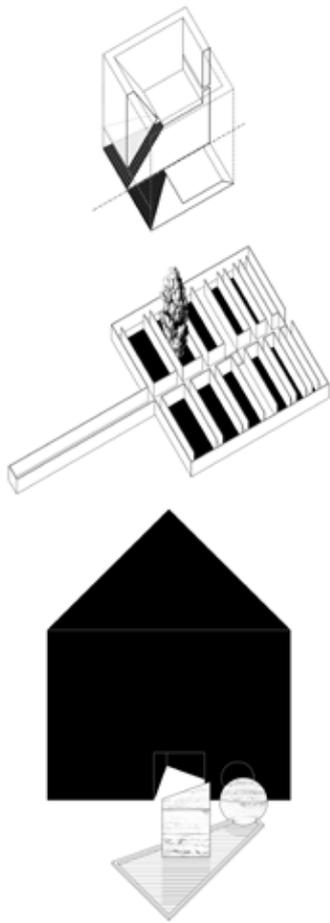
In this perspective we can try to distinguish two types of monumental programs with different objects and different purposes. On the one hand, the commemoration of victims, which allowed to clean up the waste of the past, founding the mythology of the Republic's origin on the unscratchable conceptual substrate constituted by the extreme collective sacrifice<sup>3</sup>. On the other hand, the commemoration of the *Resistenza*, intended as a popular, democratic and libertarian movement contrasting the oppression, which allowed the identification between the values that had inspired and innervated it and those placed at the base of the democratic system, identifying in anti-fascism the connective tissue of the new social and political structure.

The monuments we are going to discuss here, designed several years after the end of the war, concern this second type of programs.

### **Declination of the theme, ways of abstraction, relationship with the city: a comparative reading**

Three un-built projects, presented in the context of three design competitions, are here analysed. They are the monument to the *Resistenza* designed by the team formed by Aldo Rossi, Gianugo Polesello and Luca Meda for Cuneo (1962), the one designed by Giorgio Grassi, again with Meda, for Brescia (1965) and the one designed by Costantino Dardi, with Giovanni Morabito, Michele Reborra and Ariella Zattera, for Milan (1971). They arrive to formal outcomes which, although different, show some common features. The first element consists in the fact that the evocation of the event is entrusted solely and exclusively to the architectural forms. These monuments are neither conceived as plastic objects to be contemplated as statues, nor as support infrastructures for pictorial or sculptural iconographic apparatus with didactic purposes. They also renounce the ambition of being *total artworks*, that is, they do not seek integration between architecture and other artistic expressions.

The second common element is the essentiality of the forms. Pure and absolute geometric forms, without connoting attributes, are organized



**Fig. 1**  
From top to bottom: Cuneo building, axonometric section with plan; Brescia building, axonometric view; Milano building, axonometric view. Graphic elaboration by the author.

through a syntax entrusting monumentality to the exactness of proportions and measures and to a solemn character, reachable with stylistic reduction procedures. A modality in continuity with some masters of the Modern Movement and above all with the Enlightenment tradition.

The purist choice seems to lead to a form without style, in which the author, if not completely hidden, seems to take a step sideways to make way for architecture with an auroral tone situated outside of time. An architecture that flaunts indifference with respect to its surroundings by virtue of its absoluteness. This tendency towards an anonymous condition, which unites the three projects, can be considered as a sublimated expression of the eminently collective character of the monument<sup>4</sup>.

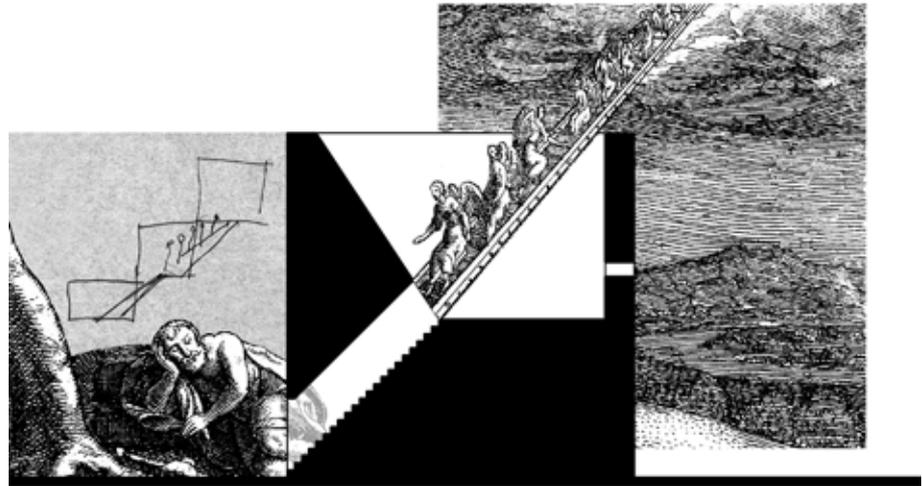
### Declination of theme

Starting from the idea of the monument as a place separated from everyday life, independent from city, the common commemorative theme is declined by the three artefacts in a different ways. The need for separation and the consequent definition of the place dedicated to collective memory are pursued by each of them with reference to three fundamental actions.

The Cuneo building refers to *ascending* (going up). The place where the theme takes place is located at a different height than the street level and looks like an open-air room from which the guerrilla war landscapes can be observed through a thin horizontal slit: the evocation takes place through the visual indication of places where the facts really happened. The open-air room is reached via a staircase materializing the preparatory moment for memory and it is characterized by a strong and constant altitude compression opposed to the continuous decreasing in width as you go up.

This idea of ascent has also strong symbolic implications as it can be iconographically linked to the Old Testament event known as *Jacob's dream*, in which angels use a ladder to reach the kingdom of God<sup>5</sup>. According to Jewish exegesis in particular, these ascendant figures correspond to virtuous men who after death, by virtue of merits obtained in life, reach angelic status. In this perspective, the Cuneo staircase would allow the heroic partisans to ascend to heaven, or to an eternal dimension. The virtuous choice made by ordinary citizens who have turned into fighters would therefore have a transcendental character, it would be connected to a profound human feeling rather than to political contingencies. This reading follows the position expressed by Piero Calamandrei. He considered the birth of the collective awareness that had led to the *Resistenza* as a *natural* and *cosmic* event, elevating this movement to a higher level than the historical contingency<sup>6</sup>. In those years, an interpretation of this type, also adopted for the commemorative programs of other monuments to *Resistenza*<sup>7</sup>, had the task of responding to the need to overcome political counter-position, within a broader process of national pacification.

The Brescia monument insists on the celebration of death and mourning by building a dense network of analogical references, linking it in several points to the history of the collective commemoration of the dead. It separates the commemorative space from the urban space through an exact enclosure. The fundamental action of *entering* is expressed in terms of an interruption in the continuity of the white wall, from which, however, it is not possible to immediately see the internal articulation<sup>8</sup>. The user is then channelled onto one of the two perimeter paths, from which he can see the different walled gardens and then reach, through the transverse paths, the main longitudinal axis. As claimed by the authors themselves,



**Fig. 2**

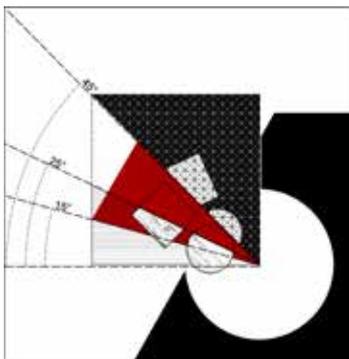
Cuneo building. Section of the building, sketch by Aldo Rossi and "Jacob's Dream" by Wenceslas Hollar. Graphic elaboration by the author.

the planimetric scheme takes up by analogy the design of an Italian formal garden and, at the same time, the urban layout of an ideal city, in which the walled gardens correspond to the urban blocks. Given that, as is well known, the order of the seventeenth-eighteenth-century geometric garden was intended to be allusive to an ideal urban order, we can recognize that in this project the analogy mechanism develops concentrically, as in a system of Chinese boxes.

The game of references does not seem to end here. In fact, starting from the eighteenth century, the ideal city also became the reference for numerous cemeteries and therefore, wanting to look at the Brescia memorial as a cemetery in which bodies are missing (the tomb without the object), we can identify the gardens with burial fields without the stems signalling the presence of the dead. To confirm this lack, however, there is an exception: in one of the enclosures, the presence of a pre-existing monumental tree animates the scene.

If the gardens are also hollow urban blocks, incomplete parallelepipeds missing two faces, we can look at this monument in terms of an incomplete, un-finished city. A non-finiteness disguised or perhaps made possible precisely by the clarity of the geometries and the exactness of the measures. This reading can be linked with the concept that will be clearly exposed a few years later by Aldo Rossi with reference to its extension for the San Cataldo Cemetery in Modena. He presents his cubic ossuary as a building *without a roof* in which the «windows are without frames[...], an unfinished house [...] analogous to death»<sup>9</sup>. An incompleteness which, in an ironic multilevel and multidimensional analogical game, also affected the construction of the complex, which was only half completed.

If the tomb is therefore a non-finite house, the cemetery is consequently a non-finite city, just as non-finite, in the sense of absence of conclusion, is life after death. The Milano project concretizes the fundamental act of *crossing*. The monument fruition takes place in fact by crossing the tensional space defined by detached geometrical elements constituting the *primary configuration*. The originating figure is a cube split along the diagonal: on one side of the cutting stands the «present section identified by the solid of a three-dimensional metal structure», on the other side «the absent section is occupied by a marble cube and a marble sphere, to whom a plane oriented at 30° removes

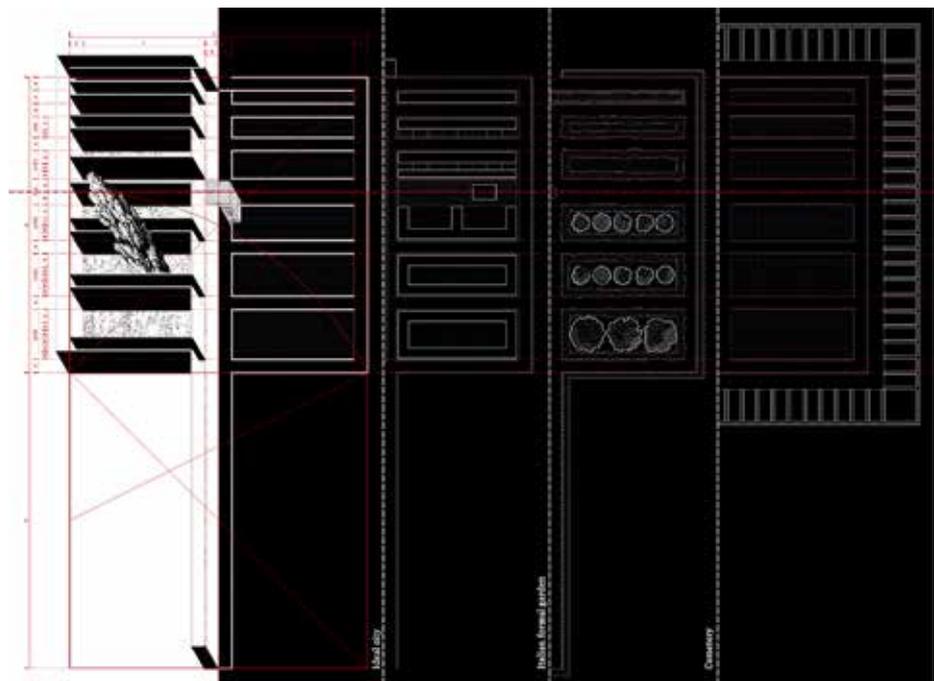


**Fig. 3**

Brescia building. From left: axonometric section and plan fragments of the project; hypothetical plan fragment of an ideal city, an Italian formal garden and a cemetery court. Graphic elaboration by the author.

**Fig. 4**

Milano building. Planimetric scheme with El Lissitzkij "Break the Whites with a Red Wedge". Graphic elaboration by the author.

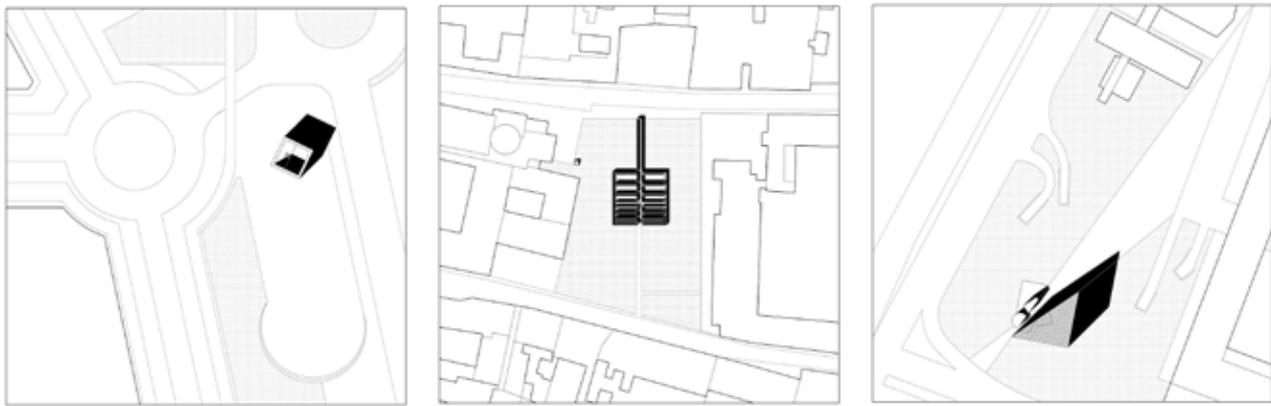


a part, which manifests itself as an imprint and a cast in the sectioned face of the metal structure»<sup>10</sup>. The two fragments of primary solids rest on a thin, triangular-shaped water-sheet, fixing one of the vertices of the base figure.

The decompositions and breaking of solids define a system of conceptual, figurative and material oppositions and antinomies: full versus void, presence versus absence, primary form described versus mutilated primary form, noble materials versus *poor technologies*<sup>11</sup>. The *Resistenza's* guerrilla war relives in the forms of Euclidean geometry. In the peculiar form of pure analogy that this monument stages, the concrete elements of the historical event are transfigured into geometrical elements giving rise to an *inverse allegory*. Describing the monument from this perspective, the main figure of the technological half cube can represent the regime's *moloch* split by partisan action. This specific figurative choice, which sees a main bigger element broken by the intervention of a smaller figure, effectively represents the idea of a conflict in which an initially disadvantaged subject achieves victory against an overwhelming and apparently unbeatable enemy, just as happened in El Lissitzkij's 1919 illustration "Break the Whites with a Red Wedge", with which the Russian master praised the Bolshevik victory against the Menshevik army in the civil war.

These projects can be labelled as abstract architectures but each one refers to a different way of conceiving abstraction.

We can propose a first differentiation between *iconist abstraction*, which works on the sublimation of the figure, and *processualist abstraction*, which focuses on the process leading to form and not on its representational capacity<sup>12</sup>. If the Cuneo monument can be frankly placed in the iconist field, the Brescia artefact, while assuming a clear figuration, shows a certain satisfaction in the description of the formalization criterion. In fact, the main longitudinal axis is extended up to a point outside the square from which,



**Fig. 5**  
Urban relationships. Mass plans.  
From top to bottom: Cuneo,  
Brescia and Milano. Graphic  
elaboration by the author.

turning the gaze towards the *crossroad*, the criteria assumed for the proportioning of the enclosed gardens' widths are clearly shown and they can be recognized in the rules of perspective geometry applied to the scenography. In the Milano project, lingering on the formative process becomes almost fetishistical: operations leading to form (decompositions, offsets, rotations, etc ...) are represented and themselves become tangible and concrete elements of the composition in a true metalinguistic operation<sup>13</sup>, a discourse through forms on the ways in which abstract language is produced, the staging of analysis and verification of forms' evocative capacity.

The second level of differentiation regards the abstraction intended as a *transitive* or *intransitive operation*. In the first case the forms represent and signify other than themselves, they are the stylization of real elements or of historical architectures, their purification carried out through linguistic reduction procedures<sup>14</sup>. In the second case, forms represent anything other than themselves and the processes generating them, they possess a meaning and a value in themselves. It is clear that the Brescia building is clearly positioned in the field of transitivity, as demonstrated by the many analogue threads unravelling from it, while the Milano memorial, as previously mentioned and considering the author's declared adhesion to the so-called *Linea Analitica* that pursuing a self-referring artistic language<sup>15</sup>, pertains to the second world. For the Cuneo artefact, however, the positioning appears to be more problematic. While on the one hand we can recognize that it evokes other architectures and other worlds, on the other we can say that it also embodies a deep reflection on the ability of form, properly manipulated, to build meaningful spaces.

### Relationship with the city

The specificity of the commemorative theme and the form of monumentality assumed by these three buildings imply the need for the autonomy of forms from contextual constraints or relationships. By statute, the monument deduces values from reality in order to transfer them to transcendental level and therefore can only come true in forms exclusively responding to its internal logic, to its commemorative purpose. In this way, these forms define, through configurations tending to be self-referred, a character of otherness with respect to the surrounding space<sup>16</sup>.

The planimetric rotation of the Cuneo cubic artefact derives in fact from the entirely internal need to build a specific visual relationship at a distance (due to the declination of the theme) and therefore it does not recognize the arrangement of the important territorial road axis along which it is located. The shape, size, arrangement and position of the Brescia building do not

derive from any *urban relationship*<sup>17</sup>. The square enclosure placed in the centre of the park and oriented along the north-south axis, while responding to absolute laws, does not deny the pre-existence, rather it overlaps it, determining a coexistence that is concretized in the presence of the large tree within one of the walled gardens. Furthermore, this monument builds a visual relationship with the outside in the opposite direction to what happens in Cuneo monument: a stage located on the park's edge allows user to see the form of the artefact which coincides with its planimetric order. Unlike the two previous artefacts, the Milano monument seems to extend itself beyond the limits set by the positions of the solids constituting it, producing an emanation that redesigns the large open space in which it is located: the fundamental building's geometries define a paved path converging towards the *tensional space* in which the commemorative theme is concretized. In this case, the condition of otherness is expressed in formal terms, but not in terms of fruition modalities. The underlying concept seems to question the idea of monument as a sacred, physically separated, place, proposing its restitution to the urban worldliness, a *profanazione*<sup>18</sup> that, while weakening its solemnity, is aimed at maximizing its didactic and educational capacity, making it freely usable by all people crossing this urban place.

## Notes

<sup>1</sup> For the concept of building's destination, read Antonio Monestiroli, *La ragione degli edifici*, in Renna A. (1980), p. 180.

<sup>2</sup> Renato Capozzi, *Il monumento, tra memoria e ragione*, in Visconti F. (2013), p. 78.

<sup>3</sup> The monuments built in the early post-war period almost always followed the first type, also because in many cases they were collective burials or cenotaphs. Their program was therefore centred on the theme of mourning and it was declined in the representation of death's tragic nature. This is the case of the monumental burial for the victims of the *Fosse Ardeatine* massacre built in the Roman countryside by Fiorentino, Perugini and others; the monument for the men killed in concentration camps built by BBPR in Milano monumental cemetery and the partisan ossuary at the Bologna cemetery built by Bottoni.

<sup>4</sup> To deep the issue of relationship between collectivity and architectural theme read Antonio Monestiroli, *Il tema di architettura*, in Renna A. (1980) 236-238.

<sup>5</sup> Reading proposed by Thomas L. Schumacher in the analysis of the various phases of Giuseppe Terragni's project for the funeral monument to Roberto Sarfatti, in Schumacher T.L. (2001), pp. 229-250.

<sup>6</sup> Sentence by Piero Calamandrei quoted in Croset P. e Skansi L. (2010), p. 117

<sup>7</sup> This is the case of the monument designed by Gino Valle in Udine, in which the idea of the transcendental dimension of the *Resistenza* intervenes in the very conformation of the building, whose elements are composed according to the "rhythms of cosmic life". To deep, read Croset P. e Skansi L. (2010), p. 117-118.

<sup>8</sup> See the description by the authors in the competition panel quoted in Crespi G. e Pierini S. (1996), p. 37.

<sup>9</sup> Description by Aldo Rossi in Ferlenga A. (1987), p. 54

<sup>10</sup> Excerpt from project description by Costantino Dardi in Dardi C. (1987), p. 113.

<sup>11</sup> Definition given by Costantino Dardi in Dardi C. (2009), p. 65.

<sup>12</sup> For the differentiation between these two ways of abstraction, refer to essay by Valerio Paolo Mosco, *Puro, Purezza (Pur, pureté)*, in Grandinetti P., Dal Fabbro A. e Cantarelli R. (2019) pp 39-40.

<sup>13</sup> Filiberto Menna quoted in Dardi C. (1987), p 23.

<sup>14</sup> Refer again to Mosco V.P. in Grandinetti P., Dal Fabbro A. e Cantarelli R. (2019), pp 36-37.

<sup>15</sup> For a broader definition of *Linea Analitica* in art and architecture, please refer to Dardi C. (1987), pp 21-24.

<sup>16</sup> It is an extreme form of *a priori* architecture that Dardi has explained as follows: «All the architectures whose poetics are based on the object, on its formal authority and on its self-significant charge move in the area of monumentality», in Costantino Dardi, *Tre risposte alla monumentalità*, in Dardi C. (2009), p. 66.

<sup>17</sup> Crespi G. e Pierini S. (1996) p. 37.

<sup>18</sup> For the concept of *profanazione* and relationship with the sacred see Agamben G. (2005)

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Fabio Guarrera  
**Outline of an archaeology of the sepulchral space**

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Abstract

This contribution aims to develop a structuralist “critical measurement”, in order to individuate “formal principles” underlying the architectural design of the Brion cemetery. Based on the theories elaborated by Vittorio Ugo concerning the issue of archetypes in architecture, an “archaeology” of the sepulchral space is here proposed, in order to perform a “classification” of the internal forms of the monument. The archetypes found are classified in two macro-families: “archaeology of nature” and “archaeology of architecture”.

Parole Chiave

Archetype — Eidos — Architectural measurement — Carlo Scarpa — Brion Cemetery

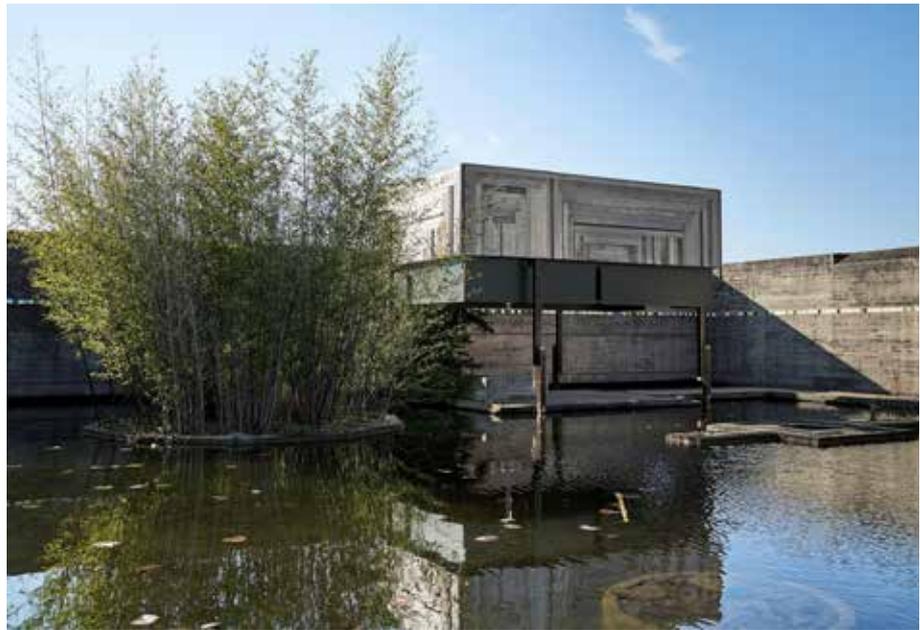
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The theory of Structuralism, the critical-artistic movement originating in the ‘60s of the 19<sup>th</sup> century, is based on the principle of “classification”. According to structuralists, everything can be and must be classified; what is not classified does not exist.

Following Michel Foucault and Roland Barthes, who represent the main references for the construction of a contemporary analytic criticism, several scholars have attempted to define a new “general system of artistic knowledge”.

In the field of architecture, where the development of Structuralism started later, Vittorio Ugo<sup>1</sup> built a theory aimed to individuate the consistency and the statute of architecture as a discipline, through a taxonomical argumentation. Within this “classification” – intended as principia individuationis – Ugo elaborates a theory on archetypes: «a system of systems that aims to reunite and relate the foundational principles of architecture in a unitary and articulate theoretic field».

This article does not contain a deep investigation on the complex relationship that has developed between architectural analysis and structuralist thinking<sup>2</sup> – in order to save space for the other focuses of the text –, whereas it presents an experimental critical reading on the fundamental archetypes of the Brion cemetery, based on Vittorio Ugo’s theories. The objective is to define an “archaeo-logy” (literally, a discourse on archetypes) of Scarpa’s masterpiece: an analysis of the monument that allows going beyond the superficial description of the physical, metric, chronological and symbolic information within the complex of San Vito d’Altivole (moreover, already discussed in a consistent part of literature), in favor of an objective (but also subjective) interpretation of its deepest figurative structures. In Ugo’s words, the purpose is a “dimensioning” aimed to clarify the measure units

**Fig. 1**

Carlo Scarpa, Tomba Brion, San Vito di Altivole.  
The Meditation Pavilion.  
Photo by Lorenzo Pennati.

of the materialized elements, within the field of archetypes.

By adopting the Sicilian professor's double classification of "archaeology of nature" and "archaeology and architecture"<sup>3</sup>, it is possible to recognize, in the *èidos* of the Brion cemetery, three macro-families of "primal forms" that allow "measuring" space. The first macro-family, the "archaeology of nature" includes the archetype of "forest", "clearing" and "garden". The second and the third family, "archaeology of architecture", comprise the archetypal variants of the static space – "fence", "hut" and "theatre" – and of the dynamic space – "labyrinth", "bridge" and "stairs". These are nine elementary<sup>4</sup> and trans-typological polarities, composed in an allusive sense by Scarpa as a clarification of the maximum degree of structural consistency of the sepulchral space.

Without altering their position within archaeo-families, and without keeping in a close consideration their physical distribution (that is, their compositional syntax), the nine individuated archetypes are reported in the following as in a "list"; they are described according to the physical elements that can be recognized in the phenomenological field of the monument.

### The Forest

At a conference held in Madrid<sup>5</sup> in 1978, Carlo Scarpa declared that he wanted to propose the plantation of "one thousand cypresses" in the first design idea. This is an interesting statement that shows the "forest" to be the first archetype sought for the figurative orchestration of this extraordinary masterpiece. «I could have done it – Scarpa says – [...] but as it always happens at the end of a work, I thought: "My God, I did it all wrong"» (Scarpa 1978). The exclusion of the plantation of one thousand trees in favor of the design of an intercluded space did not forbid the master from leaving traces of this first archetype. They can be found, for example, in the eleven cypresses planted in the rectangular space on the West of the cemetery, beyond the boundary wall, next to the main access, or in the *cedrus atlantica glauca pendula* placed in front of the "propylaea" at the internal access to the cemetery.

The "forest" – or rather its traces – represents in the Brion cemetery the memory of the "primal state" of the natural space, before the modifications brought by man and by history.

**Fig. 2**

Carlo Scarpa, Tomba Brion, San Vito di Altivole.  
The enclosure.  
Photo by Lorenzo Pennati.

Using Vittorio Ugo's words, the forest portrays « "the anti-house" par excellence, the uninhabitable-by-man» (Ugo 1991); a context where habiting – and burying – cannot help constituting a modifying activity that changes the "wood" into a "garden".

### The Clearing

It is the archetype that affirms the «dominant quality of a "place"» (Ugo 1991), the settling and topological principle based on deforestation and tillage works: the opening of the "forest", the geometrical venue of the "enclosure", representing the primigenial furrow that houses walls and sacralizes the intercluded area. In the clearing is the dense and consistent "void" that Scarpa prefers to the dense and primal "solid" of the "forest". An "enclosed" space within which the other "representational" archetypes can be collocated, following a precise composition.

### The Garden

It is the archetype of the tamed natural space: the cultural Apollonian that substitutes the Dionysian "wood". It is the analogical model of the kosmos that intertwines with chaos. Eden, «a place of dia-logue and conciliation par excellence» (Ugo 1991). In the Brion complex, the "garden" can be found in the whole geometric, formal and structural organization, in its totally controlled and controllable nature, in the definition of the image of a "pacifying" and "sacred" place.

### The Fence

It is universally acknowledged that the act of fencing marks the official sacralizing action of a space. The fence separates the inside from the outside, the self from the other, order from disorder. The construction of the fence creates a sacred world that analogically mirrors kosmos. The "fence" archetype is built by the religious man who seeks a contact with the divine. It is temenos: a "separate" sacred space where the entrance is only possible through the "threshold". In San Vito d'Altivole, the fence turns into a wall that is sloped on the external side, yet plain on the internal side: an optical mechanism that allows «those who are inside to look outside [and forbids those] who are outside from looking inside» (Scarpa 1978)<sup>6</sup>.

**Fig. 3**

Carlo Scarpa, Tomba Brion, San Vito di Altivole.  
The cave-temple.  
Photo by Lorenzo Pennati.

### The Hut

As a fundamental archetype of the idea of “dwelling”, the hut is at the origin of the éidos of architecture. In its “schematic” evolution, it is initially a stone-cut “cave” – that communicates the principle of “shelter” – and then a built hut, expressing the comprehension and the cultural re-elaboration of the same law. In the Brion cemetery, there is the metaphor of both versions. The first representation is that of the “temple-cave” that conceals the altar; a space illuminated by holes and by a gash in the pyramidal configuration. The archetype of the “cave” is referred to by the aedicula for the burial of the family members, characterized as well by a light from above, cast by an emptying cut on the sloped roof.

On the other hand, the “meditation pavilion” can be reconducted to the constructed structure of the “hut”, demonstrated by a wooden roof sustained by slender metal pilasters; as it emerges from many drawings, Scarpa imagines this space as “inhabited” by young women’s bodies.

### The Theatre

The Brion grave is the place of the “staging” of the binomial couple of death and life. It is a théâtre, a term that derives from the archaic thèasthai, literally meaning: a place where to “look with astonishment and wonder”. In this design, Scarpa writes the “script” for an “open”, strongly cathartic place. «I wanted to demonstrate – says the artist in a statement reported by Philippe Duboy – how to act in the social, local, urban context to make people understand what the sense of death, eternity and transience could be»<sup>7</sup>. The grave is the «public place of civitas [...] prepared for the “wait”» (Dal Co 1984); the space where «everyone goes with a strong affection, [where] kids play and dogs run» (Scarpa 1978).

The Brion grave “theatrically” represents death as a “complement of life” and not as a “mystery”. It is a monument and a cultural symbol raised in front of the dead; «primigenial cradle of meanings» (Dal Co 1984). Within the global conception of this space as a “theatre”, the semicircular seats placed in the cavity beneath the arcosolium are physically allusive to the koilon: a place for prayer and for the ecstatic contemplation of death.

**Fig. 4**

Carlo Scarpa, Tomba Brion, San Vito di Altivole.  
The arcosolium and the koilon.  
Photo by Lorenzo Pennati.

### The Labyrinth

In complementarity with the static space of the hut, the labyrinth is a dynamic space. When analyzing this archetype, Vittorio Ugo affirms that the labyrinth is a physical and conceptual structure «that exalts the notion of place as a geometric quality, intrinsic in a space, and as the result of the coexistence of components» (Ugo 1991); in this sense, the Brion cemetery is a “labyrinth-shaped narration”.

The processional succession of routes that connects the archetypes, imposing «a particular approach to each architectural event» (Dal Co 1984), is indeed labyrinthic. The ambiguity of the access to the grave, reachable both through the forest/threshold from the cemetery, and through the gate/threshold on the street (private access), is indeed labyrinthic. The allegoric path of water «that fuses together images of beginning and end, producing the coincidence of the “first and last” » (Dal Co 1984), finally, is indeed labyrinthic; it is a liquid element of figurative link (and symbolic mediation) between all the other archetypes<sup>8</sup>.

### The Bridge

It is the “joining” archetype, the topological “axial” dimension of continuity/discontinuity. The bridge represents the metaphor of the rite of passage, of connection. This archetype can be seen in the arcosolium of the grave, past the two spouses’ graves. «I have set my rainbow in the clouds, and it will be the sign of the covenant between me and the earth» (Genesis, IX, 13), as stated in the passage of the Bible that could have suggested this figurative program to Scarpa. In the arcosolium of the Brion cemetery, the bridge is actually a “rainbow”, as suggested by the color of the mosaic on its internal side. It is a dynamic place entrusted to Iris, Gods’ messenger and intermediary between the Earth and the Sky.

The paths on the surface of water in the labyrinth-path that allow reaching the “forest” of cypresses and the “meditation pavilion” are bridges, as well.

## The Stairs

It is the archetype of ascension: a “vertical bridge” for the initiation to the rite. In the Brion cemetery, the stairs are used to mark the slight difference between the original height of the existing cemetery and the artificial one, created by Scarpa’s design. Here five steps, slightly offset, allow a detachment from the existing cemetery. Additional allusions to the archetype of stairs can also be found in the theme of the “stepped frame”, diffusely used as a decorative element. In this case, the frame/stairs serves as an «optical guide [that] runs across the volumes [...], showing its most evident form where the need for a formal definition is more urgent, and where a sign of order is more necessary in the axial pattern of the composition» (Dal Co 1984).

These are, in a nutshell, the nine archetypes found: primal foundational principles that allow “backwarding” to the global intuition that drives the genesis of the design; to its deepest “structure”. In a structuralist key, the exegesis performed here – through a methodology that can be experimented on any architecture – allows developing a concrete knowledge activity of the “conceptual form” of the architectural work. In this sense, the analyzed formal structure is not physically intrinsic to the construction<sup>9</sup>, but the expression of a work of interpretation and measurement: a product, as Vittorio Ugo would say, of “critical dimensioning” aimed to the representation of the “archaeological field” of the sepulchral space.

## Notes

<sup>1</sup> Vittorio Ugo (Palermo, 1938-2005), Full Professor of Theory and History of Representation Forms at the Polytechnical Institute of Milan, he taught in Bari, Grenoble, Tokyo. Among his books, it is worth mentioning: Vittorio Ugo, *Forma Progetto Architettura*, Didactic documents 05, Institute of Architecture Fundamentals, Faculty of Architecture of Palermo, Dante Library, Palermo, 1976; I.D., *Dimensioni dell’architettura*, Cogra, Palermo, 1982; I.D., *Lauger e la dimensione teorica dell’architettura*, Dedalo, Bari, 1990; I.D., *I luoghi di Dedalo. Elementi teorici dell’architettura*, Edizioni Dedalo, Bari, 1991.

<sup>2</sup> For detailed studies on the relationship between architecture and Structuralism, see: Cesare Brandi, *Struttura e Architettura*, Einaudi, 1967; and the recent essay by José Ballesteros: *MANUAL ESTRUTURALISTA para arquitectos*, Madrid, November 2010 (accessible at the website of the PhD in Architecture and Design at the University of Geneva through this link: [http://www.addgenova.org/DSA/wp-content/uploads/2015/11/manual-estructuralista\\_-\\_Italiano.pdf](http://www.addgenova.org/DSA/wp-content/uploads/2015/11/manual-estructuralista_-_Italiano.pdf))

<sup>3</sup> A classification that Ugo himself draws from “The Archaeology of Knowledge” by M. Foucault.

<sup>4</sup> In his classification, Vittorio Ugo only mentions the “forest”, the “garden” and the “clearing” within the family of “archaeology of nature”; the “labyrinth”, the “hut” and the “bridge” within the family of “archaeology of architecture”. This essay adds three archetypes to the classification proposed by the Sicilian professor: the “fence”, the “stairs” and the “theatre”.

<sup>5</sup> See Carlo Scarpa, *Mille cipressi*. Conference held in Madrid in the summer of 1978, in DAL CO F., MAZZARIOL G. (1984). *Carlo Scarpa 1906-1978*. Electa, Milan, pp. 286-287.

<sup>6</sup> The area of the Brion cemetery is at +71,5 cm above ground level, while the boundary wall is 160 cm tall. Hence, the internal sepulchral area is at +231,5 cm above ground level, guaranteeing the possibility of spotting the horizon from the internal area.

<sup>7</sup> See Philippe Duboy, Scarpa/Matisse: *cruciverba*, in DAL CO F., MAZZARIOL G.

(1984). Carlo Scarpa...cit., pp.170-171.

<sup>8</sup> According to Guido Pietropoli, Scarpa's assistant and collaborator, during the design process the master does not seek a labyrinthic effect in the acceptance of a space where to get lost. «Here, we must not feel lost», Scarpa says as reported by Pietropoli, «as we have already arrived». See Guido Pietropoli, Carlo Scarpa 1968-78. Quasi un racconto, n.p.

<sup>9</sup> Concerning the concept of "structure" as a subjective interpretation of a form, it seems interesting to report some words by Gilles G. Granger, written by Cesare Brandi. «A structure is an abstraction through which a concrete knowledge activity defines, at a stage determined by practice, a form of objectivity: the structure is not, in this sense, within things; it is not even in the mind as a model of being or a process; it results from the applied work of a subject on an experience, and that is how it contributes to section with accuracy the thing within this experience, giving it the status of object» (italics in the original Italian text AN). See Cesare Brandi, op. cit. pp.22-23.

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Alberto Calderoni, Luigiemanuele Amabile  
***Vita est peregrinatio.***  
**The Cathedral of Neviges Between Sacred and Urban**

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Abstract

In 2020, the German architect Gottfried Böhm turned 100 years old. His sacred architecture has defined the German architectural landscape from the years of post-war reconstruction to today. The project for the new Cathedral of Neviges (1963) collects and amplifies the representativity of the religious rite with an evocative formal expression that characterizes urban space, weaving renewed relationships between the internal space of the church and its exterior. Translating both sacred and secular rites into physical actions, Böhm's work stands out as a solid reference for his capability of reinterpreting religious faith as a tool for building communities, incorporating its indispensable sense of sharing and civic sociality.

Keywords

Sacred architecture — Ritual — Urbanity — Post-war reconstruction

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Una vita, che non può essere separata dalla sua forma, è una vita per la quale, nel suo vivere, ne va del vivere stesso e, nel suo vivere, ne va innanzitutto del suo modo di vivere. Che cosa significa questa espressione? Essa definisce una vita – la vita umana – in cui i singoli modi, atti e processi del vivere non sono mai semplicemente *fatti*, ma sempre e innanzitutto *possibilità* di vita, sempre e innanzitutto potenza. E la potenza, in quanto non è altro che l'essenza o la natura di ciascun essere, può essere sospesa e contemplata, ma mai assolutamente divisa dall'atto. L'abito di una potenza è l'uso abituale di essa e la forma-di-vita è quest'uso. (Agamben, 2018)

The small copper plaque with the image of the Virgin Mary, engraved towards the end of the seventeenth century, was transferred to a modest parish church in Neviges, a village of medieval origin not far from Cologne. The news of its miraculous properties spread among local communities and gave rise to a cult that over the centuries has seen an ever-increasing number of believers, travelers, and clerics flock to the small center, modifying the life of the humble village, one of the last historic bastions of the Catholic counter-reformation in Germany. During the 1930s, more than three hundred thousand pilgrims a year crowded into the streets of Neviges and some particularly relevant celebrations hosted up to thirty thousand worshippers at the same time. This is when the late Baroque church started to show its inadequacy to welcome such occasions, especially in the rainy winter months. It was in the 1950s that the Franciscan friars began to imagine the construction of a new church. The Sanctuary of Neviges was set to become one of the most important buildings of the Archdiocese, second only to the Cathedral of Cologne and capable of gathering approximately eight thousand observers who returned *en masse* to celebrate Sunday service immediately after the end of the Second World War. After a series of projects



**Fig. 1**

Young pilgrims inside the Cathedral of Neuges, 1960s. (Archiv der Marienwallfahrt Neuges) (symbolic image to be associated with the essay).

that were proposed but never developed, 1962 saw the organization of an invited competition restricted to a few architects, mostly from Germany and active in Cologne. They were asked to design a building that could accommodate nine hundred seats, a sacristy, smaller spaces for prayer, confessionals, and the chapel where the sacred image of the Virgin had to be hosted. The project had also to provide shelters for pilgrims, a kindergarten, a residence for the elderly and a permanent seat for the religious chapter. Gottfried Böhm, in those years a professor in Aachen, and son of the already famous church architect Dominikus (1880-1955), was among the invited architects.

The architectural context of those years was marked by the desire of moving over the destruction wrought by the Second World War by pushing for a rapid – yet often reckless<sup>1</sup> – reconstruction. The enormous production of new housing built in standardized and inhospitable<sup>2</sup> neighborhoods – a strict interpretation of the late International Style – soon led to the appearance of a certain nostalgia for places where communities could meet and deem their own; a feeling to which Böhm was not indifferent and that characterized his work<sup>3</sup>. He reinterpreted the competition brief, proposing a different position for the church rather than the one foreseen by the commission, considering more appropriate to set the building as close as possible to the core of the village, instead of physically annexing it to the existing monastery on the eastern front; a vision that was preferred by the friars. Böhm chooses to set the new building towards the existing buildings, further south than the monastery, generating an ensemble that is harmoniously balanced with the surroundings.

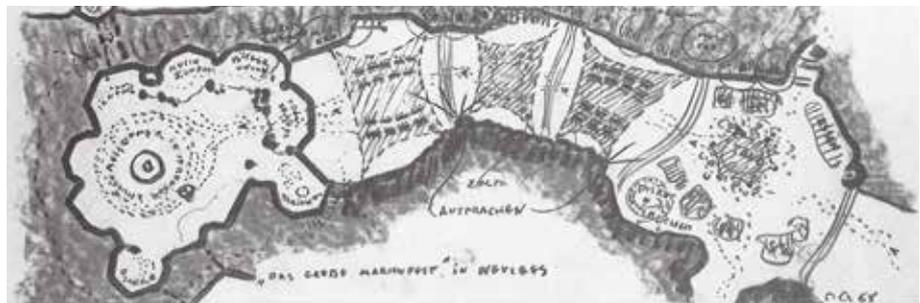
The main feature of the proposed urban composition is the system of open spaces – defined by a generous flight of steps surrounded by small buildings at the edges – to be crossed to reach the sacred hall. As the only project providing this availability of public space, Böhm's architecture implements a dynamic way of experiencing the ritual of the pilgrimage, as a gradual and slow ascent to the sacred image. This act of devotion at the end of the long and tiring journey of the pilgrims is slowed down by stairs, steps or ascents, a feature that recurs in the architecture of sanctuaries such as in the Abbey of Mont-Saint-Michel in France – separated from

**Fig. 2**

The Neviges sanctuary and its context, 1968. (Archiv der Marienwallfahrt Neviges).

**Fig. 3**

Gottfried Böhm, Design sketch for the external spaces of the Cathedral of Neviges, 1968.



the shore by a tongue of land regularly submerged by the tides – and the Sanctuary of Santiago de Compostela in Spain, end destination of a long journey where the sacred building is separated from the actual square by two twin staircases. In the project for the new cathedral, Böhm welcomes and reinterprets this architectural theme in the light of the specificities of the place, combining the precise design of the rite with the fascination for the characteristics of the natural landscape of the Bergisches Land – its orography, the shifting ground elevation, the contrast between solid masses of vegetation and wide-open spaces, lawns and ponds.

The jury considered the intervention too radical and not adequate for the size of the village. The proposal was therefore rejected. Cardinal Josef Frings, Archbishop of Cologne at the time, however, was not satisfied with the work of the commission and the competition was relaunched in 1964. Böhm, among others, was invited to take part again. Its second version confirmed the urban concept already developed in the first competition, with some differences regarding the design of open spaces: the access stairway, more akin to a square on several levels, assumes an even more central role in the general composition, so that it appears almost like a succession of rooms guiding its pilgrim along his path. The buildings on the western front, already present in the first version of the project, are here replaced by a sequence of stairs that responds to the different changes of height, introducing a balanced system in continuity with the orography of the site. After the meeting of the jury, Frings approved the new version of Böhm, which was built in just two years, from 17 July 1966 to 22 May 1968<sup>4</sup>.



**Fig. 4**  
Laying of the foundation stone,  
1966. (Archiv der Marienwallfahrt  
Neviges).

#### The rite between urban and sacred

The themes explored in the project by Gottfried Böhm reflect his refined critical sensitivity towards both the physical and cultural context. There are two registers within which we intend to analyze the Neviges Mariendom: the relationship between the building and the built environment and the rite as generator of the architectural system.

The new church of Neviges present itself as a huge mass compared to the village made up of small traditional wooden houses with steep pitched roofs. The compositional mechanisms behind this imposing building, that allow it to harmoniously resonate in the existing urban system, come from past references. Böhm's strategic choice was to rely on a way of settling typical of medieval churches. This becomes clear observing how, just south of the Franciscan monastery, the Evangelical Church of late medieval origin is inserted in the center of a hybrid courtyard, as a result of the arrangement of the houses in a circular form: a (physical) circle that encloses another (symbolic). It is a consolidated position that the symbol precedes the formulation of a constructive form (Hautecoeur, 1954; Rykwert, 1963) and precisely the circle, among pure shapes, is the one that suggests a double symbolic value: the circle is destined «to protect from external dangers» or to «enclose, imprison. The first are city walls, then temples, and the second are funerary circles. In both cases they constitute sacred limits, *ἄβαρα* that only some rites allow to cross»<sup>5</sup>. The houses, thus the circular limit in defense of the sacred, enclosed in another room with a circular vocation. The same symbolic matrix is perfectly absorbed by Böhm's work by keeping a sequence of circumferences under trace – shaping them in space – that draw, layer by layer, thresholds so that the pilgrim feels protected and safe in crossing the limits of the sacred.



**Fig. 5**  
The Cathedral of Neviges as seen from the village, 1968. (Archiv der Marienwallfahrt Neviges).

The generating idea inextricably links the lesson inherited from history with the strategy expressed in the construction of the Cathedral. Precisely from the context, from its geometries, from its perceptible grain, the new church takes shape, as modeled in clay (a material of which numerous scale models were made by the architect) in which to discover a mineral object – a crystal, reminder of the influence of the expressionism experience of Paul Scheerbart and Bruno Taut of the *Glasarchitektur*<sup>6</sup> of the 1920s – and of Böhm's training as a sculptor at the Munich Academy of Fine Arts in the same years in which he was studying architecture). How much the tools used by the architect guide the design activity and influence the choices of the project is still a fertile field of research, however it is evident that Böhm's scratching of the mass of the new building is the result of a careful study of the context. The pitched roofs of the small houses surrounding the new building functioned as references for the modulation of the folds and faces that characterize the large concrete roof. The strong intention of acting in a way that is specifically anchored to a precise historical and physical reality allowed Böhm to imbue his compositional choices with a double level of signification: on the horizontal plane the planimetric insertion is essential for a renewed urban centrality while, on the vertical axis, a slow process of subtraction of material enables the construction of a volume made up of mediated relations, apparently generated by mimicking the textures of the roofs of the surrounding houses but on the contrary the result of a calibrated ability to see and synthesize the reality of the built environment. The Cathedral of Neviges is an urban project, built to sit at the center of a new composition and at the same time being in tension with existing references. The structure of the fabric in which it is inserted

becomes a propulsive rule for the morphology of the new, amplifying the sculptural vocation of Böhm's work.

To read the design evolution of the religious complex, it is essential to understand how important the rite of the pilgrimage has been as a generating reference for the architectural system in its entirety. In one of the first sketches of the project, what emerges strongly is how much the flow of life and its dynamics, thus the formal construction that is defined by the actions of man, is central to the way of understanding design for Böhm. «A building is a human space, background and representation of its dignity, architecture [...] must naturally adapt to its physical context, both formally and historically, without denying or fantasizing about the needs of our time»<sup>7</sup>. The artificial ground, a churchyard extended to the size of a real square before the sanctuary, is a fundamental part of the composition of the entire religious complex. In that sketch, there is no distinction between covered and open spaces: the building seems to define an excavation on the village ground (always generated by the geometric shape of the circle) in which all the different ways of living the pilgrimage rite, the different possibilities of using space, always aim at creating community. Four “plates”, in the first sketch, then transformed into a slow ascent limited to the west by a row of trees and to the east by the reception buildings. The sense did not change. The square becomes for Böhm the opportunity to make clear the indispensable necessity of an “empty” space ready to welcome pilgrims, placing them in the first place at the right distance from the access to the church (thus favoring a different visual perception from the one obtained from walking between the streets of the village) and generating, during the path, a slow ascent, both physical and emotional. The architecture of the religious complex is therefore a constructed form capable of expressing the desire to be at the service of the community and its rituals, while retaining the strong role – typical of good architecture – of guiding the gaze, marking gestures and actions, in short, orienting human life by making it better.

### **The Mariendom. An Urban Architecture**

In short, there are three elements that make up the cluster of the Cathedral of Neviges: the large public space on several levels, the building of services and hospitality for the pilgrims – with its cellular and recursive structure – and, finally, the big church. The slow ascent towards the seemingly impenetrable concrete mass, modulated by the ground of the open-air rooms, takes place in the access to the sacred hall, a large space of urban vocation enclosed under a roof. The planimetric situation strengthens a better understanding of the relation of continuity that exists with the external space; in section, the thresholds carved into the body of this architecture, like cavernous spaces, physically let perceive a change of state and its different conditions: from a civically urban space, one is projected into a metaphysical, transcendent and strongly sacred dimension.

The church of Neviges is a continuous spatial sequence with a strong emotional power that reveals, after accessing a low narthex, a place of physical decompression where the eyes can get used to the dim light and the body to a different temperature, the complex power of the liturgical hall. A space enclosed under a roof made of folds – concave and convex – calibrated so that the light is at times reflected, while at others is absorbed. The space of the hall is defined by the high altar, center and fulcrum of the celebration, one of the few fixed elements of the liturgy, central but slightly rotated towards the entrance to allow the celebrant to observe the whole congre-

gation and from which the other spaces appear to be generated. Two internal stairways lead to three tiers of balconies overlooking the congregation, ensuring that no pilgrim is too far from the celebrant. The roof reaches its highest point between the altar and the assembly, placing the rite of Communion in close relationship with the community that participates in the sacred action «consciously, godly and actively»<sup>8</sup>. All around, smaller cavities, as if they have been dug into the church external wall, host the chapel of the Sacraments and that of the icon of the Virgin, the final destination of the pilgrimage rite, located to the left of the entrance: explicit action aimed at emphasizing through the composition of the space how the true goal of the *peregrinatio* is the collective act of celebration – rather than the intimate and personal act of veneration.

The innovations regarding the organization of the space of the liturgy were already absorbed and implemented by Rudolf Schwarz, Emil Steffan and Dominikus Böhm in the first decades of the twentieth century – and subsequently promulgated by the Second Vatican Council in the *Sacrosanctum Concilium* (coeval with the competition for the sanctuary of Neviges) – and had considerable influence on the shaping of the sacred space for the new Cathedral. From the *motu proprio* of Pope Pius X of 1903 *Tra le sollicitudini*, the traditional arrangement of the interior spaces of the churches was questioned by some figures of the *Liturgical Movement*, a theological current aimed at re-establishing the active participation of the believers in the rite, which saw Germany as fertile field of experimentation. The meeting between Rudolf Schwarz and Romano Guardini – theologian and spiritual guide of the German youth movement *Quickborn* – paved the way for a generation of German architects who, in the post-war period, experimented with possible layouts of the sacred liturgical space that corresponded to a renewed way of celebrating that is authentic and heartfelt, and which would gather the worshippers in prayer in a rite that would be strongly participatory. «A god, a community, a space! [...] to merge all the spatial elements in a single room that holds them together, forming a large roof over the altar»<sup>9</sup>.

The elements of the liturgical space of the church of Neviges contribute to the construction of the urban character of the work and become a proof of Böhm's continuous search for a renewed urbanity so necessary for building communities. The hall appears to be a large square surrounded by facades made of houses – the balconies – inhabited by the faithful. Its ground is “furnished” with light elements (mobile chairs instead of benches anchored to the floor), just like a public space in a village. The church, from dusk, is entirely illuminated by elements made as outdoor lampposts capable of reverberating the brick texture of the pavement continuing the external one. Light is used to enhance the evocative character of the space. Of the three high windows, the one facing south-west illuminates the altar at noon, while in the morning the sun bathes the sacramental chapel in a scarlet light, due to the color of the large windows on which the *Hardenberger Rose* is painted, based on a design by Böhm. Other smaller ones, on the other hand, by selecting almost single sunrays as blades, allow the light to penetrate the heart of the liturgical space.

In a continuous and fluid dimension typical of an urban *unicum*, the Cathedral of Neviges stands out as an important machine for experiencing the sacred. Böhm has succeeded in translating the pilgrimage rite into a constructed form to hold together a living and multifaceted community, materializing an architectural expression into a design that sees collective

experience as a profoundly natural act, to be preserved and always kept alive. Urban atmosphere and the material reality of the place are merged in this huge building which, thanks to its physical presence, manages to be a condenser of characters and permanence, explicating the values shared by the community through an evident use of compositional methods that are all contemporary, but which sink deeply the roots in history. The complex relationship between soil, texture of the existing urban fabric and the indispensable monumentality of a church make the Cathedral of Neviges an emblematic example of intentions and actions aimed at the construction of sacred architecture with an evident civil character.

## Notes

<sup>1</sup> LEICK R., SCHREIBER, M. e STOLDT, H. (2010) “Wie Deutschland aus Ruinen auferstand”, *Der Spiegel*, 20, 16.05.2010. [online] available at: <<https://www.spiegel.de/international/germany/out-of-the-ashes-a-new-look-at-germany-s-postwar-reconstruction-a-702856.html>> [Last access 18 settembre 2021]

<sup>2</sup> Cfr. MITSCHERLICH A. (1965) – *Die Unwirtlichkeit unserer Staedte: Anstiftung zum Unfrieden*, 10th ed. (Frankfurt/Main: Suhrkamp, 1971) trad. It (1968) – *Il feticcio urbano. La città inabitabile, istigatrice di discordia*. Einaudi, Turin

<sup>3</sup> «We find these uniform estates and characterless cities everywhere, full of blocks of buildings with no sense of scale, featureless, with no depth or sculptural form. Resistance to this makes it easy to understand our interest in the formal richness of old things and the delight we take in the great formal variety offered by the new architecture». BÖHM G. (1963) “Über St. Engelbert in Köln-Riehl” In: HOSTER, J. e MANN A. (edited by), *Vom Bauen, Bilden und Bewahren. Festschrift für Willy Weyres zur Vollendung seines 60. Lebensjahres*. Greven & Bechtold, Colonia, 377.

<sup>4</sup> HAUN G. (2017) – *The Mariendom Neviges*. Kunstverlag Josef Fink, Lindenberg, 4.

<sup>5</sup> HAUTECOEUR L. (1954) – *Mystique et architecture. Symbolisme du cercle et de la coupole*. Picard, Paris, 31.

<sup>6</sup> Cfr. SCHEERBART, P. (1918) – *Glarsarchitektur*, Verlag der Sturm, Berlin, trad. It. (1982) – *Architettura di vetro*. Adelphi, Milan.

<sup>7</sup> BÖHM G. (1986) – *The Pritzker Architecture Prize. Ceremony Acceptance Speech*. [online] available at: <[https://www.pritzkerprize.com/sites/default/files/inline-files/Gottfried\\_Bo%CC%88hm\\_Acceptance\\_Speech\\_1986.pdf](https://www.pritzkerprize.com/sites/default/files/inline-files/Gottfried_Bo%CC%88hm_Acceptance_Speech_1986.pdf)> [Last access 18 settembre 2021]

<sup>8</sup> *Sacrosanctum Concilium. Costituzione Sulla Sacra Liturgia* (1963), 48.

<sup>9</sup> Cfr. ACKEN, J. v. (1922) – *Christozentrische Kirchenkunst. Ein Entwurf zum liturg. Gesamtkunstwerk*. Theben, Gladbeck.

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Francesca Addario  
**Sacredness of nature and interiority of forms.  
Contemporary interpretations of the chapel in the woods**

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Abstract

Since ancient times, sacred – the unknown and incorporeal otherness with which man tries to establish an intimate comparison – has been felt in places with a strong naturalistic meaning where, usually, the predisposition of the soul to interiority intensifies. In fact, nature – as a metaphorical evocation of wandering, contemplating, seeking, getting lost but also of finding oneself – in its many guises has often been the mystical and idyllic place of architecture, especially the sacred one. The archetype of the sacred wood is deeply rooted in the ancestral imagery of man and architect: from Vitruvius to Alberti, from Laugier to Loos, from Asplund to Tessenow, it is the ‘topical’ space in which architecture reveals its presence.

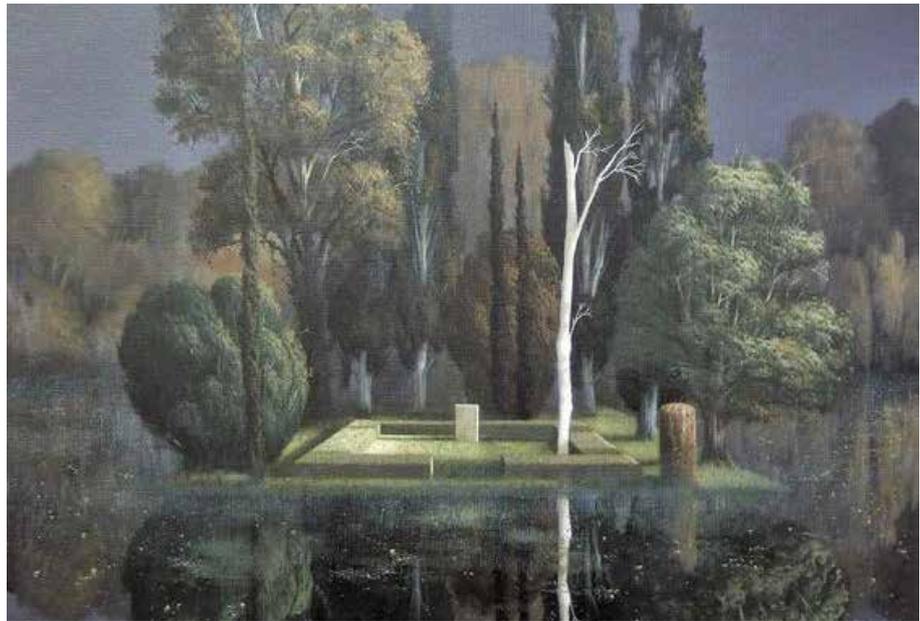
Keywords

Nature — Architecture — Sacred — Interiority of Form — Contemporary

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In this singular historical moment, man has returned to look for the reasons for his work, to ask himself what is the meaning and the role of his being in the world, to discern and give the right weight to the things that happen to test him. In spite of ourselves, the pandemic experience that the world unexpectedly had to face the last period has awakened us from a condition of dormancy in which we were more or less unconsciously, from that mechanical loop of gestures, actions and daily rituals that every day they absorb us and distract us from the fact that the time of our lives is a limited time. The questioning of the concept of relationship and the denial of any physical contact with the other, for the fear of accelerating the contagion, brought us back to a more intimate and reflective dimension, revealing the human need to relate and get in touch with the outside, perhaps because the space of nature refers to an original and ancestral dimension that concerns existence and the deep meaning of the life. Nature, as an emblem of life that cyclically transforms itself, remind a cosmogonic and universal vision in which a superior order can be traced and that elevates it to human eyes: this explains the reason why, since ancient times, for a lot of peoples from different cultures and traditions nature has been constantly deified and sacralized.

In the features of a forest, a desert, an expanse of water, a mountain or even a swamp, the naturalistic dimension of an uncontaminated space can be the evocation of the metaphysical. In fact, when man is in front of nature, and in it he feels an invisible force that almost goes beyond his human finitude, the soul unconsciously prepares itself to seek some relationship with it: it is in this constant tension of man towards nature that the indissolubility of their bond is manifested. It is then that mystery, which intrinsically hides itself in nature, that it determines the ecstatic condition of man towards it,



**Fig. 1**  
Arnold Böcklin, *Stèle Funéraire*,  
1880.

a condition which can oscillate between a cautious fear or deep devotion precisely in those who cross it and experience it directly with body and mind. In other words, the state of mind that man activates towards nature can change between the recognition of its immensity and unreachability, which presupposes an authoritative respect (*ehrfurcht*), to a state of symbiotic empathy (*einfühlung*).

Subject of a strong symbolism, in literature, philosophy and figurative art, the ambivalence with which nature has been interpreted over time, as benign or stepmother, is the result of the different historical-cultural eras that man it has gone through and which, inevitably, have conditioned the way of looking at and deciphering the world. Among the many forms in which nature manifests itself, the forest is perhaps one of the images most rooted in the primitive memory of man. In classical mythology it was considered the Muses' abode, a place with a strong spiritual charge in which it seems that the divine resided. Its double meaning as *silva* (ὄλη) – a place where nature is free, uncontaminated and inaccessible – and as *lucus* (ἄλσος) – a sacred place in which unknown primal and divine forces reside – has influenced not by chance the imagination of many authors and artists who have chosen the forest for the setting of stories and figurations. Therefore, if on the one hand it is an inaccessible and dark place that arouses in man his deepest fears – a mysterious place, an allegory of inner bewilderment, of the unfathomable, of estrangement, of the interior – on the other – because *lucus*, as well as from *locus*, place, it also derives from *lux*, light – figuratively in the sacred wood there is also a reference to the image of the clearing where the light can radiate itself. In the forest, therefore, two opposites coexist, as well as in the desert: even in the latter case there is a double conception of the desert figure that from an iridescent expanse of sand under the scorching sun of the day is transformed, at night, into the purest, clearest and darker manifestation of the celestial vault, an absolute spectacle of the greatness of nature.

Within this intense and mutual relationship between the sacred and nature, architecture also plays its part in the revelation of the spiritual. The spaces built on the basis of this relationship usually emanate a strong introspective charge in those who pass through them, almost as if they already had a sort of natural predisposition to introversion. Renato Rizzi spoke, in this regard, to the concept of

“interiority of form”<sup>1</sup> attributing a character that typically belongs to the sphere of the person – the interior – to the architecture, the city and also to the landscape: a character of serious emotion and transport towards an intimate dimension of the soul that the form induces in man. *The interiority of form* may be the architectural character through which some recent examples that have taken on the task of deciphering the sacred can be read.

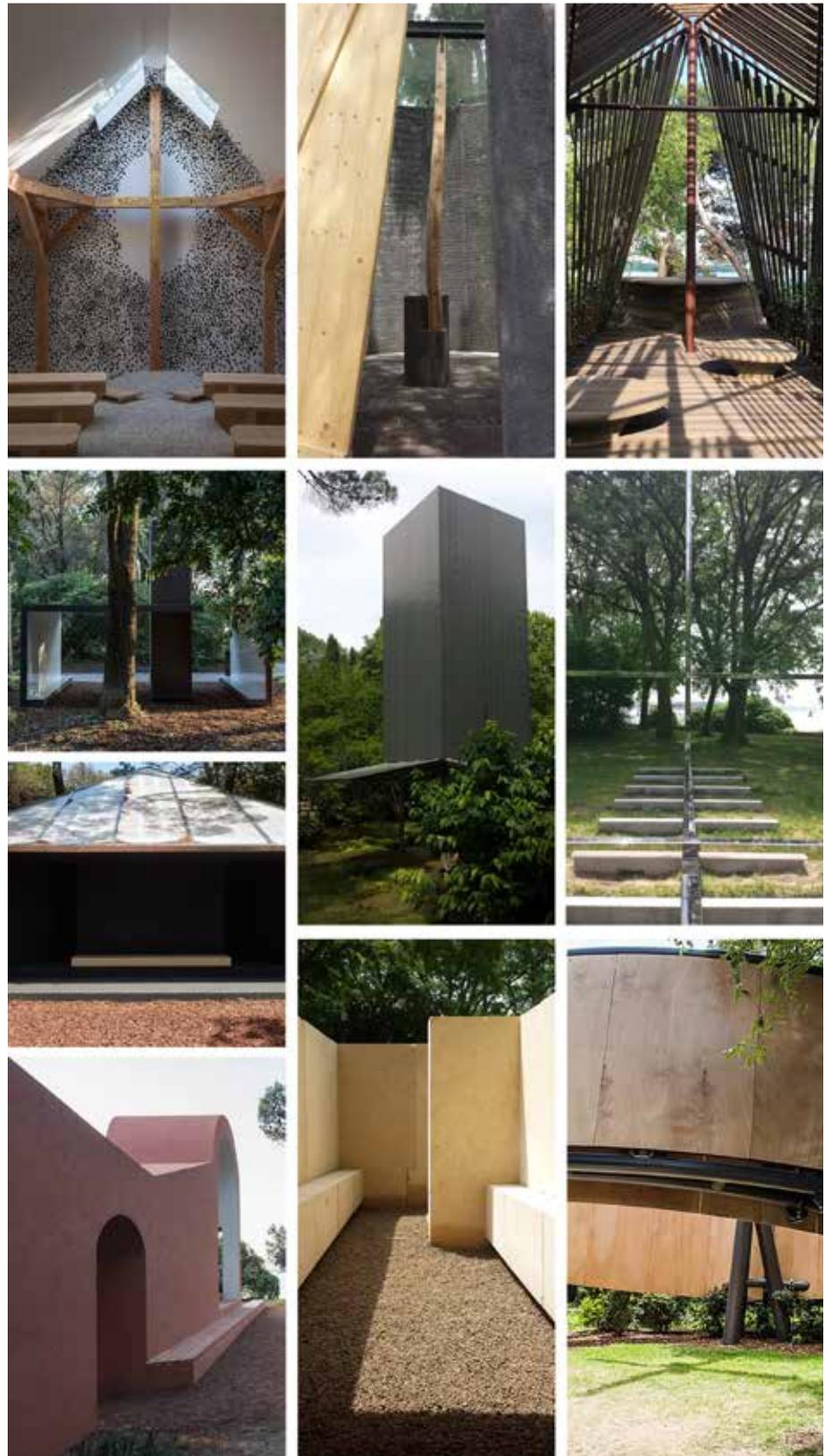
Undoubtedly, the chapel in the woods has influenced the imagination of many contemporary interpretations on the theme, the most recent of which is attributable to the Vatican experience of the ten chapels, in the woods of the San Giorgio Maggiore island, for the Venice Biennale 2018. The exhibition, entitled *Vatican Chapels*, was imagined as a widespread pavilion in the woods – to be discovered slowly – a catalogue of contemporary translations of sacredness. In the construction and design of these small pavilions which, at the express request of the Vatican, should have been transportable in the hypothesis of their potential relocation, the designers involved in the prestigious initiative<sup>2</sup> have mostly tried to express and represent the construction tradition and material of their country of origin.

The chapel is a small place that can have different purposes and destinations: it can be a place of worship or a landing place, for rest or meditation. Since it is not necessarily associated with a specific religious cult, the symbol of the cross was not expressly requested by the Holy See, which therefore also opened up the hypothesis of imagining lay spaces.

As always, the project is (or at least it should be) the transposition of an idea in which we believe and that we try to transmit with architecture, an idea that is mediated through the construction of a space that aspires, in its essence, to become a place. From a comparative reading, the spatiality of the ten chapels are different despite they have some recurring attributes. Wanting to find descriptive categories – also to understand how each chapel manifests the *interiority* of the sacred form – it could be observed how in some cases there is the theme of the opposite *contrast* between exterior and interior; in others the refined combination of *materiality* between space and light; in still others the reference to an evocative *symbolism*; while in others the theme of the essential *archetypal* of the wall.

Referring to the idea of contrast, from a constructive and formal point of view, the chapels by Berman and Fujimori – although both use inverse colours for the exterior and interior – are also, among others, the proposal that come closest to the Asplund chapel: the first, triangular in plan, recalls it in the entrance prelude which reveals a very dark interior in which only a dim natural light penetrates from above; instead the second, with a regular plan, recalls it in the gabled roof realized by wooden supports between which a narrow passage it opens up allowing the entry of only one person at a time.

Referring then to a particular attention to the material aspect of the interior space, Radic has created a truncated conical chapel, with a transparent roof, with concrete shells textured with a pluriball texture, inserted into the formwork before casting. As for the lighting aspect as an essential part of the experience of space, Foster’s chapel – a tensile structure with wooden cladding facing the lagoon – is one of the projects that have worked most in this direction: there, in fact, the experience of natural surrounding crosses the entire space of the chapel in a kaleidoscopic play of light and shadow that changes at different times of the day. Finally, the suspended pavilion of Corvalán refers to the image of a Venetian steel bricola – certainly the least temporary proposal –; even in this case the light is the real protagonist because it defines on the earth, in the shadow of the trees that surround it, a large oculus of light in which, at certain times of the day, the shadow of a three-dimensional cross is projected.



**Fig. 2**  
Vatican Chapels, Venice 2018

The proposals by Cellini and Godsell instead recall, in different ways, the symbolism of the cross in the space concept: while the Roman architect opted for a volumetric intersection of two parallelepipeds with two of the six open sides – also in this case there is the use of opposite colours – the Australian architect has created a square-based prism with a structure of wooden and steel poles whose base when it is open, from a planimetric view, refers to the image of a cross. Juaçaba's project is also part of this

group: with a few but calibrated signs – four mirrored stainless steel beams resting on seven plinths that act as benches – it is created a space totally open to nature where is reflected.

Flores and Prats, on the other hand, have built their chapel in the variable thickness of a wall: on the less thick side there is the entrance slit through which the visitor finds himself in front of a natural gash that welcomes him; on the thicker side there is the space for a niche opened towards nature too and the lagoon, where the lectern is located. Souto de Moura also builds his chapel using a Vicenza stone wall, an enclosure of a trapezoidal space with oblique sides, which envelops an internal space that is collected and shaded by a roof over the altar.

But it is certainly in the relationship with the surrounding nature of the wood that each chapel has made the perception of the sacred ‘concrete’: despite the conceptual, formal and material diversity, each chapel has sought a unique relationship with the nature of the suggestive site which, according to the cases outlined here, it was interpreted by the designers either as a natural cover (in the projects of Corvalán, Juaçaba, Radic, Souto de Moura), or as a scenic front (in the projects of Cellini, Flores and Prats, Godsell), or as a visual goal (in the projects of Foster and Fujimori), or again as an uncontaminated backdrop (in the case of Berman): this is how the experience of the interiority made from these spaces is accomplished. The character of the interior is undoubtedly also present in other examples. Among the many works by Paolo Zermani, for thematic affinity with what is being treated, the *Chapel in the woods*<sup>3</sup> is significant because it is charged with the meaning of place through the presence of only three elements – a cross, a wall and a seat – which in plan return to a point and two orthogonal lines. The Parma wood impregnates the scene in which the discreet project is located which, through the incisive essentiality of a few signs, builds an elementary place, a metaphysical space that is in tune with the surrounding nature. The sun illuminating the cross screens its shadow on the wall and on the ground and completes the expressive depth of the Zermani’s project: thus the suggestion of a pervasive experience is fulfilled and through nature it tells of the passage of time.

The *San Bernardo Chapel* of Nicolás Campodonico, located near a small wood near Cordoba, was also born from a relationship of a strong dependence with light: the orientation of the chapel was in fact studied in a way that two beams irradiate into the internal dome of the chapel a shadow that, in the hours of sunset, progressively draws a cross. The space that is created tells the visitor about the passage of time and makes the experience of the sacred – through nature, light and architecture – engaging and unique every time.

Last but not least, the *Bruder Klaus Chapel* by Peter Zumthor, near Cologne, is the emblem of a surprising experience where light and matter define a mystical and ascetic environment in a totally unexpected interior space: here material contrast and spatial experience are states poetically connected: the chapel externally has the shape of a pentagonal prism with a single large access opening; internally, the space, illuminated only by an eye of natural light, is the result of a concrete casting on a formwork consisting of wooden poles of variable diameter, which were subsequently burned for their removal. The dark setting of the chapel, due to precise choice of this traditional local procedure, presents a rough texture inside, almost as if one were inside the barky shell of a tree; in addition, in correspondence with the holes left in the concrete, Zumthor has located some

crystal beads which, when the external light radiates into the interior, become almost like crystallized drops of water, embedded in the surface of the walls.

The experience of nature and the revelation of its sacredness are obviously also evident in many other buildings linked to worship, memory and remembrance: from memorials to cemeteries, from crematoria to mausoleums to sanctuaries. Think of the numerous Italian hermitages and sanctuaries that from their acropolic positions look at distant and silent landscapes that give the viewer peace of mind, amplifying the experience of nature; or to the work of Dani Karavan in memory of Walter Benjamin or to the Monument to the Venetian partisan by Carlo Scarpa or to the suggestive cemetery of the sea in Fisterra by Cesar Portela which is interposed between the land and the sea.

All places dominated by nature are places that by their own vocation, as I have tried to affirm, predisposed to interiority. The singularity of nature which, as we have seen, becomes the horizon or scenic backdrop of some lucky projects, such as those described, is certainly a condition that in a certain way helps architecture to define, through the relationship and mutual exchange with the outside, a sacral dimension with the place. This does not exclude that even architecture, through the attention, constructive wisdom and material consistency of those who imagine and create it, contributes to constituting – with nature – the places of the otherness: places that nourish the spirit and the interior, places in which to wander and stop, reflect and get lost between the solitude and the nostalgia of a melancholic memory, between meditation and contemplation of nature and life.

## Notes

<sup>1</sup> “Nobody can deny our interiority. Even if the impact of the word in our mind very often has an indefinable effect. Quickly fades into the nebulae of feelings or thoughts. Imagine instead if someone asked us to explain what the interior of the city, the landscape, the suburbs, the buildings is” (author’s translation from Italian); text available on <https://divisare.com/projects/286717-renato-rizzi-parma-inattesa-lo-spazio-del-pudore> or on RIZZI R., *Parma inattesa. Lo spazio del pudore*, Monte Univeristà Parma, Parma 2013.

<sup>2</sup> The initiative involved A. Berman, F. Cellini, J. Corvalán, R. Flores and E. Prats, N. Foster, T. Fujimori, S. Godsell, C. Juaçaba, S. Radic and E. Souto de Moura. F. Magnani and T. Pelzel were instead entrusted with the setting up of pavilion zero centered on the inspiring project of the exhibition: the chapel in the woods by Gunnar Asplund in Stockholm’s Skogskyrkogården.

<sup>3</sup> The Italian architect Paolo Zermani has worked extensively on the theme of the chapel, including the chapel on the sea in Marsascala, the Noceto chapel in Parma and the chapel-museum of the Madonna del Parto by Piero della Francesca in Monterchi.

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Carlotta Torricelli

**The form of absence.**

**Reflections on the city, memory, and monuments, starting from Luigi Snozzi's project for Brunswick, Germany**

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Abstract

When architecture is called to give shape to what is no longer there, the art of building faces the challenge of transposing the emptiness of loss into an image. It then finds itself having to fix a certain temporal segment within the dynamic flow of collective memory, to root the event it has been asked to represent within the specific character of a place, to define a precise image – among the many possible ones – which contributes to locating that trauma within the choral narrative it is a part of. By questioning the potential implicit in the intimate link that exists between construction and destruction, we come face to face with a reflection on the relationship between memory and the city, starting from an investigation around a project in which an erased urban reality is reconstructed in the negative in the ground, like an imprint, while it itself is translated into a monument.

Keywords

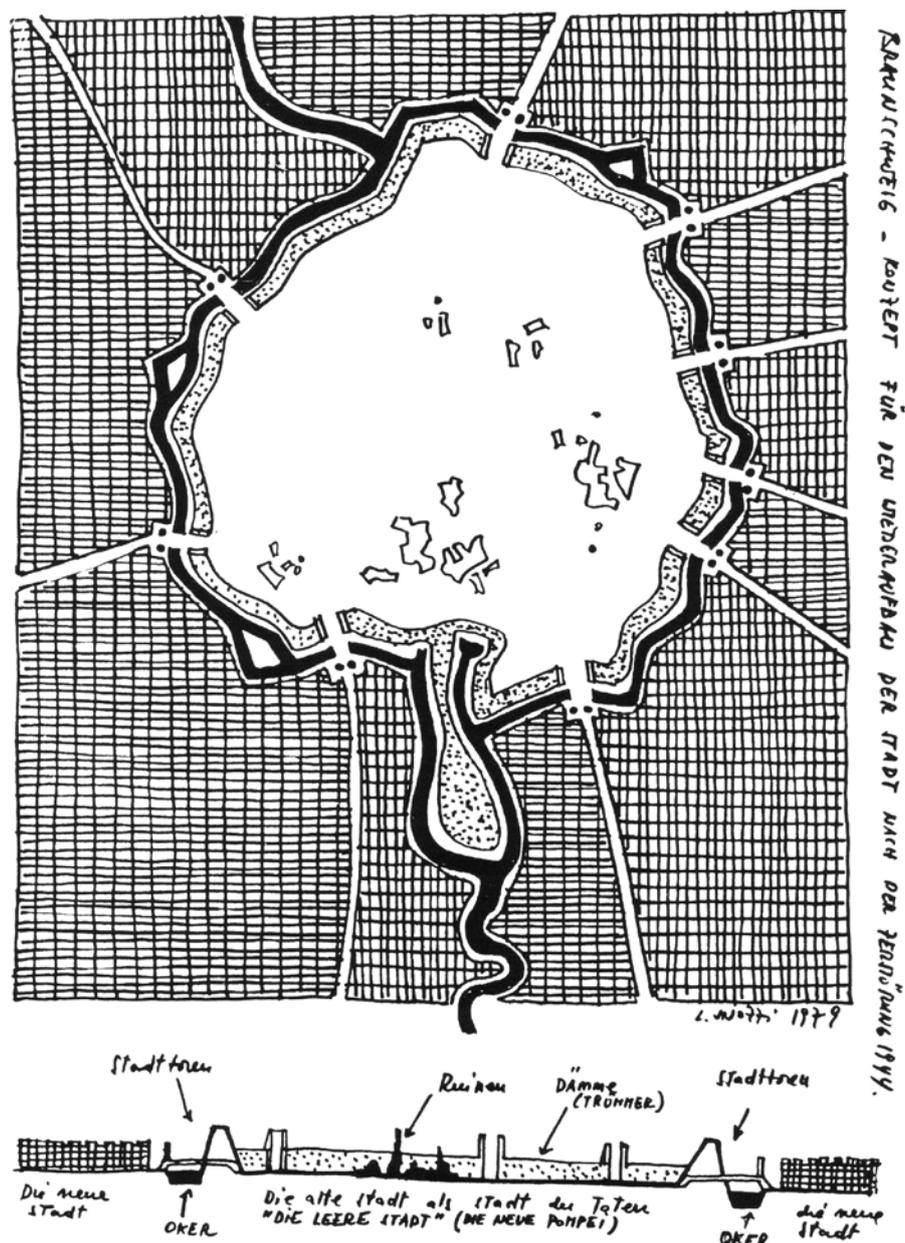
Figuration — Monument — Heterotopia

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Quand sur l'abîme un soleil se repose,  
Ouvrages purs d'une éternelle cause,  
Le Temps scintille et le Songe est savoir.  
(Valéry 1920)

Upon reasoning over the theme of representing absence, the idea starts to emerge that, ultimately, thinking is nothing more than returning to the origins. Pursuing this logic, an investigation of the project of spaces dedicated to the passage from life to death, or of places appointed to pass on the memory of a traumatic event – but more precisely to represent the civilization that was affected by it – becomes an opportunity for a reflection on the relationship between architecture, city, and monument. And, at the same time, a point of synthesis in the dialectic between time and memory in architecture. When architecture is called upon to give shape to what is no longer there, insoluble aporias become evident. In the tension between rooting and transformation, between experimentation and denial of form, the art of building collides with its powerlessness to transpose the emptiness of loss into an image. This condition should not be interpreted as a limit, but as an opportunity for reflection on the symbolic and evocative potential of the architectural project, seen as the rewriting of a place through a montage of heterogeneous times capable of questioning the “eternal present”.

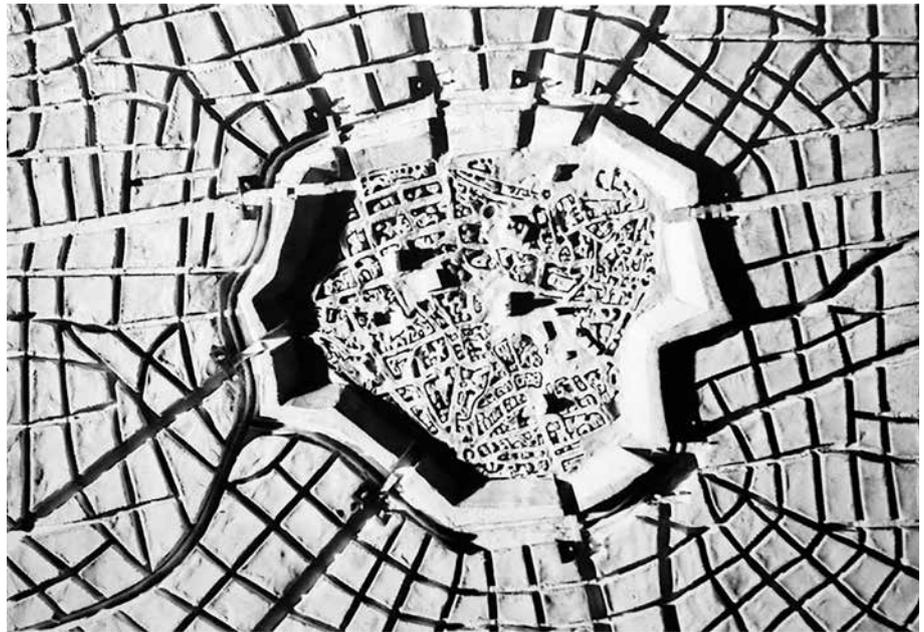
During the first lockdown of 2020 – an instrument for containing the health emergency due to the spread of COVID-19 – the urban form, so neglected – not to say denied – in the debate which prevails in the contemporary world, involuntarily found itself at the centre of reflections from different sectors of culture.



**Fig. 1**  
Luigi Snozzi, Braunschweig  
[Brunswick] *Konzept für den  
Wiederaufbau der Stadt nach  
der Zerstörung 1944, "Die leere  
Stadt - das neue Pompei"*, 1979

Photographers and artists documented our deserted cities, with images of empty public spaces, ghostly, yet at the same time extraordinarily eloquent, given that they had been restored to their nature of space, measure, and form. The space of the community, as a pure system of relationships, declares the metaphysical nature of architecture, which translates the dimension of absence into a figure. The heritage value of the public space became tragically affirmed when people were unable to live it. At the same time, death returned to being a part of everyday life, in a society which no longer recognized it as «a defined place or space/time» (Baudrillard J. 2009, p. 139), a fact which profoundly undermined the capacity for a collective reaction.

Meanwhile, the ongoing health emergency has made us completely blasé to the daily victim count. Elias Canetti (2014, p.11) recognized the inhumanity implicit in the act of counting itself, as the annulment of the dignity of a single death: «It all begins with the counting of the dead... A dead man and another dead man are not two deaths».



**Fig. 2**  
Luigi Snozzi, Braunschweig  
[Brunswick], model, 1979.

If, therefore, the pandemic has urgently reintroduced reflection on the tension between individual memory and collective memory, the investigation of a project manifesto in which the urban form, when empty, crystallizes into a monument, is absolutely up-to-the-minute. Nor does it seem immaterial that its author, Luigi Snozzi, has only recently passed away.<sup>1</sup>

In 1979, this architect from the Canton of Ticino designed a proposal to reconstruct the Old Town of Brunswick, a city in Lower Saxony reduced to a pile of rubble by the Allied powers towards the end of the Second World War. The project envisioned using the huge amount of debris as a building material to define an enclosure which would reproduce the layout of the Baroque city walls, surrounded by the waters of the Oker River; inside, it would leave a large empty space, where it would be possible to read the imprint of the historical city on a 1:1 scale, which the architect himself (Snozzi L., 1984, p.34). defined an “urban X-ray”. Accordingly, the design of the ancient city would be visible thanks to the trace of the foundations of the built fabric which once gave a form to this urban setting. In this negative morphology, only the volumes of the main civil and religious buildings would emerge, among which the figure of the Braunschweiger Schloss would stand out, which was instead entirely demolished in 1960 and reconfigured in 2005 into a new organism which has retained only the ancient style of the façade, unlike other historic buildings patiently rebuilt from what had escaped destruction. In his model, we can recognize the churches with their fronts crowned by towers, which in various historical engravings represent one of the characterizing elements of this townscape. Brunswick was the capital of a duchy twice, first in the 12<sup>th</sup> century, during the reign of Heinrich der Löwe [better known in English as “Henry the Lion”, t/n], then from 1671 when it belonged to the Dukes of Brunswick-Wolfenbüttel, who, by choosing to reside there from 1753, transformed it into a lively centre of Enlightenment culture.

What remains of that condensed architecture and culture after the air raids of the night between 14 and 15 October 1944 most probably resembled a lunar landscape, and the death toll, in this case, verged on the extreme. As described by Kurt Vonnegut (2007, pp. 164-65), who witnessed first-hand another extreme destruction:



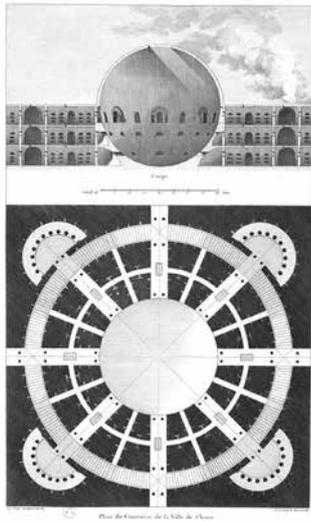
**Fig. 3**  
Alberto Burri, *Grande Cretto Gibellina*, aerial view

[...] the sky was black with smoke. The sun was an angry little pinhead. Dresden was like the moon now, nothing but minerals. The stones were hot. Everybody else in the neighbourhood was dead [...] Their wood had been consumed, and their stones had crashed down, had tumbled against one another until they locked at last in low and graceful curves [...] the survivors, if they were going to continue to survive, were going to have to climb over curve after curve on the face of the moon.

With life cancelled, Snozzi chose to freeze the atrocity of the tragedy in a mineral mould: «The ancient city as a city of the dead. The empty city (the new Pompeii)», as we find written on one of his project drawings. The central void, the space of the community, declares the metaphysical dimension of architecture which translates destruction into a monument, without reconciliation.

In other words, it is the celebration of the end of a civilization, of which this monument – conceived thirty-five years after the event, in the midst of the debate on the role of urban design in relation to history and places – represents the sepulchre: an international and secular memorial. Indeed, in funeral rites, as Alessandro del Bufalo wrote (1992, p. 15), sepulchres «are called upon to play the role of lasting and unequivocal survival certificates, of memories in stone». In this sense, the project does not raise the problem of passing on the memory of the victims, the losers or the winners, but is partisan of a single cause, namely, that of the city as a collective work.

In this same regard, it is interesting to remember that Luigi Snozzi, speaking of the reasons which inspired him to undertake the profession of architect, declared (Croset P. A., Peghin G., Snozzi L., 2016, p.43) the importance which a famous statement of Carlo Cattaneo had during the



**Fig. 4**  
Claude-Nicolas Ledoux, *Le cimetière de la ville de Chaux*. Plan and section. In *L'architecture considérée sous le rapport de l'art, des mœurs et de la législation*. Tome 1, 1804. Source: Gallica.BnF.Fr/BnF.

years of his training at Zurich Polytechnic: «A region distinguishes itself from wilderness by the following: it is a huge deposit of human fatigue [...] this earth therefore is no longer the work of nature, it is the oeuvre of our hands, it is an artificial homeland»<sup>2</sup>. With this awareness, the architect assumes the act of modification implicit in the project as a determining fatality, going beyond the vision of those who, believing themselves champions in safeguarding historical and environmental heritage, understand it as a definitive fact, while actually decreeing its death. Snozzi did not imagine a celebration of the return to nature as a memorial, but a descent into the origins of this artificial homeland, whose genetic heritage is engraved in the urban structure revealed by its foundations.

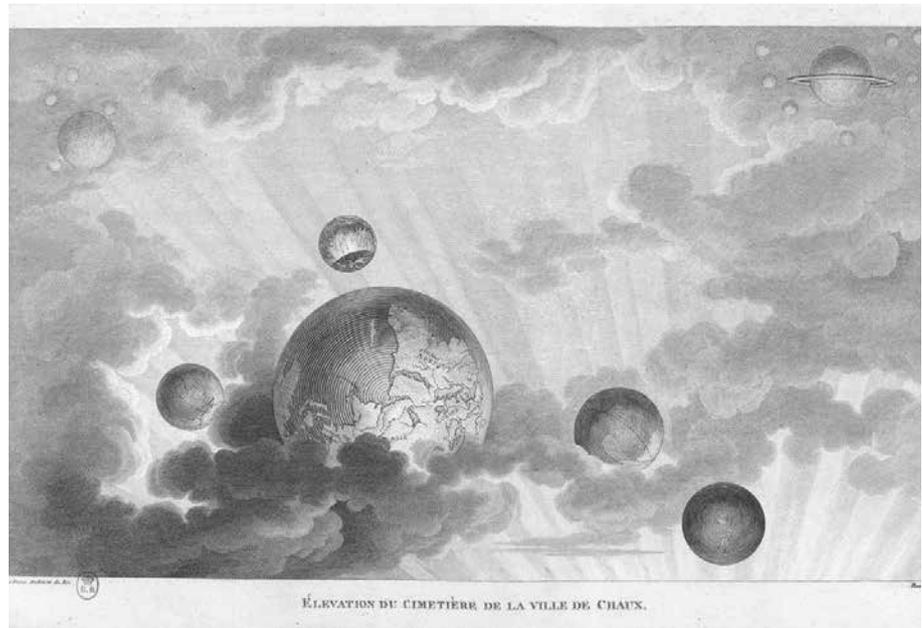
At the same time, however, Snozzi's proposal did recognize the mourning of the historic city and sought to celebrate its rite of passage, projecting the design invention towards the future. In an engineering spirit, around the void he built a colossal substructure, conceived as a barrier to separate the city of the living from that of the dead; in this way, the architect differentiated between the debris, which he used to build this new border, and the rubble which shaped the memory of ancient urban artefacts. This new enclosure was marked by a sequence of urban gates, connected to the road network which defined the grid of the new settlement, in line with the figure of the walled city, as a composition of regular geometries with differing orientations; these traced and reinterpreted the pattern of the cultivated fields, as it appeared in historical representations attached to the preparatory drawings.

The built fabric of the new city was to be located entirely outside the moat surrounding the walls, in a dialectical tension with the ancient city to which it is connected via a system of bridges. The bridge is the element which demonstrates the multi-scale value of the architecture, which summarizes the entire urban solution in the detail of a single device. The design choice condensed the sacredness of the rite of foundation of the new city in the regular layout governing the new settlement, measuring the territory and projecting the dimension of the new urban nature onto the geographical scale; while, at the same time, the dimension of absence was moulded in the material forming the ground for the central void, through signs which evoke the figures to which the community attaches a heritage value.

Significantly, the title of the article with which Snozzi (1984, p. 34) presented his project in the magazine *Werk, Bauen + Wohnen* is *Ein neues Stadtkonzept - Denkmal der Zerstörung*, embedding the new vision in the monument to cancellation which makes it necessary. In the last line of the short text we read: «Every human intervention presupposes a destruction», and the architect takes full responsibility for this, reversing this inseparable link in a positive way.

It is the desire to cancel the opposition between birth and death that makes the project a crystalline affirmation, not only on architectural and urban levels, but also of a social and political nature. In an interview (Gambaro M., Snozzi L., 2015, p. 310), Snozzi stated: «It would have been the first European city with an empty city centre, the dream of my ideal city. Obviously, the project has not been approved. I think the essence of the public space and in particular of the square is right in this metaphysical dimension in which architecture defines and circumscribes an empty space».

The form of absence, therefore, celebrates in a single figure the memory of what has been lost and, at the same time, the foundation rite of what



**Fig. 5**

Claude-Nicolas Ledoux, *Élévation du Cimetière de la ville de Chaux*.

In *L'architecture considérée sous le rapport de l'art, des mœurs et de la législation. Tome 1*, 1804.  
Source: Gallica.BnF.Fr/BnF

is to come, in a sort of circular movement. According to Jean Baudrillard (2009, pp. 145-146) our culture, in the progressive deepening of its rationality, has come to 'de-socialize' death, while the primitives carried out the symbolic operation of initiation which «does not aim to avoid death nor to 'overcome it', but to articulate it socially», in a reciprocal exchange, thereby avoiding the division between birth and death, while transcending the disorder implicit in passing away. In the same essay, published in 1976 in Paris, the philosopher identified the moment of extradition of the dead as one of the crisis points of Western urban culture, which reserves for them neither fiscal nor mental space: «The cemetery no longer exists because modern cities have entirely taken over their function... » (Baudrillard J., 2009, p.139).

A few years after Snozzi's project, a major artist, Alberto Burri, conceived a work which amplified, in both a physical and conceptual sense, the experiment he had previously carried out in his works *Cretti*, capable of crowding the memory and raising multiple echoes, as if they were prehistoric works built by the hands of giants. It is the way of being of the work of art, without limitation of time, both far-off and nearby, which Cesare Brandi defined as "abstention", «a full presence, a dynamic presence, a real unreality» (Brandi C., 1979, p.947).

The *Grande Cretto Gibellina* (1981-1984-2015) is a landscape artwork, whose historical-civil significance consists in veiling and, at the same time, highlighting the memory of the city destroyed by the Belice earthquake back in 1968. The pedestrian routes criss-crossing the old city – 20km from the new one – built by compacting and covering the rubble with concrete at a constant height, conjure up both the catastrophe and the inextinguishable memory of it.

The image of the empty sacred enclosure made from rubble as designed by Snozzi, reread in this interpretation, recalls another powerful representation of the drama of modern humans and their relationship with death. Is this not architecture in stone, one of the various versions that have been designed for the famous pagan rite – sacrificial, propitiatory or initiation – as represented by Igor Stravinsky's ballet *The Rite of Spring*, conceived and composed between 1911 and 1913 for Serge Diaghilev's Ballets Russes company?

On the 3<sup>rd</sup> of December 1975, at the Opera House in Wuppertal, in North Rhine-Westphalia – a city which, incidentally, from the occurrence of the bombings saw destruction of “only” 40% of its buildings – the German choreographer Pina Bausch sent her whole company, half women and half men, all barefooted, onto a stage completely covered with earth. There was no other scenery, and for almost forty minutes the bodies of the dancers traced the movements of a dance obligated by death on this irregular dusty surface, while on the floor lay a red cloth, the only symbol of the sacrifice which must necessarily be made. In the fourth episode of the first part, *Spring Rounds*, the men and women drew a circle, using their bodies to trace out the archetypal figure of every ancestral dance, but also of the primitive shelter or of the first home of humanity, as well as its first funerary mound. In this epic vision, birth and death renewed each other, until their opposition was resolved in the primeval dimension. On the contrary, the masculine and the feminine remained clearly separate and in dialectic opposition – but this is the subject of other musings. The recovery of the archaic dimension which had animated Stravinsky at the beginning of the twentieth century, was radicalized by the German choreographer, who reinterpreted it as a necessary rite for contemporary humans to re-establish their culture and find a place for the demons who populate it.

Stravinsky – whose *Poetics of Music* was one of the fundamental texts on which Luigi Snozzi based his teaching – was not the only one to perceive the demand for a return to the origins in the first two decades of the twentieth century. All the avant-garde movements born in the most vital season of European culture shared this necessity, each interpreting it in diverse ways, while raising the problem of the conflict between life and death which modern humans, and the metropolis which represents them, are unable to find a place for.

In the Surrealist Manifesto of 1924, André Breton (2003) wrote: «Everything tends to make us believe that there exists a certain point of the mind at which life and death, the real and the imagined, past and future, the communicable and the incommunicable, high and low, cease to be perceived as contradictions». Yet, the atrocity of the totalitarian regimes which would soon put an end to this intense moment of international exchange of artistic sensibilities, together with the barbarism of the ensuing Second World War, were indeed to overturn these values, but in a different direction, that of the annihilation of mankind. In the tension of this watershed, Luigi Snozzi planned the rite of a return to the origins and, at the same time, a passage towards a future which his design still had the will and ability to aspire to, laying the groundwork for it.

Which brings us back to thinking about the rhythm of our progress as architects, governed by a complex dynamic made up of fractures and conflicts, but also of the possibility of intertwining the fibres of time, eluding chronology, giving rise to distant dialogues, references, and returns. It can happen that projects and theories contain more future than the contemporaries observing them can read. At which point, it is the present that can bring to attention the relevance of a distant experience, providing new keys to interpretation.

In conclusion, then, how might we define this urban vision for Brunswick? On several occasions it has been considered a utopian project. Analysing in depth the logic on which it is built, however, it is clear that it can more properly be defined as a heterotopia. In saying *heterotopia*, direct reference is made to the definition given in 1966 by Foucault (1980, pp. 7-8):

The utopias console: because even though they do not have a real place, they unfold into a wonderful and even space [...] also if their access is chimerical. The heterotopias are disturbing, no doubt because they secretly undermine the language, because they prevent naming this and that, because they break down the common names or they entangle them, because they 'syntax' is broken up beforehand and not only that which constructs the phrase – but also that which is less obvious which makes words and things 'stay together' (some on the other side or others facing them).

In other words, this is a project which unhinges the categories, subverts the relationship between city and memorial, between necropolis and polis and, starting from the archetypal figure of the enclosure, asks questions about the future of the city, about the rites which pass on its memory. Snozzi recovered an archaic dimension in which the sacred space, the place of the dead, was separate from the urban body, but inseparable from it.

In the conflict between the city of the living and the city of the dead, urban contexts have steered their process of transformation in numerous ways, and innumerable responses have been built upon this dialectic which, in turn, have oriented architectural practices in diverse ways. Since the end of the 18<sup>th</sup> century,<sup>3</sup> the Age of Enlightenment, reasons of a cultural nature and, at the same time, of a hygienic nature, banished burial places from the city, opening up a vast problem of codification and planning, but reconstructing that separation which had characterized the ancient city in certain cultures, for example those of the Etruscans, where, as Paolo Portoghesi wrote: «The city of the dead acquires a value which almost doubles the city of the living, with characteristics which make necropolises resemble cities and tombs resemble houses»<sup>4</sup>.

It therefore appears pertinent, in conclusion, to see similarities in the project under investigation with the choice which Claude-Nicolas Ledoux made regarding the cemetery in his project for the ideal city of Chaux (1780-1804). In his project for the burial site of the Royal Saltworks at Arc-et-Senans, the architect expressed a secular visionary quality based on physiocratic thinking, which led to him imagining a reorganized and rarefied city, as part a large-scale reorganization – as we would say today – of the territory and a rationalization of its design in both formal and production terms.

Three orders of underground tunnels, according to the model of the Roman catacombs,<sup>5</sup> are distributed by radial paths which lead, through a set of arched and Serlian openings, to a large, completely empty, spherical space of approximately 73 metres in diameter.<sup>6</sup> The upper hemisphere is above ground and has no openings or decorations. The nakedness of the surface, together with the absence of hierarchy implicit in the chosen geometry, declare the egalitarian implications on which the architect based the project, where the use of cremation informed the idea of the continuous regeneration of life in death. Only an oculus positioned at the top frames a portion of the sky. This space was not born as a place for ceremonies,<sup>7</sup> we cannot recognize within it a place where we might remain, nor a clear access point. Those who look down from the openings in the immense vault can contemplate the void inside and the movement of the ray of light which enters from the oculus. Even the choice of the site has a strongly symbolic character: the cemetery is located outside the urban fabric, in the quarries from which the building material to build the city of the living was extracted. The mass of the cemetery saturates the void left by the mining activities, closing the plain with a new artificial ground layer, over which towers

the upper part of the gigantic globe which Emil Kaufmann (p. 300) defined as “an austere symbol of infinity”: «Around the edifice there is nothing but a wide empty space. No tree, no lawn, no lively stream relieves the gloom. Whoever approaches it shall face an image of nothingness, a vision of the void – ‘*l’image du néant*’».

The pure geometry within which the dimension of absence is inscribed is counterbalanced by an enigmatic drawing, to which Ledoux assigned the title *Élevation du Cimetière de la Ville de Chaux*. This represents the infinite space of the universe, with the earth in the centre and the motion of the planets that surround it, illuminated by a ray of sunshine. The astronomical image may represent the universal sublime in which the dead will be reabsorbed after their passing away, but certainly, since it is included in an architectural treatise, it implies for it the extension of its field of action to unexplored imageries.

For us, as contemporary architects, all that remains is to tie together the threads of the way of working represented here by Snozzi’s project for Brunswick, and by the many other artistic experiences which have been juxtaposed to it, thanks to the analogical process. To transpose the evocation of memory into form – going beyond the duality between density and rarefaction of the urban fabric – the void asserts itself as an iconic and representative space of an established community, only if it is itself understood as a structured form, one working from within the fractures, one which thrives on the tension – again in Brandi’s words – between “abstention” and “flagrancy”. In this opposition there yet lies the possibility of giving a form to absence in the construction of a monument.

## Notes

<sup>1</sup> For this article, use has been made of the images of the project to reconstruct Brunswick [Braunschweig, Germany] which the architect authorized for use in the volume by Rakowitz G. and Torricelli C. (2018).

<sup>2</sup> The original quote is contained in a report on “Industry and Morals” (presented by Carlo Cattaneo at the SIAM [Association to Promote Arts and Crafts] of Milan, in 1845) and can be found in: Cattaneo C. (1972), p.472.

<sup>3</sup> This request was sanctioned by Napoleon in 1804 with the so-called Edict of Saint-Cloud (*Décret Impérial sur les Sépultures*), in which the previous fragmentary rules on cemeteries were systematically gathered, establishing that tombs were to be placed outside the defensive walls of the city, and that they were all to be identical.

<sup>4</sup> The quote from Paolo Portoghesi is contained in the Presentation of the volume by Bertolaccini L. (2004), p. 6.

<sup>5</sup> The thesis of using quarries as burial sites was at the centre of the Parisian debate at that time, given that discussions were ongoing regarding the relocation of the remains kept in the *Cimetière des Innocents* to the quarries of Montrouge, south of the city.

<sup>6</sup> It is impossible not to see similarities between this spherical space and the equally famous one of the project developed by Étienne-Louis Boullée for Newton’s Cenotaph in 1784. The studies cited in the bibliography take a closer look at their similarities and differences.

<sup>7</sup> In his description of the project, Ledoux endeavoured to illustrate its use by declaring that religious services would take place at the centre of the building. In reality, however, we do not find any horizontal plane inside the sphere that would allow us to envisage the carrying out of such activities, as if the section wished to emphasize the image of emptiness as far as possible.

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Roberta Esposito  
**Mundus. Fundus.**  
**The pit that connects the subterranean and the celestial**

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Abstract

The paper analyses the form of the mundus as a foundation pit of the Roman city and, at the same time, as an architectural dimension capable of establishing a connection between the underworld of the dead and the overworld of the living. The deep cavity with its circular section is the formal translation of both the act of urban creation that transforms chaos into cosmos and the necessary union between earth and sky.

By attempting to unify the two pits, which are in any case responsible for the transition from the vain to the concrete, and by describing the ancient rituals of propitiation connected to them, the book aims to argue that through Architecture, and therefore through the manifestation of form, human life can aspire to eternity.

Keywords

Mundus — Underground — Celestial

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Mundo nomen impositum est ab eo mundo qui supra nos est: forma enim eius est, ut ex his qui intravere cognoscere potui, adsimilis illae<sup>1</sup>.

Catone, *Commentaria iuris civilis*.

The world below and the world above, corresponding to the two dimensions of the subterranean and the celestial, of the same form, one the mirror of the other – as argued by Cato in his *Commentaria iuris civilis* and later reported by Festus in *De verborum significatu* (2nd century AD, L. 44, 14-21) – are connected through the cavity, in the sense of a passage, of the *mundus*.

The word, in spite of its much debated etymology<sup>2</sup>, corresponds, therefore, to the element capable of connecting the two spheres of darkness and light, and of allowing the crossing from one to the other space. In this sense, we support the thesis of the Italian glottologist Vittore Pisani, who, taking up the aforementioned definition of Cato, argues that the underground *mundus* and the *mundus* above our heads, besides having the same form, are indicated by the same word. The lemma *mundus* does not split into two homophonic voices, one indicating the earth and the other the vault of heaven, but corresponds to a single word that signifies the two opposites of earth and sky, and is embodied in the element that connects them.

The word *mundus* actually represents the passage from the subterranean to the celestial and vice versa, i.e. the vertical connection between the two dimensions of below and above. Therefore, the *mundus* can lead to the underworld and, at the same time, thought of as upside down, correspond to the opening that turns towards the vault of heaven. In other words, there is a reciprocal relationship between the two dimensions: the *mundus* from



**Fig. 1**

Collage. Mosaic from the Mausoleum of Galla Placidia in Ravenna + Memento Mori mosaic found in Pompeii and housed in the National Archaeological Museum in Naples.

the depths leads to the world of the living and, conversely, from the light it leads to the darkness of the abyss (Georgescu 2019, pp. 206-223).

The form that materialises this connection corresponds to that of the pit. The French linguist Joseph Vendryes related the word *mundus* to the word *fundus*, “bottom, earth” (1914, pp. 305-310).

This pit has an elongated section, and on the side of the earth’s bottom its construction reaches *ad solidum*, that is to the layer of rock under the layer of soil, while on the side towards the sky, it has the possibility of opening or closing through the stone called *manalis lapis*. Its section, given the removable stone cover, must have been rather small, probably no larger than the mouth of a well.

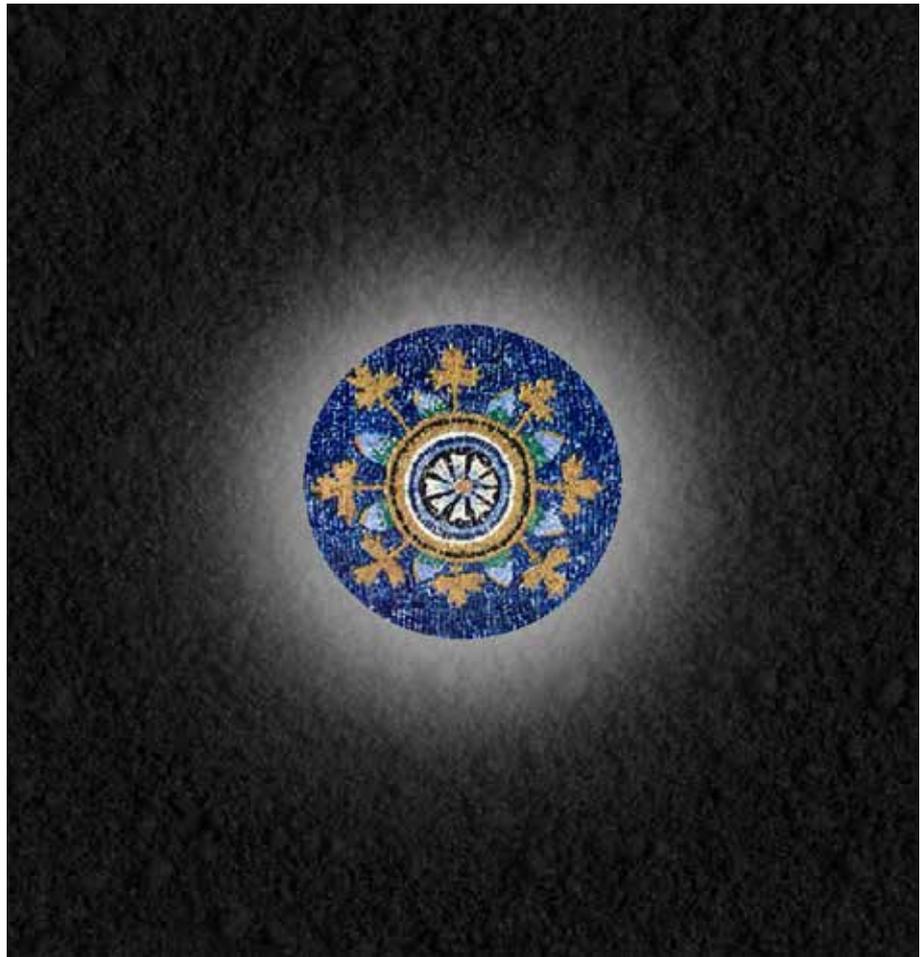
However, ancient sources distinguish two different *mundus*: the city’s foundation pit and the *Mundus Cereris* pit, which connects the world of the dead with that of the living and which is not necessarily dug during the urban construction ritual.

The two cavities have often been confused and, consequently, homologated. The misunderstanding arose from the geographical location of the foundation pit of the city of Rome. Plutarch (1st century AD, L. 11, 1), probably believing that the Rome of the Tarquins was the Rome of the origins, assimilates the *Mundus Cereris* located in the Comitium inside the Roman Forum to the foundation pit dug by Romulus on the Palatine Hill, as reported by Ovid (9 AD, L. 4, 810-24).

The circular pit mentioned by Plutarch, consecrated to the Mani and excavated in the sanctuary of Ceres, *in the place that is now called Comitium*, is overlooked by a brick construction – still visible today – 2 metres high and 4.45 metres in diameter, which, through a small entrance, gives access to an underground area that was once embellished with polychrome marble. The trench, most likely dating back to the Severan period because it was located between the Rostra and the Arch of Septimius Severus, was, as Plutarch again pointed out, considered to be the centre of the *pomerium*, that is the sacred furrow constituting the city’s boundary, drawn with a plough pulled by an ox and a cow.

According to Ovid, however, the city of Rome originated on the Palatine Hill, so the foundation *mundus* must have been located there. This theory is, moreover, confirmed by archaeologist Andrea Carandini’s discovery of a wall dating back to the eighth century B.C. at the foot of the hill, which has reopened the debate on the dating of Rome’s foundation, giving new strength to the ancient vulgate that indicates 21 April 753 B.C. as the birth of the city. Carandini (2006) believes that on the *Cermalus*, the area in front of the later Temple of Victory, was therefore positioned the foundation pit of the city of Rome, corresponding to a tomb on which stood an altar.

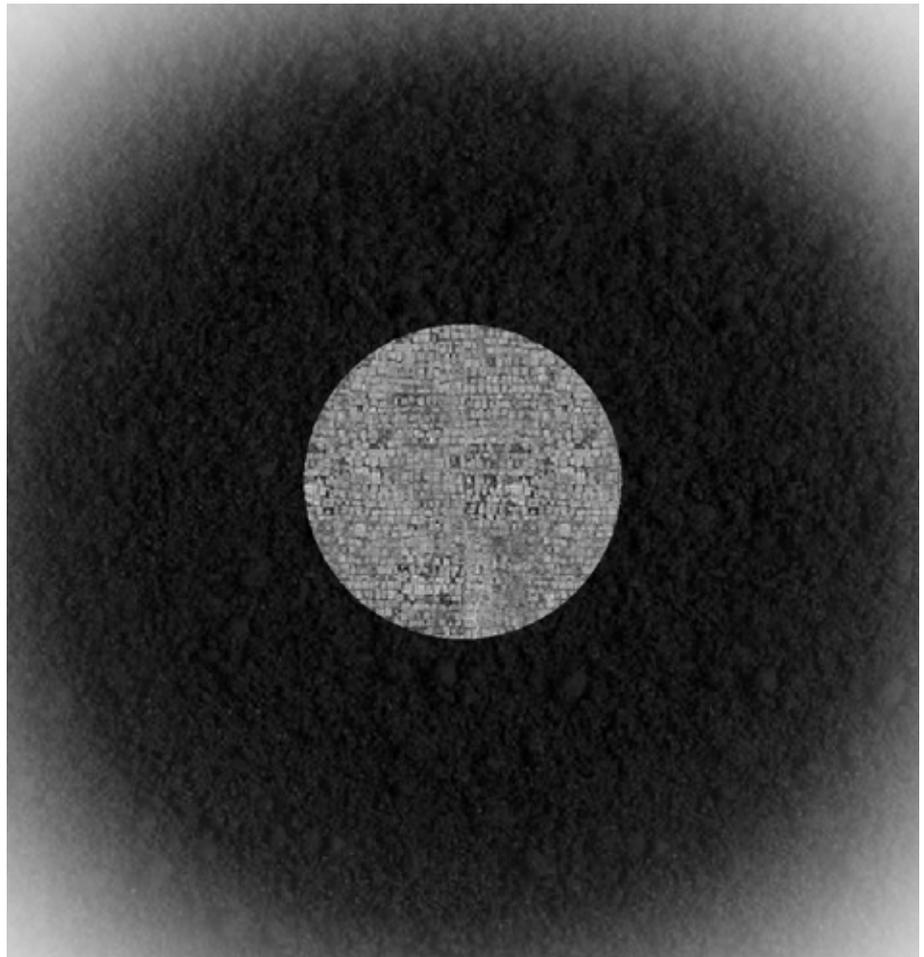
The *mundus*, as a foundation pit, was dug in the centre of the new city after the urban boundary (*pomerium*) had been marked out and at the intersection of the two main axes of the decumanus and the cardo, which divided the settlement area into four. The excavation operation was part of a ritual sequence that inaugurated the new place of habitation by imitating, to a certain extent, the primordial act of the creation of the world. As Mircea Eliade argues, «when one takes possession of a given territory, that is, *when one begins to explore it, one performs rituals that symbolically repeat the act of creation; the uncultivated area is first of all “cosmized”, then inhabited»* (1968, p. 23). In other words, the excavation for the *mundus* repeats the cosmogonic act, since «every construction is an absolute beginning, that is, it tends to restore



**Fig. 2**  
Collage. Section of the *mundus*  
towards the sky.

the initial instant, the fullness of the present that contains no trace of history. A construction is a new organisation of the world and of life» (Eliade, 1968, p. 23). Ordering a territory by tracing its boundaries and structure achieves the transition from the unmanifested to the manifest or, to put it in cosmological terms, from chaos to cosmos. The ritual of urban construction gives the territory a form that makes it real. In this scenario, the act of creation takes place at the precise central urban point. The pit, as *Umbilicus Urbis*, is placed in the centre of the city, which is the zone of the sacred par excellence, and access to this nucleus is equivalent to a consecration, an initiation. It is on and around the *mundus* that the city is founded.

In contrast, another ritual was linked to the *mundus* as the connecting pit between the world below and the world above. In *Simboli della tradizione occidentale*, Julius Evola (1977), taking up Mircea Eliade's studies, refers to the *mundus* as *Mundus Cereris*, that is the pit that separates and at the same time connects the world of the dead and the world of the living. The *Mundus Cereris*, covered by *manalis lapis*, "stone of the Mani", was uncovered three days a year when it was said that *mundus patet*, "the world is open". During those days the secrets of the religion of the Mani, the gods of death, were brought to light and all public activities had to be suspended. As reported by Ateio Capitone (5 AD, L. 7), the three opening days of the *mundus* corresponded to August 24 (the day following the Volcanalia festival of August 23 and preceding the Opiconsivia agricultural festival of August 25, linked to the end of the harvest and, consequently, to the deity Ceres), October 5 (three days before the Nones of October, linked to the *Ieiunium Cereris*, "the fast of Ceres") and, finally, November 8 (six days before the Ides of November and possibly associated with *triticum*, a variety of spelt sown in November).



**Fig. 3**  
Collage. Section of the *mundus*  
towards the earth.

The *mundus* has, in this case, the capacity to unite the two worlds of below and above only when the stone covering it is moved. The “cover”, as Giorgio Agamben argues in *Quando la casa brucia* (2020a), gives the *mundus* the role of a door that, unlike the door-site corresponding to a constantly open passageway, thus a threshold of passage, can open and close separating one space from another. The two dimensions of earth and sky are therefore able to be independent, except for the three days a year when the barriers between the dead and the living are broken and primordial chaos is re-enacted. At that precise moment, time is suspended, its law is annulled, a coexistence of past and present is realised.

The rite, certainly chthonic in character, clearly also has agricultural values that strongly recall the original meaning of Ceres as the Great Mother.

The ritual has also often been compared to the operation of digging and invoking the dead performed by Ulysses in the 11th book of the *Odyssey* (Vinci 1995). The mythical hero, who goes to Hades to question Tiresias, the Theban vate holding the golden sceptre, digs a pit, pours wine, honey, water and white flour into it, prays to the souls of the dead and slaughters sacrificial victims, causing their blood to drip into the cavity. The gesture makes the screaming souls of the dead emerge from the dark depths and crowd around the pit, just as they do during the three days of *mundus patet*, during which the souls of the dead can return to the world of the living.

In this specific case, the tendency is to homologate the two pits. The excavation, whatever its function, with its form achieves the transition from the vain to the concrete. «In the centre is manifested the passage from the profane to the sacred, from the ephemeral and the illusory to reality and eternity, from death to life, from man to divinity» (Eliade, 1968, p. 36).

Moreover, in the writings of Plutarch and Ovid we learn that, once the pit had been dug, some first fruits were thrown into it – actually Ovid claims that the pit was filled in again and an altar representing a *novus focus* was erected over it, while Plutarch writes about a completely empty underground space. The act of casting suggests a connection, and perhaps a unification, between the city's foundation pit and the pit dedicated to Ceres (*Mundus Cereris*), which connects the two worlds of the subterranean and the celestial. The first fruits are related to Ceres who, before being associated with the Greek Demeter, is, as Varro reports, the Goddess of growth who is identified with the mother earth – «Nec sine causa Terram eamdem appellabant (maiores nostri) matrem et Cererem» (37 BC, L. 3, 1-5). It seems possible, therefore, to hypothesise the existence of a link between Ceres and the construction of a new foundation and with the world of the dead, whether we think of her in her more ancient guise as the Goddess of growth or, with a Greek interpretation, in the guise of Demeter, the Goddess of death and the Underworld.

Many ancient sources do not pose the problem of distinguishing the foundation pit from the pit of Ceres, making the *mundus* correspond synthetically to the totality of the dimensions. For Festus *mundus appellatur coelum, terra, mare et aer*, for Varro, quoted by Macrobius (430, L. 1, 16-18), *mundus cum patet, deorum tristium atque inferum quasi ianua patet*, and again, for Pliny the Elder the *kòsmos* of the Greeks *nos eum a perfecta absolutaque elegantia mundum* (77-78 AD, L. 2, 1.3-1.4).

The unification of the two pits can also be found in more recent studies. According to Mircea Eliade (1968, p. 31), the Roman *mundus*, which was traced around the place where a city was to be founded, constitutes the meeting point between the underworld and the earthly world. Or, as Ludovico Quaroni observes in *La Torre di Babele*, Roman cities were «square and divided into four by two main roads, the *cardo* and the *decumanus maximus*, laid out straight and at right angles to each other between the four gates, or rather between the only four points where the sacred boundary line, the *pomerium*, was interrupted. At the intersection of the *cardo* and the *decumanus* was the heart of the city, materialised by the *mundus*, an opening in the ground into which the founders poetically threw samples of the products of their homeland and which was reopened every year with propitiatory rites» (1967, p. 152).

Openness, as Agamben argues again this time in *Gaia e Ctonia* (2020b), a work dedicated to the two representations of the earth, the supernal and the infernal, unites «the present and the past and it is through the relationship between these two worlds that it becomes possible to direct actions and find inspiration for the future». In other words, the two divinities need to coexist. Therefore, civilisation, in order not to end up at the mercy of fear, cannot remove the concept of death, since the terror of the end «can only be cured by those who rediscover the memory of their dual abode, who remember that human is only that life in which Gaia and Chthonia remain inseparable and united».

The necessary marriage between earth and sky can only be expressed through architecture. In this sense, the connection between the dimension of the dead and the dimension of the living is expressed in the architectural form of the elongated trench with a circular section. The *mundus*, whose form seems appropriate because it seems to represent the uninterrupted thread that connects the two worlds below and above, is created by excavating, that is subtracting material from the solid earth to generate a void.

The technique, rather than a construction method, is equivalent to the representation of architecture as the essence of form and volume.

The pit, through the purity of its form, gives concreteness to the passage from the world of the underworld to the earthly world, and vice versa, allowing the present world to find inspiration for the future. The form of the *mundus*, not useful but necessary, is able to stage the coexistence of death and life, and to demonstrate that through Architecture human life can aspire to eternity.

## Notes

<sup>1</sup> English translation: «The *mundus* has been given this name because of that *mundus* which is above us: for its form, as I have learned from those who have entered it, is similar to that [of the heavenly *mundus*]».

<sup>2</sup> The Ernout-Meillet Etymological Dictionary of the Latin Language, while reporting a number of hypotheses concerning the origin and meaning of the lemma, maintains that the etymology of *mundus non liquet*.

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Gennaro Di Costanzo  
**From life to death and back to life.  
The Labyrinth archetype and the Knossos Palace in Crete**

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Abstract

This contribution aims at reflecting on the relationship between the constructed work and its original form, referring to the case of the Palace of Knossos in Crete as an archaic and original architecture, an ancestral place where the cultural practices related to death and rebirth found their stable and evocative form. The archetype of the Labyrinth, as well as the space of the cave, constitute the thematic poles around which the discourse on the Palace of Knossos is articulated, a constructed work to host the rites of passage between life and death, reified in the impeded wandering and in the meanders, in their intimate relationship with a nucleus that guards the *mysterium tremendum* and that opens to the idea of the infinite continuation of life through death.

Keywords

Knossos Palace — Labyrinth — Cave

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The Palace of Knossos in Crete, the original, archaic place where the ancestral foundation of the West began with the conception of Europe, is a paradigmatic case of the relationship between ritual and architectural forms: it stages the fundamental opposition between life and death, light and shadow, oblivion and remembrance.

The construction of the second palace, dating back to 1600 B.C., took place on the ruins of older buildings, attesting to the foundation of a complex located mainly on the west side, overlaid by the work of Daedalus, the mythical author of the Labyrinth: master of the τέχνη, an Athenian devoted to the cult of Apollo who found himself in the service of Dionysus, he was induced to construct, through artifice, the deception aimed at the man who challenges Minos.

In fact, the construction is based on geometric principles that mark its course and directions, modulating the tangle of possible deviations. Daedalus therefore «configures a «rhythm» that is given by the alternation and combination of knots and corridors, by their order, their syntax, and also by the continuous change of direction, by the acceleration and stasis, by the form of movement that Ariadne's thread materialises» (Ugo, 1993, p. 159). As Michelangelo Cagiano de Azevedo, (1958, p. 29) observes, the myth of Theseus, Ariadne and the Minotaur, as well as the figure of Daedalus, are “Attic nationalistic enrichments”, since the foundation of the first Palace can be dated to 2400 B.C. and its reconstruction, over a millennium later, is another thousand years distant from the Periclean age proper. In addition, Minoan culture, particularly that of the proto-Palazzial period (2800-1900 BC), presents substantially different cultural characteristics compared to Greek and even Mycenaean culture: if forms of collective, artistic and religious life can be identified that herald Greek civilisation, they are based

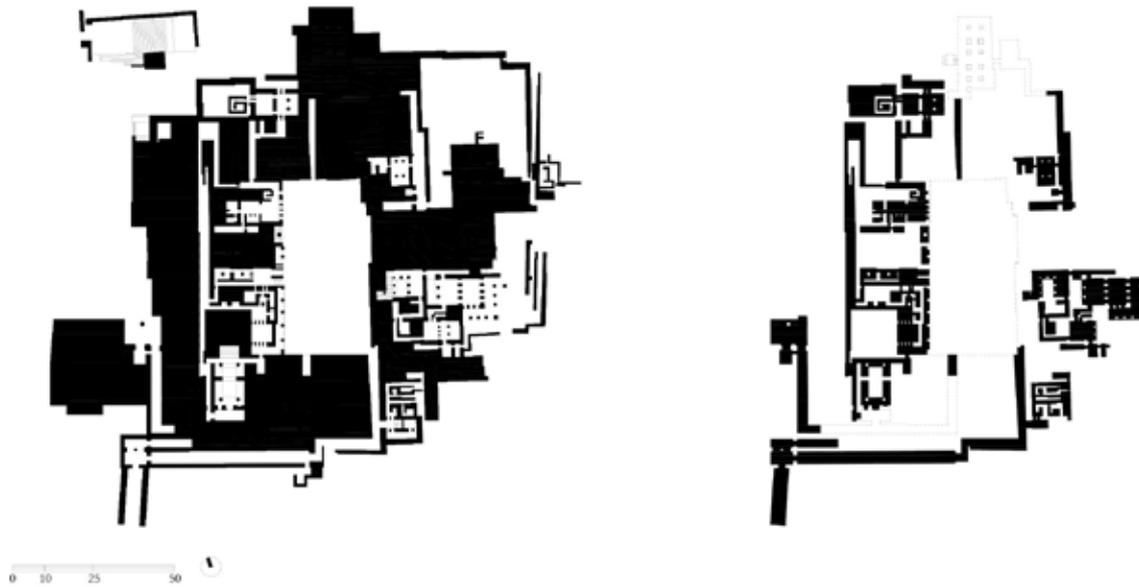


**Fig. 1**

Plan of the semi-hypogeum level and reconstruction of the first level of the Palace of Knossos, drawing by the author.

on different worldviews, even the idea of death appears different. Even the idea of death appears different. It is not presented as an oppositional term of life, but as its necessary continuation. For Diodorus Siculus, the ruins of the Palace are identified with the ‘foundations of the house of Rhea’, showing how the rites and cultic practices of the early Minoan civilisation were directed towards the cult of the mother earth: similar traditions can be found in other areas of the Mediterranean basin, as, for example, in the megalithic cult on the island of Malta. But the figure of Daedalus can take on a symbolic significance: as the builder of the Labyrinth and the *kopós* for Ariadne to dance on, as Homer’s famous passage testifies, he represents the intention to found a palace for Minos, the royal figure governing the island of Crete, thus indicating the conception of a work built for a specific purpose, not only as the political centre of the Minoan civilisation but also as its religious and cultic centre, a place where the worship of properly chthonic deities could be recognised and represented. The construction is mainly oriented to the interior and to the depths of the Earth: the Throne Room, for example, is set up as an evocation of a sacred cavern.

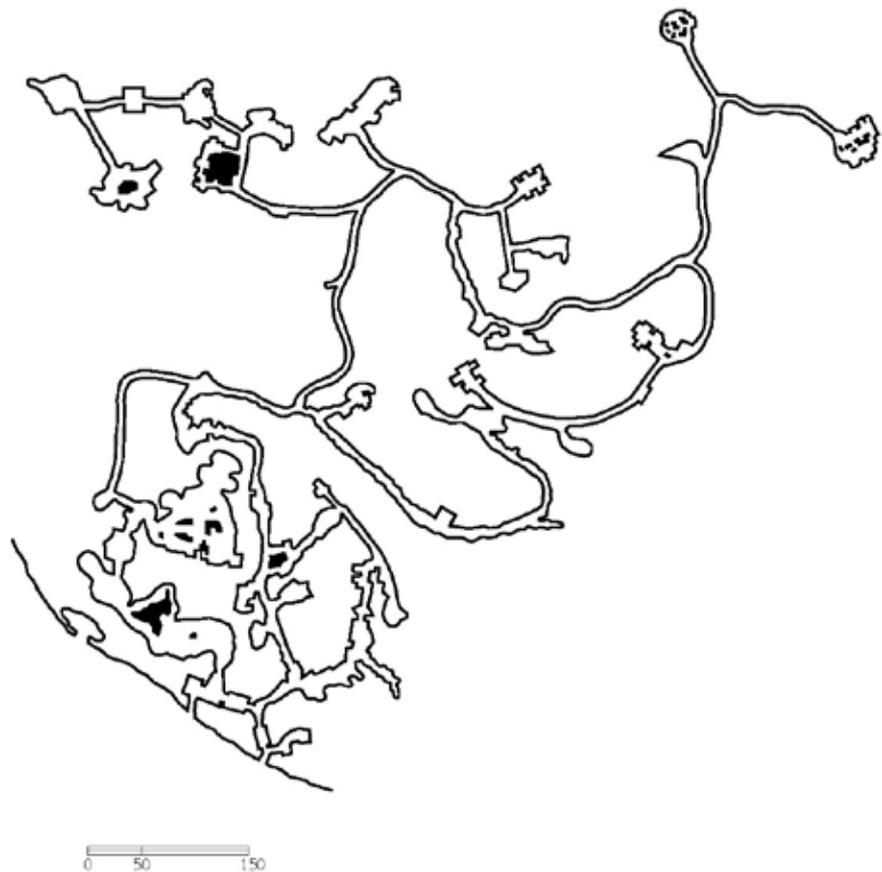
The Palace of Knossos, as we know it today, can be divided into an aerial, solar part, designed to host life, and a semi-hypogean, chthonic part, dedicated to death. There are two formal and constructive registers that work dialectically together: on the one hand, the continuous wall system that, with its knots and changes of direction, gathers a basement, which is contrasted by the openness of the upper fronts, characterised by the use of the Minoan column and the pilaster. The act of concealment and unveiling are thus staged, made evident by their coexistence in a selected space: the central courtyard. This constitutes the largest opening in the complex (54x27m), while the other courts are considerably smaller and provide air and light to the rooms. The zenithal openings, with the exception of the main courtyard, are configured as cavities, surrounded by columns, around which are articulated systems of ramps and staircases serving the different terraced levels. The entire Palace has a vertical distribution of this type. In plan, homogeneous parts of the complex can be identified, indicating an organisation in districts or sectors converging in a labyrinthine pattern towards the central courtyard. The central courtyard seems to offer itself as an unobstructed space around which two main sectors are arranged, west and east, offset from each other and homogeneous in the type of cluster.



**Fig. 2**

The labyrinth of the semi-hypogean level. In evidence on the left, in the western part, are the processional corridors, the central sanctuary, the throne room, the lustral basin to the north and its connections; in the eastern part, the double axe room and the lustral basin to the south. Right, inversion figure background, drawing by the author.

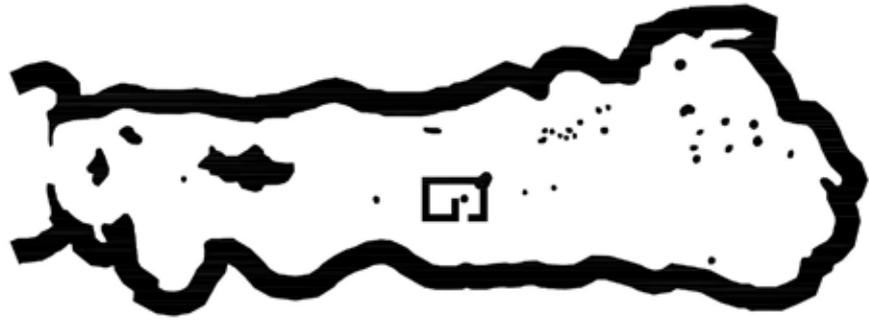
The western sector of the semi-hypogean floor consists of the storage rooms, arranged in a comb pattern, the central sanctuary, juxtaposed to the loggia, the Throne Room<sup>1</sup>, in which there is the first lustral basin, and the northernmost complex, in which there is the second and largest lustral basin. These rooms are reached mostly through the central courtyard, which is accessed by means of three paths that converge in it, connecting the processional ways that wind outside in the north-west part of the complex. The western sector forms the architectural core of the entire palace, where cultural activities took place and it is possible to hypothesise that rituals associated with the Labyrinth, the fundamental, primordial, archetypal and denotative form of the palace itself, took place. In order to grasp the compositional aspects of the architecture of the Palace of Knossos, it is necessary to investigate the relationship between the built work and its archetypal root, the Labyrinth, by adopting a third term, which has already emerged from the previous considerations, the cave. As Paolo Santarcangeli (1967, p. 98) points out, the most important rooms are intentionally kept small: they are intended to reproduce the structure and spatiality of the cave, places dominated by rare entrances to light, which comes from aerial cavities rather than from courtyards. The lustral basins, as initially defined by Arthur Evans, are the most expressive points of this formal conception, since they are narrow, semi-hypogeous spaces that can be reached through meanders and dark halls, and constitute the cultic nucleus destined for female initiation rites or, more generally, those connected with fertility, practised by the Cretan civilisation as early as the Neolithic era, but also found in the myth of Persephone through the return of the abducted woman: the same «return that was celebrated in Eleusis with the announcement of a birth in death» (Kerényi 2016, p. 36). The homological and non-isomorphic relationship<sup>2</sup> between the lustral basin and the space of the cave allows us to recognise the connection between the Palace and the archetypal form of the Labyrinth. In fact, there are three etymological roots to which the origin of the term can be traced: the first and most common is λάβρυς, the Greek name for the double-headed axe, a ubiquitous symbol in the Palace of Knossos that has constituted an authoritative hermeneutic basis in historical studies on the Minoan civilisation; a further root of the term can be traced back to λάβρα, originally indicating the cave or mine with



**Fig. 3**  
Plan of the Gortyna Cave, drawing by the author.

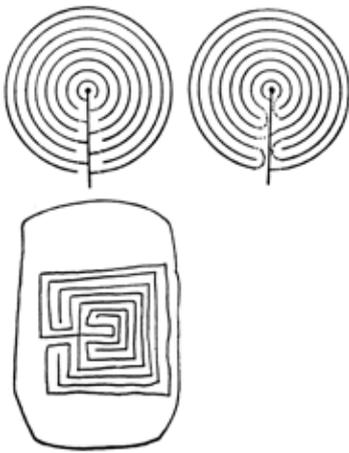
many tunnels; a third root, instead of tracing the term Labyrinth to a possible Greek derivation, searches for the origin of the meaning in the sparse written evidence of the Minoan civilisation, we want to refer to Micheal Ventris' decipherment of the 'linear B a post-Palazzian tablet in which the Minoan and Mycenaean languages are mixed, "where the word "da-pu-ri-to-jo", in the tablets, stands for "labyrinth", and indeed appears associated with "po-ti-ni-ja", i.e. Potnia, the chthonic divinity" (Santarcangeli, 1967, p. 63). The lemma *daburinthos* is composed of two parts, where the first – *dabur* – properly indicates the sacred place marked by the meander shape, i.e. the Labyrinth, while the suffix *inthos*, of Mycenaean origin, indicates the complex of buildings of which the *dabur* is a founding part.

The third hypothesis appears to be the most convincing from an etymological point of view, also because at the time of the construction of the Palace of Knossos, generally recognised as the Labyrinth of the ancient Mediterranean, the term 'axe' was not translated as *labrys* but as *pe-le-ky* – *πέλεχυ* –, thus invalidating the first and most widespread hypothesis advocated by the discoverer of the palace itself, Sir Arthur Evans. The hypothesis that the Labyrinth coincides with the idea of a building for cultic activities is also supported by the theories of Cagiano de Azevedo and Carlo Gallavotti. The latter points out that the Labyrinth does not identify the complexity and grandeur of a building, but rather indicates the semi-hypogean quality of such a construction in the centre of which a sacred place is housed; Cagiano de Azevedo, on the other hand, traces the origin of the term back to the cave, to the place found or excavated in the depths of the earth. «An underground 'sacred' environment characterised by the presence of a sovereign fe-



**Fig. 4**  
Plan of the Amnisos cave with the meander in the centre, drawing by the author.

male deity, a πότνια: this is therefore the typically religious significance of the Labyrinth. While it remains difficult to determine its location (Gortyna?), its cultic purpose is clear: the Cretan cult practised was that of a chthonic deity and, as such, naturally hypogean» (Petroli, 1990, p. 229). We would also like to report the position of Francesco Aspesi (2016), who identifies the *daburinthos* with a different place from the Palace of Knossos, namely the cave of Amnisos near the mouth of the *Karteros* River. The cave has a meandering enclosure surrounding two stalagmite formations, probably part of the cult of the goddess πότνια, which is similar in form to the northern lustral basin of the Palace of Knossos. Among the various positions currently held in the debate on the Labyrinth and its coincidence or not with the Palace, that of the actual relationship between the real building and its archetype is the most convincing from an architectural point of view: not only because of the homological relationship between the lustral basin and the sacred cavern, but also because of the actual structure of the basement floor. Particularly in the western sector, where the articulation of the paths, excluding the functional cores of the storage area and the rooms created between the massive foundations, produces a labyrinthine structure evoking the hypogeal spaces of Gortyna, where intersections and changes of direction connect the rooms used for cultic activities. This condition seems to be repeated also in the aerial part of the Palace, where the clustered aggregates elude any possible alignment between them, while renouncing the introverted character afferent to the semi-hypogeal plane. It can therefore be said that the idea of the Labyrinth is subject to the formal structure of the Palace, to its type, although it does not actually coincide with it. As Elémire Zolla states (1988, p. 57), « what we call an object is a set of constellated impressions, gathered into a unity by the archetype dominant in the moment, which gives the moment its relative unity». The archetype is therefore that which confers unity to the characters and forms of the type, positioning itself as ‘essential’, that is, which refers to the quality or essence of an order superior to the type present in the object under examination.



**Fig. 5**

Above, Derivation diagram of a labyrinth of the Cnossian type; below, Labyrinth engraved on the back of a golden tablet from Pylos; on the main front is the engraving of the Linear B deciphered by Ventris (from Santarocangeli, 1967).

The Labyrinth, symmetrical to the Apollonian enigma (Giorgio Colli, 1975), constitutes the cultic element of a Dionysian matrix that conceals and at the same time allows access to the world of the dead: the reverberation that this form produces in the built work its expression, manifesting the sacred nature of the building, its *raison d'être*<sup>3</sup>.

It can be said that the Palace of Knossos introduces the formal conditions emanating from the Labyrinth, its archetype. In doing so, even the aerial part is a particular declination of the original formal idea, in which the avoidance of any alignment produces a specific formal and typological quality in line with the idea of the cluster, thus conditioning a fragmentation of relatively autonomous parts aggregated around the large central courtyard. In fact, the ritual structure of the Labyrinth also remains in all the myths that evoke its form: the “impeded wandering”, or rather the challenge that must be taken up in order to reach the centre of the *mysterium tremendum*, is embodied in the meander, a place where an elementary hierophany is carried out with the unspeakable, sometimes consisting of chthonian gods or monsters, such as the mythical Minotaur who inhabits the Palace of Knossos. For Brede Kristensen, the form of the Labyrinth itself collides with the entrance to the underworld but, as Károly Kerény (2016, p. 32) observes, «wherever one finds it [...], the labyrinth is more connected with the world of ideas, more archetypal, more primordial – *urgestaltiger* – than the underworld (equally mysterious, but in itself completely amorphous). An explanation that sacrifices what has its own form to something that lacks it [...] overlooks what constitutes its fundamental element». As Kerény himself points out (2016, p. 34), it is the original form of the Labyrinth – *Urform* – that determines the different possible configurations – *Gestaltungen* – leading the elementary sign of the spiral – its form – to the figures – *Gestalt* – evocative of that spatial and ritual conception, a condition from which architecture cannot escape and which indeed becomes a way of eternalizing and transmitting a specific conception of the world.

From life to death and back to life, this is how the ritual structure associated with the archetype of the Labyrinth can be expressed, a form that is in itself open and infinite, allowing entry and leading, through a tortuous path, to salvation, to exit, in a continuous regeneration of the mystery or enigma that it poses to the attention of those who intend to tackle it.

## Notes

<sup>1</sup> « In the throne room, to the west of the central courtyard, there is an excavation (also found in other palaces) whose use is unknown and which could be related to the cult of sacred snakes, whose presence is suggested in Minoan Crete by a whole series of findings. Now, the cult of serpents is associated, for obvious reasons, with that of the subterranean Powers, sometimes fecundating and therefore benevolent, and sometimes fearsome, since, according to their will, they ensure or destroy the stability of the world. How can we forget that Crete and the whole of the Aegean world are situated in a region of frequent and violent earthquakes, the results of which were often catastrophic for the island?» Santarcangeli P. (1967) – *Il libro dei labirinti*. Vallecchi, Florence, p. 105.

<sup>2</sup> On this subject, see the distinction between isomorphism, homology and analogy proposed by Tomás Maldonado; Maldonado T. (2015) – *Modello e realtà del progetto*. In: Id., *Reale e virtuale*. Feltrinelli, Milan.

<sup>3</sup> Cfr. Monestiroli A. (2010), *La ragione degli edifici. La scuola di Milano e oltre*, Christian Marinotti, Milan.

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Susanna Piscicella

**Scandal of the limit and anesthesia of the form in the society of a-mortality.**

***I celebrate* by John Hejduk, a formula beyond death**

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Abstract

The culture of our time has removed the concept of the limit. Death is more and more a matter of others; spectacularization, or thanatology. Yet its cancellation is impossible. Farewell halls and funeral homes are neutral zones designed more to minimise than to comfort. They represent the extreme attempt to anaesthetise the pain of loss, to remove death. Anaesthetic architecture for an a-mortal society that has to reduce its sensitivity. Whereas death itself is the limit that humanises us.

John Hejduk, in spite of his time, puts death back at the centre of his work, revealing to us the only way not to succumb: to celebrate it. His work proves nothing, it celebrates everything. Through pain, his architecture recovers the sensitivity of form, its empathy.

Keywords

John Hejduk — Celebration — Architecture and death — Representation of pain — Corporality

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The culture of our time progressively removes the concept of limit. Even death, the limit par excellence, once being the acme of the great architectural tradition (pyramids, tholoi, mausoleums, funerary monuments, etc.) is now reduced to a hindrance, to something scandalous. It is a degenerative disease to be treated with fury and to be hidden with hypocrisy even from the dying. As the long agony of Ivan Il'ich reminds us. The end is increasingly a matter for others; spectacularization, or thanatology. Preventive medicalization becomes the priority of a society that aspires to eliminate the confrontation with the limit, to become a-mortal (Illich, 2009). But, in fact, removal is impossible. In fact, if the technique today promises a progressive elimination of human limits, however pain and death are ineradicable. And when architecture stops reflecting on pain and death, it assumes the same automatic and procedural nature of technology, to which every authority of the project is delegated today. Normative, safety devices that, as the name itself says, *sine-cura*, exempt us from any responsibility. Even from life itself. Because it is precisely through care that our attention, our being, passes. The more we try to erase pain, the more it expands into boredom, neutralizing any difference (Jünger, 1997).

If we are no longer able to accept our end, how can we imagine an architecture that is able to accommodate or represent something that we ourselves reject? The emerging construction of funeral halls and funeral homes projects on death an attempt of removal. No longer a specific architectural typology, but an oscillation between the residential and the commercial type. A hybrid that testifies to the distraction, almost embarrassment at the base of the concept. Environments that are the extension of that clinical-aseptic space where death is materially consumed. Neutral zones, designed more to minimize than to comfort

Almost in an extreme attempt to anesthetize the pain in those who remain. Anesthetic architecture for a society that must reduce its sensitivity, standardize it. While death is the very limit that humanizes us. If we try to remove it, if we stop thinking about it, we end up suppressed, swept away like objects, like things (Paz, 2013, pp. 44-49).

John Hejduk, in spite of his time, puts death back at the center of life and work. As it has always been. Because our singularity cannot be but inscribed in its mystery. Hejduk, like a Virgil of our time, accompanies us into the abyss of pain and death, revealing to us the only way not to succumb: celebrate them. Stubbornly. His work proves nothing, it celebrates everything. He translates Rilke's words into the project: *Tell me what is your task as a poet? -I celebrate-. But the monstrous and the terrible, how do you accept it, how do you endure it? -I celebrate-* (in Cacciapaglia, 1990, p. 183). Hejduk entrusts his theoretical legacy to verses, the liturgical form of the word. To their meter, the dimensional scale of his project figures. To architecture, the task of awakening in matter the distance between us and the world, and the mystery. Death opens poem n. 1, *The Sleep of Adam*, and closes the last one, n. 158, *Sentences on Death*. It marks the extremes within which all its forms move. Persephone, Eurydice, Medusa, Hades, Christ crucified and his Mother, St. Stephen stoned, St. Mark stolen, Jan Palach burned and his mother, the birds of Braque, Marat in the bath, etc.. The poems rekindle the theme of death through the different shades of form. The more than five hundred architectural figures outline as many modes of the limit, an experience that is imprinted in the form and re-directs it. In order to do this, he puts into action an unexplored device, the splitting of every architecture into object (the project itself) and subject (the emotionality that animates it). To the 67 architectures of *Victims*, to the 68 of *Lancaster Hanover Mask*, to the 73 of *Berlin Night* correspond as many souls, each with its own genre, character, past. For example, the Physician, the subject of the Office Tower (Hejduk, 1986, fig. arch. n. 19) represents the obsession of not being able to distinguish within his own body the weight of his own heart; the Mechanist, the architectural subject of the Box Car Parts project (Hejduk, 1986, fig. arch. n. 9), has his eyesight forever bleached by the shock of the atomic bomb, etc. Each subject resonates with the others, prolonging their movements, creating a continuity (a community) in which the limits of each constructs the sense of the work, its particular direction and vocation.

Of the more than five hundred architectural figures, at least forty are explicitly dedicated to death. Which is always double. Death of those who leave, but, above all, death of those who remain to live with the emotional drama of loss. Hejduk recovers in our time the sensitivity of an architectural tradition that for centuries has seen in the funeral artifact the only possibility of making architecture. The project *Cemetery for the Mothers of the Children* (Hejduk, 1997, p. 17) welcomes mothers who have lost their children. A cemetery made for those who, although alive, experience death every day. In *House of the Mother of the Suicide* (Hejduk, 1997, p. 254) he shows how the architectural body of the mother of the martyr Jan Palach, under the pressure of the pain of loss, can contract to the point of becoming the tomb, the living sanctuary of her lost son. The divarication of the sharp spines represents the incendiary moment of the boy. The vertical fixity of the blunt spines, the inexhaustible pain of his mother. The same sensitivity resonates in the poems as well, making the word and the drawing into a single project: *the emptiness / of Christ's tomb / reflected the emptiness / of his mother's*

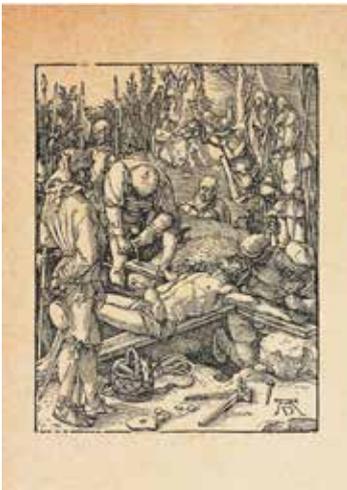
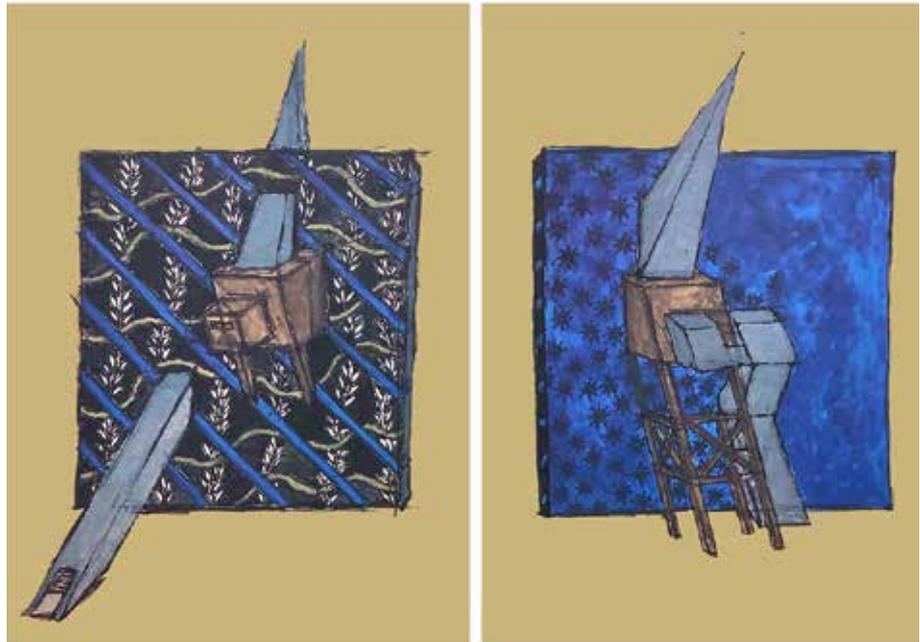
**Fig. 1**

John Hejduk, *Mask of Medusa*, 1985. Orpheus and Eurydice at the opening of the 158 poems. Medusa in the closing. In between: Persephone, Hades, Electra, Christ, St. Mark, St. Jerome, Marat, Uccello's dragon, Braque's birds, etc. All different shades of form. Each meets its own death, where its own singularity is hidden. Myth has always been a reworking of death. Whereas today's myths exclude it. Unable to deal with it, they continually remove it.

*heart* (in Rizzi, Piscicella, 2020, P. n. 68, vv. 1-4); *an upheaval shook / his sleeping Mother / her heart filled with blood* (ibidem, P. n. 20, vv. 31-33). Funeral processions, crematoria, tombs, chapels, ways of the cross, cemeteries for the dead and for the living (Hejduk, 1993, pp. 394-396), necropolises for missed architectures, etc. For the very air we inhale every moment is the summation of all the living and the dead since the beginning of time (Hejduk, 1993 B.N. p. 18). A sensitivity taken to the extreme and, at the same time, the idea that only the *societas*, the pact between generations, can overcome death, guaranteeing continuity. And here we have the architectural communities of *Victims*, *Vladivostok*, *Berlin Night*, etc.

Bringing death back to the center of reflection then means trying to recover the liturgy of a more intimate and profound sociality. The project *Town for the new Orthodox*, a newly founded city for 18,000 inhabitants conceived not far from Venice, works explicitly towards this goal. In the era of unlimited, a-mortal growth, promoted by the myth of technology, this city imposes a time limit on itself. Its hourglass is the city cemetery. When the last of the 18,000 graves is occupied, the city must be abandoned. A peremptory limit, the death of the city itself. All of Hejduk's work enacts an oblique look at the dominant cultural paradigm. The *I Celebrate* (Hejduk, 1990) collapses the concept of time. In the age of constant timelessness and alienating collective acceleration (Rosa, 2015), liturgy is the contraction that suspends all chronology. It overcomes the absence of time by assuming a different, otherwise measured time. Because if the illusion of unlimited growth produces increasingly isolated individualities, the limit is instead the contraction that produces community. Also in *Victims* the project takes on a new temporality, the 30 years it takes for its trees to grow. Time returns to be marked by generations, two cycles of 30 years, the average time of a man's life. This circularity resonates in the plan, inscribed within the circuit of the tracks of a small train, as if it were inside a fort. The periodic, circular passage of the locomotive imposes a new temporality. The clock marks a fixed, immobile hour. Next to it, the hourglass turns without stopping. Finally, *Collapse of Time* sanctions the impossibility of continuing to measure time according to the neutral, homogeneous and unlimited unit of the clock, of chronology. Every man contracts time and space in his own way. Limit, but also resource.

Hejduk's architectures experience pain, a necessary condition for the recovery of the sensitivity of form. *The sound of a book can only be heard internally* (Hejduk, 1995, Architectures in Love\*) the *Basic Elements* series (Hejduk, 1995, A.F. pp. 138-145), the front and back covers of *Architectures in Love*, which correspond to the *Seville Structure* project (Hejduk, 1995 A.F. pp. 216-220), expose architectures pierced from side to side, unarmed, like the anatomy of Mantegna's Saint Sebastian. Towards the end of the 1990s, Hejduk elaborated a triple program on the theme of the metaphor of the pierced body: *Lines No Fire Could Burn* (poetry), *Sanctuaries* (painting) and *Cathedral* (architecture). Three dimensions of the same project, which has corporality as its common denominator, since every experience, the essence of spirituality, gathers in the body. The first, *Lines No Fire Could Burn*, 1999 (74 poems) reworks the theme of the Passion: the wounds inflicted on the body of Christ, the different intensities of pain, its projection onto the external landscape, until the extinction of all colors at his death. In the second, *Sanctuaries*, 2003 (32 plates), the Passion becomes the fixed horizon of myth, of history. The U-shaped structure of the scene, open upwards, becomes the receptacle into which angels, demons



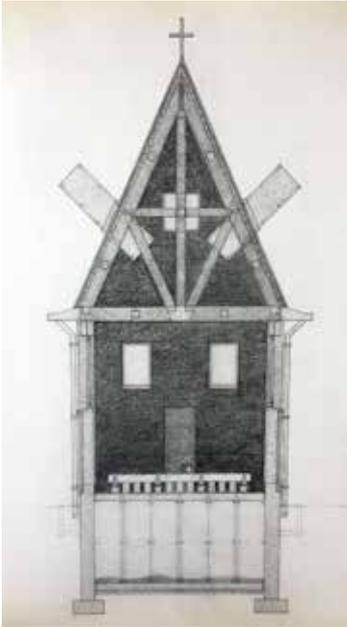
**Fig. 2**

Albrecht Dürer, *Christ nailed to the cross*, 1511. Hidden under the pseudonym of Dürer, Hejduk confesses: *The architect's life was turned upside down by his study of Dürer's engravings of the life of Christ. His research focused on the relics of Christ: the wooden cross, the crown of thorns, the garments, the iron nails* (Berlin Night, in *Soundings*, p. 154).

**Fig. 3**

John Hejduk, *Architectures in Love*, 1995. Cover, back cover. The wall, pierced, exposes the body, front and back.

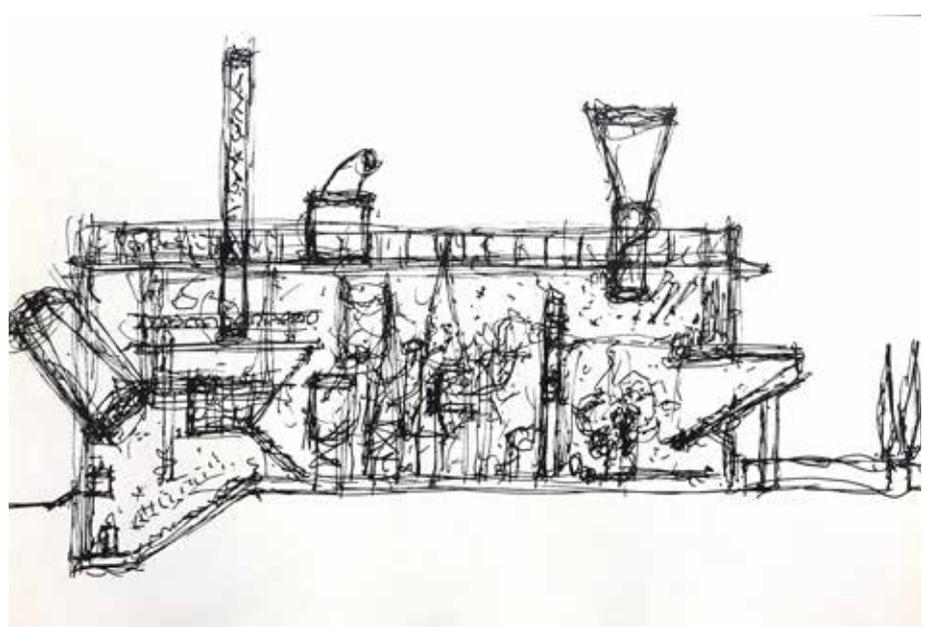
and beasts fall. Here it is the casing that is pierced by thunderbolts and rays of light. The metaphor of torture expands. It is no longer only the flesh that is tortured, but the very scene of the world. In the third, *Cathedral* (Hejduk, 1997, pp. 140-159), the ecclesia, a metaphor for life, becomes the place where all the architectural subjects of Hejduk's past converge. Vehemently attracted, they get stuck in the walls of the cathedral, piercing them, wounding them. As if the material body of the cathedral manifested its own intimate and archaic sensitivity. The theme of the pierced body translates into architecture the need to recognize the ineliminable presence of evil. The need to represent it, so as not to be dramatically overwhelmed by it. Hence the emphasis on the Crucifix in *Christ Chapel* (Hejduk, 1997, pp. 188-209), where the action of raising the Cross is reopened in its unity, as if to generate a sub-Via Crucis within the act of verticalization of the Crucifix. Somewhat like the architectural plans for  $\frac{1}{4}$  House,  $\frac{1}{2}$  House,  $\frac{3}{4}$  House (Hejduk, 1985, pp. 258-273), *Christ Chapel* is a declination of this opening of the closed unity of the image. Geometry, again, does not play a merely graphic role; rather, it serves to measure the different coefficients of intensity of the scene, to record the degrees of pain of Christ's body. The Cross rises moving like a compass. Three positions: zero, forty-five, ninety degrees. A slowing down that is a necessary condition for the intensification of vision. When he reached verticality *his vision turned upside down / for the first time / he felt the weight / of his own soul* (in Rizzi, Piscicella, 2020, p. 285). The positions of her rotation pierce the ceiling of the chapel, producing precise points of light to illuminate the tortured body. A renewed liturgy of the passing, which also resonates in the three projects dedicated to the Via Crucis. *Journey I*, *Journey II*, *Journey III* (Hejduk, 1997, pp. 226-253) reopen the reflection on the singularity of pain, on its non-transferability. Thirteen stations, places of solitude. In *Journey I*, the thirteen rooms follow one another in clusters like a slow ascent to Golgotha; in *Journey III*, they wind along a linear path where the thirteen scenes are represented by as many medieval works of the Passion. As if it were a segment of rediscovered film. Hejduk proposes to the observer an exercise of concentration, of intensification of vision, akin to the work of Saint Ignatius of Loyola. In the lines of his poems 4-77 (in Rizzi, Piscicella,

**Fig. 4**

John Hejduk, *Pewter Wings*, 1997. *Cathedral*. The ecclesia becomes the place where all the architectural subjects of Hejduk's past converge. Vehemently attracted, they get stuck in the walls of the cathedral, piercing them, wounding them.

**Fig. 5**

John Hejduk, *Pewter Wings*, 1997. Last Supper. No one has ever returned to the hall of the Last Supper after the Crucifixion.



2020) the verses of the Spiritual Exercises resonate, an effort beyond the human to visualize the extremely remote, the invisible. But with details of the highest precision, as in the passage *The disciples lifted the white tablecloth / inflating it over the table / the cloth was pulled tight / then lowered / compressing the air between the cloth and the wood* (in Rizzi, Piscicella, 2020, p. 275). In poem n. 27 *The Remaining Space*, Hejduk even manages to enter the Last Supper room after Christ's burial. The empathy is maximal. The door is bolted. Inside, the table is still set. The white tablecloth, stained by the red wine of the Last Supper, transmutes into the sheet of Christ's shroud. A table set for a farewell. An *Apparecchio alla Morte* (Saint Alphonsus M. de' Liguori, 1993) that, like many other works of the great Christian tradition, for centuries has reconciled death with everyday life, making life the time of its preparation. Precepts to hinge a liturgical rhythm in the homogeneous and anonymous chronology of time. Prayers to push deep into intimacy the sense of sharing against a common evil. Community. Precisely through pain and death Hejduk awakens life, its enigma, in the form. He celebrates the miracle of the ordinariness of the human being, that singularity that passes precisely through its limits, without which the boundless and indistinguishable desert of technique opens up. Architecture was born as a liturgical form of death. By re-translating it, it can today regenerate its symbolic structure, its sense. The limit is the only condition able to set the liturgy of the work, its intensity.

\*the book is without page numbers

## Notes

<sup>1</sup> «In quel preciso momento / si illuminò / il corpo / dall'interno (l. vv. 1- 4) La pelle di Adamo era appesa / alla forma di Eva / quando Dio la liberò / da Adamo / Morte si precipitò all'interno / impedendone il collasso» (vv. 69- 75).

<sup>2</sup> «La morte aspetta vivendo nel nostro tempo» (158. v. 151). «L'altezza della porta di una casa è per l'ingresso dell'uomo; la larghezza della porta di una casa è per l'uscita dell'uomo. Una dimensione per la vita, l'altra per la morte» (158. v. 156). «Le parole del poeta sono incomprensibili per la morte» (158. v. 165). «Morte costruisce la sua città sottoterra» (158. v. 215). «La dimensione di Morte è una sola» (158. v. 232).

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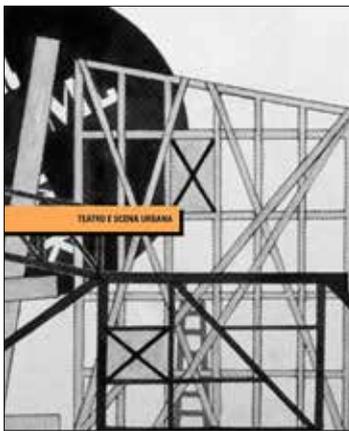
Susanna Piscicella carries out research at the IUAV University of Venice. She has had contracts at the universities Unipr of Parma, Hcu of Hamburg, Puc of Santiago de Chile. Latest monographic publications: R. Rizzi, S. Piscicella, *John Hejduk. Bronx. Manuale in versi*, Mimesis Edizioni, 2020; S. Piscicella, *Peter Eisenman. Gher-Ghar*, Mimesis Edizioni, 2018

Ildebrando Clemente  
**The other montage.**  
**Architecture as an epiphany of the world.**

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Author: *Laura Scala*  
 Title: *Theater and urban scene*  
 Subtitle: *Research and spatial experimentation of the Russian avant-garde*  
 Language: *Italian*  
 Publisher: *LetteraVentidue, Siracuse*  
 Characteristic: *format 19,5x24,5 cm, 272 pages, paperback, colors*  
 ISBN: *978-8862424974*  
 Year: *2021*

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*Theater and urban scene, Research and spatial experimentation of the Russian avant-garde* is the title of the beautiful book composed by Laura Scala after having finished her research in preparation for her doctorate in architectural composition at the IUAV of Venice. During her studies, Laura Scala was fortunate to have compared and discussed compositional issues and matters relating to her research with Luciano Semerani and Antonella Gallo, who respectively wrote two important introductory texts to the book. Equally relevant is the translation, as an appendix to the book, of *Elements of Architectural-Spatial Composition* by Vladimir Krinskij, Ivan Lamcov and Mikhail Turkus, first edition of 1934. This is a fundamental text for understanding the teaching of Vchutemas, the Russian State Institute of Higher Art with its art-technical workshops offered in Moscow between 1920 and 1930.

The book is divided into two main parts, with a short concluding chapter and an addition at the end of the book which contains, as mentioned, the translation of *Elements of Architectural-Spatial Composition*.

The first part includes an interpretation of the *syntax of the scenic space* and is essentially dedicated to an analysis of the sets of two theatrical works of the Russian avant-garde: *Victory over the Sun* and *The Magnificent Cuckold*. *Pobeda nad solncem (Victory over the Sun)* is a real theatrical masterpiece that was staged for the first time in St. Petersburg in 1913 and is the result of the collaboration between Michail Matjušin who composed the music, Aleksej Kručënych who wrote the text, and Kazimir Malevich who designed the sets and costumes. Ljubov Sergeevna Popova's drawings and scenographies from *Le Cocu Magnifique (The Magnificent Cuckold)*, a work written by Fernand Crommelynck in 1921 and staged in Moscow in 1922, were additionally analyzed.

The second part focusing on the *syntax of architectural and urban space* instead deals with the interpretation of urban space as the daily theater of the perception and revealing power of the human condition. This discussion is further enriched through the analysis of the design for the *Palazzo del Lavoro* of the brothers Leonid, Viktor, and Aleksandr Vesnin of 1922-23.

As the title implies, the author's first move pushes us directly to the essential core of the book: the not entirely obvious relationship between theater and architecture. What do the pages of this book tell us about this relation-

ship starting with the Russian Avant-garde? Firstly, they tell us that there is an *artistic experience* and that this experience is what makes us authentic: authentic in what we are, in what we do. Above all, they reiterate that the *artistic experience* defines the horizon of the architect's sense of doing that which is beyond, and before the satisfaction of needs unfolds its banal ruthlessness and stifles the desire to transcend the world of needs into an expressive world, into a new world of ideas and passions.

Not coincidentally, the last chapter of the book is titled *Fragments and the reconfiguration of a new world*. A chapter in which *constructivism*, *cubo-futurism* and *suprematism* are compared with experiences and experiments of contemporary architecture. As always, the influences and references between the old and the new, between the ancient and the present return. Even the latter "characters" - the old, the new - always at the mercy of offering us a shift in experience whose first characteristic obliges us to take greater account of the relationship between language and imagination and consequently, as it emerges from reading this book, commits us to taking the torment and search to be true into greater consideration, the hope of remaining free and the desire of every conscience to make itself visible to itself and to others.

Through the aforementioned works, *theater and urban scene* speak to us of the compositional techniques and modes we can use to imagine and stage - before putting into practice - a new world that is simultaneously also ancient, and which nevertheless is so paradoxical as to require a progressive change of our consciousness. Thus following the arguments of the book, the relationship between theater and architecture teaches us, or could teach us, a change in the level of *being*.

In fact, as developed by Laura Scala, the theater/architecture hendiadys shows us that it is easy for deceptive or phantasmagoric relationships to exist and develop between *body* and *space*, as happens in everyday life, even before that at the theater, but above all she tells us that there is, by contrast, the concrete and authentic possibility of conceiving what we are, what we do, in a poetic way. As we know, the Avant-garde has accustomed us to thinking of a new world as the result of a *revolution*, as the result of the subversion of ancient roles and old beliefs. Even if in reality, we know that the overthrow of customs has always been present in Western culture, as testified by the traditional utopian figure of the "world upside down". The myth of the "world upside down", as Michail Bakhtin has shown, expresses the profound aspiration to re-make the world in order to give it a new meaning and a regenerated order. A prefigured world in which the poor give alms to the rich, the saint becomes a sinner, fish fly and sheep shear the shepherd. We can put a world thus conceived into an image, and starting from this new image we can hope for a real subversion of injustices and an authentic social revolution.

The theme of the "world upside down" occupies only a small paragraph of the book, but likely represents the authentic "foundation" of the interpretations developed by Laura Scala. We can briefly recall that the greatest and most distressing upheaval that the Russian Avant-garde has considered is that of the defeat of time. The death of time: the apocalyptic moment. After a new world, a new world of salvation and regeneration of the human condition and its expressiveness. It is however important to note, as the author does, that destroying is necessary for building, and that, as Nietzsche wrote, the cosmic force of life is expressed in "becoming and passing away, building and destroying, without any moral additive, in forever equal inno-

cence - and above all - they find themselves in this world only through the play of the artist and the child". To *put the old present order to death* with its tyranny of facts and to rediscover the original emotion of being there, we must, as the theater teaches us, play like an artist, like a child. This is what theater teaches us, and the author reaffirms this with her invitation to reconsider the *artistic experience*, the experience of scenographic fiction, as consubstantial with the destiny of architecture.

Now Laura Scala's arguments raise some extreme questions. Will there come a day when even theater will be destroyed and overcome? Will a day arrive when theater will also die? No! I don't think so. Theater will never die. Certainly like everything else, even theater itself can die in fiction to rise again in reality like a new world. Who knows? Perhaps one day cinema will die, or if it doesn't die it will become something different than the cinema we know today and certainly something profoundly different from the cinema of its origins. But theater no, I don't think that theater will die as long as man, alas, is involved in calamities, falls into disgrace, suffers, hates or loves himself and others. Perhaps cinema will die because it is essentially a technological art, it is primarily a *téchne*. And as we know, technologies change, they change quickly and radically. Theater will never die because in the end it requires little *téchne*, almost nothing is needed to do theater: a place, a precise moment, a chair or a random piece of fabric, a story or a legend to literally *fall into*, conflicts or jealousies, the desire for justice, a dead man and so many, many whys, and above all an interminable desire for freedom. Men also unconsciously love theater. Theater is a very ancient and very important thing, perhaps even too important to be, as it were, the object of a definitive disappearance. This is because deep down, every time man feels the need to question himself, his actions and his achievements, he sees himself projected into another, he imagines his experience in the experience of another. Man always sees himself, he sees the man he was, he sees the man he is, in the moment in which he sees himself represented. And so he starts saying, he starts thinking: am I like him? Do I do as he does? And this thinking, this doing that "I desire" is always an extreme and decisive doing and thinking. A doing and thinking of a new and hopefully fairer world. Doing and thinking freedom.

And architecture? Is architecture in danger? Will architecture die? We can console ourselves by considering that if theater cannot die, then architecture will not die. Even if the different importance that the technical aspect plays in the construction of architecture is certainly greater and more intense than what is necessary to implement a theatrical piece. So let us ask ourselves once again, as this book suggests: is an architecture that relies exclusively on *téchne*, and hides its *archè*, its original power, destined to sooner or later succumb?

I mentioned that it takes little to do theater, but this little is truly vital, as Laura Scala emphasizes, because it manages to animate precisely that original power capable of strongly centering reality full of indolence and apathy, in which man gestures and fumbles without *pathos*. This original power is emotion. There is an emotion at the beginning of thinking, at the beginning of doing that testifies to the truth of what we are doing, the truth of our experiences. Often this emotion, in some ways *subtle* and impalpable, is called *thauma*, an original power, something pre-objective, pre-representative. Kazimir Malevič's suprematism has pushed itself into the secrets of reality until it reaches the pre-objective, to precisely grasp the founding and symbolic emotion that builds/destroys a new world. It is

known that in his speculative texts, Malevič constantly refers to the dimension of emotion. And the work of the Russian artist plays an important role in Laura Scala's arguments.

But the author also discusses the power of editing with great simplicity and clarity. An important theme for the Russian Avant-gardes. And the meaning that editing takes on in her interpretations goes so far as to show the "emotional source" that presides over the birth of forms: the struggle; the struggle of images with each other. In editing we almost unconsciously experience the struggle of images with each other for the first time. And we are called to make sense of this struggle, first of all a compositional sense. With editing, an original experience is reactivated in our consciousness, as if it were the first time, so that we feel an emotion that arises from the contrast between the forms and events in which the forms appear, even before that from the forms themselves.

In this struggle of images with each other there is also the struggle of *architecture-as-theater* and *theater-as-urban scene*. Two images that simultaneously attract and conflict because they cannot immediately coincide and anchor themselves to reality according to sensible order. And it is precisely the sensible order - of the alogical sensible, of supremacist painting or of the *zaum'* language - the trans-mental and trans-rational asemantic language of the Russian futurists - that allows us, according to Laura Scala, to place a conscious distance from the rigid schemes of *logos* in the direction of *artistic experience*. Experience that we have indicated, on the basis of the pages of this book, as necessary for the change in the level of *being*. An increase in *being* present, as the author points out, also among the theological postulates of Piotr Demianovich Ouspenskij's *Tertium Organum*. After all, the world we see is nothing more than a reflection of our way of being, that is, of our way of thinking. And this way of thinking, as Ouspenskij wrote, requires *work on oneself* in order to improve. The *work on oneself*, an essential prelude to staging the desire for a better world of ours, must be reaffirmed with passion, with argumentative and analytical force, as it is told in the pages of this book.

To improve this world of ours, as Luciano Semerani wrote in the introduction to the book, drawing on the symbolism of Kabbalah, it is necessary to "realize oneself". In conclusion, I would like to recall the *incipit* with which Semerani himself opens the book: this book "for everything it shows, will give you the same joy and happiness as when you meet an old friend". Surely we can add that it will give great joy, like the affirmation of an unexpected emotion, every time it helps us remember a Friend or a Maestro like Luciano Semerani.

Tommaso Brighenti  
 Un “Fantastique” de bibliothèque

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Authors: *Anna Maritano and Francesco Saverio Fera*

Title: *Marino Narpozzi*

Subtitle: *Conversazioni indisciplinate*

Language: *Italian*

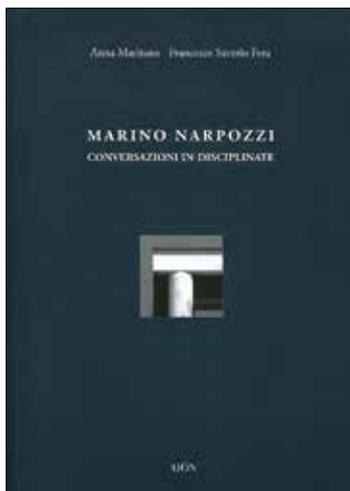
Publisher: *AION, Florence*

Characteristic: *format 24x17 cm, 152 pages, paperback, black and white*

ISBN: *978-88-98262-78-6*

Year: *2019*

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Marino Narpozzi is a cultured and original architect, perceptive, and highly refined. Undoubtedly thanks to his “intellectual approach” which derived from that universe of Aldo Rossi of which he was a part for many years, as a pupil and associate of the great maestro, but also and above all of an inseparable relationship between research, teaching, and design. Reading his essays in the book *Marino Narpozzi. Conversazioni in-disciplinate*, skilfully compiled and reorganized by the editors, Anna Maritano and Francesco Saverio Fera, is like entering the intimate world of a scholar, made up of a universe of books, delving into research which questions the most obscure aspects of the discipline, its connexions and constants, «but also the epistemological and foundational contradictions of creating architecture».

As the editors of the volume write, «in his own way [Narpozzi] is a collector of books, an unmethodical gatherer», which can be understood by lingering over the quotations and notes present in this book, and they go on to add that his collection is «a library of fragments and of memory made for the construction of an original intellectual path».

These multiple writings of Narpozzi, organized as a «sum of distinct parts», have been elaborated over a long period of time, written between Italy and France, where Narpozzi has taught and worked, and originate from university reflections, studies and research conducted between Venice, Paris, Nantes and Genoa, «multiple different worlds» organized not in chronological order, but by the themes which have characterized some of the author’s research during his life as a designer but above all as a militant academic. Thoughts which, as the editors underline, «are never clear-cut but are specified through representation of the complexity of reality», from a world of references, including visual ones and not only bibliographic varieties, seen in their entirety and summarized in these two words, very dear to the generation of the author and above all to the generation of masters from which he comes: “Design” and “Knowledge”. These two words recapitulate the content of this book, together with “Composition” which, not coincidentally, returns constantly in the various writings. A composition, which through the architect’s drawing, becomes «a language common to the so-called ‘sister arts’ – which has the task of making visible the emotional core that gives substance to the

work» since, the author always maintains, it is in an effort «to represent the movements of the soul – which itself tends to coincide with the idea, the concept underlying every narrative».

Then there is the question of Typology, which interests us «in its capacity as a classificatory tool of architecture, to make it possible to deepen the concept of architectural form and to highlight the emergence of some typical forms», but also criticism of the architectural project and, above all, perhaps Narpozzi's most cherished theme, the teaching of the discipline. It is precisely this last aspect, the constant references to teaching, which catches the eye in these writings, which shows the author's unceasing link with school and research. A teaching which enters a profound crisis if it becomes pure technique, given that «it no longer has anything to do with thought» and «loses all effectiveness»; sacrosanct words, opposed to that «pragmatism elevated to a system» where «the intention is no longer to teach knowledge, but to inculcate a technique». Words that today have an ever greater weight, since we now live in an age which is overly dependent on that «culture of existing purity» where «everything that happens is good because it happens, and this has been taken as aesthetic truth, producing images lacking in depth».

The true image is knowledge, and in order to dream, one must not close one's eyes, one must read, wrote Foucault in his preface to Flaubert's *The Temptation of Saint Anthony*, which, not coincidentally, appears in a short bibliographical note, shown at the bottom of the author's introductory essay entitled *Il mio guardaroba (My Wardrobe)* and from which the title *Un "Fantastique" de bibliothèque* was borrowed for this review. But what does this book explain to us? The constant need for an architect to never abandon and persistently continue the deepening of that thread of the discourse on the discipline along with the need to always bring these reflections back to current events, questioning today through an attempt to interpret and question contemporaneity, its limits and leeways, «questioning the very meaning of operating» and rejecting that disciplinary fragmentation which, as the author states, «does not mean giving up the possibility of a theory of architecture, but only means admitting the impossibility of defining principles, and abstract and meta-historical rules. The error lying precisely in describing the linear genesis of the theoretical concepts themselves, as if the words had retained their meaning and the ideas their logic».

To close, a few words also on the images gathered and skilfully selected for this book. The editors' choice fell on publishing two projects by Narpozzi, the Elba House and the Martigues Theatre, to show (they write), «the intertwining of Narpozzi's research on architecture, so as to transform the works into words written in stone». A crucial decision in the assembly of this volume, since it is through the built works that the verification of his intellectual formulation takes place, in which the compositional and expressive aspects come to fruition establishing that necessary and timeless dialogue with a place which, in Narpozzi's architecture, is never intended in an "abstract" or "purely conceptual" way.

