

The Monument without Style (On the Hundredth Anniversary of Giuseppe Terragni's Birth)

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. . . ruins emanate gray time while the electricity of the future flickers like a halo and a glass mask around the new . . .

—F.T. Marinetti, *Ricostruire l'Italia con architettura futurista Sant'Elia*

The notion of a modern monument is veritably a contradiction in terms. If it is a monument it is not modern, and if it is modern, it cannot be a monument.

—Lewis Mumford, *The Culture of Cities*

The summit of the Col d'Echele would be a singularly unremarkable place were it not for the armies of uniformed ghosts forever inching their way across the once war-scarred fields of the high plain of Asiago. As in so many other areas of the Alps or, for that matter, in no less nondescript but more celebrated sites such as Pharsalus, Somme, Waterloo, Cannae, and Verdun, these invisible troop movements take place along a vast network of shifting force lines, pressure points, and vectors of power that were once lived with an intensity that is inversely proportionate to the neglect that they endure after the actors, machines, and motives of war are consigned to graveyards, scrap heaps, and books receding ever deeper into the stacks of today's libraries of Babel. Even the injuries suffered by the landscape quickly heal. Every battlefield is a theater of forgetting. That is, unless postwar forgetting is (momentarily) interrupted by the conscious, selective, instrumental acts of recollection known as monuments.

A *monumentum* or *monimentum* is a commemorative statue or building, tomb, or written record that reminds, marks, and warns; a *Denkmal* or sometime stimulus to thought that combats the certainty of oblivion by means of architectures that, by their very natures, are built to last. There is, accordingly, no more conservative or tradition-bound domain of construction: conservative in its recourse to stone as the material of memory-marking and memory-making; tradition-bound in its reliance upon a standard repertory of ornamental styles,

geometrical forms, and rhetorical conventions of mostly classical derivation.¹ To a degree greater perhaps than any other form of architecture, the architecture of monuments exudes the gray temporality of ruins and resists the flickering electricities of the future. As such, it stands in fundamental tension with the values of the modern movement as formulated in seminal statements like Le Corbusier's *Vers une architecture* (1923):

The history of architecture unfolds itself slowly across the centuries as a modification of structure and ornament, but in the last fifty years steel and concrete have brought new conquests, which are the index of a greater capacity for construction, and of an architecture in which the old codes have been overturned. If we challenge the past, we shall learn that "styles" no longer exist for us, that a style belonging to our period has come about; and there has been a revolution.²

The revolution in question commits architecture to serving neither the past nor the future but instead the present, even at the risk of openly embracing built-in obsolescence. It invites built structures to cast themselves in the mold of the airplane, the motor car, the transatlantic liner, and the turbine; to transcend the system of styles in the name of a contemporary style that is no style at all: an architecture of engineers founded upon ceaseless experimentation with new materials, the industrialization of construction, and ensuring comfort, usability, and mobility for those who live, work, and play in today's built environments. The icon on the cover page of *Vers une architecture* is thus the antithesis of a tomb, a crypt, or a funerary stele: the shiny steel corridor of the steamship *Aquitania* exposed to the sea on one side and to a row of cabins on the other; an illustration of "the value of a 'long gallery' or promenade—satisfying and interesting volume; unity in materials; a fine grouping of the constructional elements, sanely exhibited and rationally assembled."³

The exemplary unity and beauty that protagonists of the modern movement like Le Corbusier, Walter Gropius, Ludwig Mies van der Rohe, and Giuseppe Terragni attributed to the steel-walled cities in motion like transatlantic liners and to other similar artifacts of the industrial age commit them to a critique of traditional forms of commemorative architecture, conventional materials, the imitation of historical styles, and the insistence upon the permanence and immobility of built structures. Yet this new generation of architects, in spite of its dream of an architectural fresh start and its antimemorial turn of mind, regularly found itself summoned to find new ways to commemorate the past. And not just any past: the recent past of mass death and mechanized war represented by the Great War, a war that gave rise to an unprecedented proliferation of small- and large-scale, individual

Giuseppe Terragni. *Monument to Roberto Sarfatti, Col d'Echele, Asiago, 1934–1935*. Current state. Photo: Václav Sedý.

and collective, monuments and memorials to soldiers, veterans, and “martyrs of the fatherland” in Italy and throughout Europe.⁴

Such was the case of Giuseppe Terragni, the centenary of whose birth is being celebrated in 2004. In a succession of remarkable projects from the Erba Incino *Monument to the Fallen* (1926–1931) to the Futurist/Rationalist Sant’Elia *Monument to the Fallen* in Como (1930–1933) to the proposed living monument to Dante’s *Commedia*, the Danteum (with Piero Lingeri; 1938–1941)—but also more broadly in such masterworks as the Novocomum (1927–1929) and the Casa del Fascio di Como (1932–1936)—Terragni set out to create a modern monumentalism: a monumentality “without style” that harkens back to an archaic vocabulary of funerary monoliths, cubes, crosses, walls, and stairs and devises a new rhetoric of commemoration founded upon an aesthetic of emotional restraint. A poignant case in point is his austere geometrical monument to Roberto Sarfatti, who died trying to conquer the summit of the Col d’Echele late in World War I and the recovery of whose body in the early 1930s led his mother Margherita to commission the construction of memorial atop the very summit in pursuit of which the young Roberto sacrificed his life. The monument underwent an unusually rich variety of reworkings that must be viewed against the backdrop of Margherita Sarfatti’s role as the protagonist and arbiter of 1920s and early 1930s debates on modern art and architecture and her gradual eclipse in the mid-1930s, culminating in her departure for and exile in America after the promulgation of Italy’s racial laws in 1938. The resulting *monumentino* (little monument) or *caro segno* (dear sign), as Sarfatti preferred to designate it, thus marks one of the high points of Rationalist formal experimentation.⁵ But it also marks a double loss lived with special pathos by Margherita Sarfatti: a summit conquered posthumously at great cost and the demise of a dream that fascism might wholeheartedly embrace the values of modern art and architecture.⁶

The broader concern of this essay is with how modern architecture, from Adolph Loos, Walter Gropius, and Mies van der Rohe to Terragni



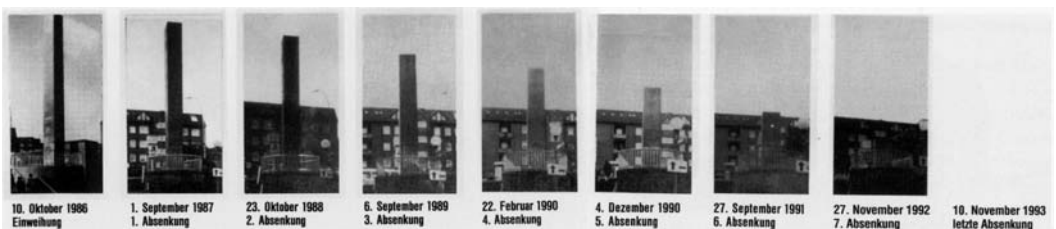
decorative incrustations, revealed in its forever fresh geometrical simplicity, whether by design or thanks to time's corrosive but triumphal march forward toward pure form.¹¹

Like Terragni's *Monument to Roberto Sarfatti* (1934–1935), modern monuments from Goethe's prescient altar to Agathe Tyche (1777) through Aldo Rossi's *Monument to the Resistance* (1962) to Maya Lin's *Vietnam Veterans Memorial* (1982) to Sol LeWitt's *Black Form Dedicated to Missing Jews* (1989) explore the possibilities of an architecture of memory-marking and memory-making that marks and makes by means of geometrical solids such as the rectangular monolith (vertical, horizontal, or inclined), the pyramid (positive or negative), the sphere (figured or implicit), the cross, and the cube (solid or hollow). Digging deep into the vocabulary of archaic funerary and religious forms, they conjoin these geometries with features such as abstracted stairs, walls, corridors, and crypts within the framework of an overall inward, introverted, even hermetic/hieratic turn: a revolt against the theatricality of the prior century's architectures of mourning, against their literal-minded figurations of death, rhetorical bluster, reliance on hackneyed symbols and allegories, recourse to scale alone to achieve an emotional impact. The resulting creations do not always assume the form of the sort of counter mnemonic "monuments in motion" that a Marinetti would have demanded as a remedy for pastism or a Nietzsche would have prescribed as a cure for the life-sapping effects of nineteenth-century historicism: perhaps only Vladimir Tatlin's kinetic *Monument to the Third International* (1920) and Esther Gerz and Jochen Gerz's sinking *Monument against Fascism* in Hamburg (1986–1993) fully fit this demanding bill.¹² Yet, equally inventive, they break with precedent by summoning up archaic precedents in an effort to lift the tragedies and events of contemporary history out of ordinary time and space into a heroic/utopic no-time and no-space, a secularized equivalent to eternity. The modern architecture of memory neither imitates nor repeats in any ordinary sense. It investigates the expressive potential of elementary geometries, archetypal forms and, for that matter, both old and new materials so as to transfigure and recombine them, expanding, altering, and/or reversing their meanings in the pursuit of a monumentalism that transcends mere size.

Four such operations of decomposition and recombination will be tracked in the following pages with Terragni's *dear sign* serving as a guide. They bear the subtitles "The Airborne Monolith," "The Exploded Cube," "The Reversible Stairway," and "The Open-Air Crypt." All are variations on what is, at core, a single operation. Together they provide a springboard for an inquiry into the phenomenology of new/antique commemorative forms.

Opposite: Froebel's elementary geometries, from Le Corbusier, *Vers une architecture*, 1923.

Below: Jochen Gerz and Esther Shalev-Gerz. *Monument against Fascism, War, Violence—For Peace and Human Rights*, Hamburg, 1986. Various stages from the time of inauguration, October 1986, to the time of its sinking, November 1993.



The Airborne Monolith

Monoliths, whether dolmens or steles, are the most ancient form of construction, and their very centrality to Terragni's work is symptomatic of an all-embracing concern attested to by his friend, the fellow Rationalist architect Alberto Sartoris, who recalls that:

with Giuseppe Terragni one was given to regular and lengthy meditations on the concept of *monumentality*, the art of which is distinctive to architecture as a discipline. Even a building of reduced size can be a monument. Bigness is beside the point. A great monument has nothing to do with the colossal. Rather, like the Danteum, it must provide a semblance of natural grandeur. The shaping of a monument is the product of genius, of a masterful concept.¹³

Monumentality as an architectural ideal was in the air in Rationalist salons. The challenge was to decouple it from the formulaic titanism of prior architecture. The case of Terragni is telling in this regard inasmuch as the actual scale of his built works is generally modest—even the Casa del Fascio can seem like a jewel box nested within the fabric of contemporary Como—yet the pursuit of a “natural” grandeur informs their every detail with a sensibility that is his alone.

Prominent among such details are monoliths approached as vehicles for achieving monumentality less on the basis of vertical or horizontal span than by means of a staging of weight and mass that underscores both the sheer physicality of the stone slab and the potential reversibility of that physicality. For Terragni the monolith figures mortality and the earth, composure in the face of tragedy, gravitation as evidence of the universal certainty of death—all the more so in horizontal iterations like the fifty-ton white-granite monolith that sits under the base of the Como *Monument to the Fallen*, the polished block of black Biella syenite of the Como Casa del Fascio, the *lapis niger* (black stone) of the Palazzo del Littorio (1934), and the twelve-ton granite block of the *sacrarium* of the Lissone Casa del Fascio (1937). Yet even these dolmens are never set to rest as if sealed-for-eternity covers of an ancient sarcophagus. Instead, their tonnage is floated in a manner that wedds them to the conventional association of steles with heroism, levitation, standing tall, heavenward flight.

Every monolith becomes an allegory of (im)possible transcendence. The towers of the Como *Monument to the Fallen* sprout forth from the horizontal block buried at their base. The eighty-meter parabolic tower of the *Integral Reclamation Monument* (*Monumento alla Bonifica*

Giuseppe Terragni (based upon a drawing by Antonio Sant'Elia). *Monument to the Fallen*, Como, 1933. Photograph of the inauguration, November 4, 1933.



Integrale; 1932) intersects and finds its horizontal double in two eighty-meter walls sandwiching a stairway. The glass-encased stones of the *sacraria* defy gravity and hover weightlessly in the air, their very polish dematerializing the intensified materiality conferred upon them by their mass. Essential to this reversibility is the integrity of the mass itself. The block must be single, not the product of fakery (stucco encased in stone sheeting). Its surfaces must be treated in harmony with the setting and desired effect. Proportions must be established in accordance with ideal geometries, Albertian proportions, golden sections. The handling and selection of the material to be worked is crucial because *the material is the monument*.

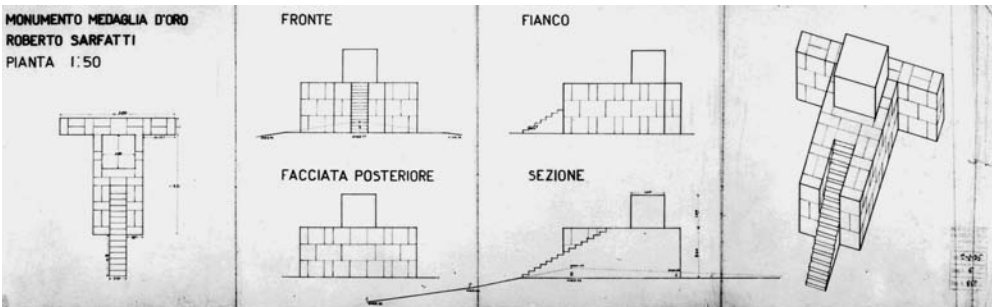
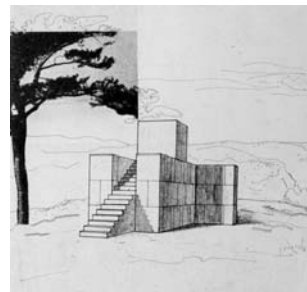
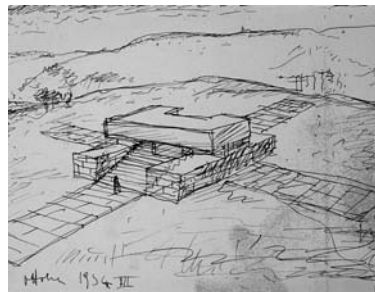
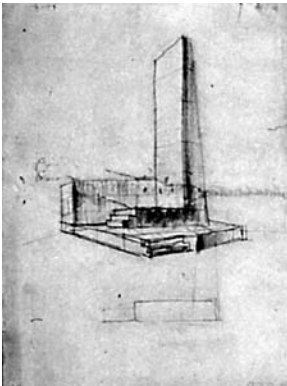
Such was the challenge posed by the Sarfatti commemorative marker.¹⁴ In every iteration of the project, from the earliest sketches dating back to the early 1930s in which a vertical stele with a sloped back is assembled into interlocking vertical and horizontal L-configurations ending in stairways, to the intermediate project with its 7 x 5.15 meter U-shaped slab suspended atop a 2 x 2 meter cube, to the final scaled-down project with its 1.6 x 1.6 meter cube, the monolith was key. How to haul it up the 1,039 meters of the Col d'Echele; the need for a slab not in granite (as originally envisaged) but rather in local Asiago white stone, worked roughly so as to repeat the coarseness of the mountainscape itself; the inadequacy of any solution involving stone cladding filled with concrete; a final compromise involving the block's division into two six-ton units; its positioning within the cruciform axes of the monument in alignment with the cardinal points so as to suggest an ideal global positionality: these were the architect's chief concerns. And they betray a deeper preoccupation shared with the rest of the new architecture of commemoration: to devise a buoyant monument of the requisite simplicity and gravitas. The Sarfatti monument is built around a triple act of levitation. The block at its crux is lifted, first, out of the white stone of the quarry down in the valley; then, up the slope; and, finally, up the

Top, left: Giuseppe Terragni. *Monument to Roberto Sarfatti* 1934–1935. Sketch of first version, pencil on paper, 1934.

Top, center: Giuseppe Terragni. *Monument to Roberto Sarfatti*, 1934–1935. Sketch of second version with U-shaped monolith, green ink on paper, 1934.

Top, right: Giuseppe Terragni. *Monument to Roberto Sarfatti*, 1934–1935. Drawing of final version, as built, pencil and blue ink on heliographic copy, 1934–1935.

Bottom: Giuseppe Terragni. *Monument to Roberto Sarfatti*, 1934–1935. Technical drawings of final version, ink and pencil on paper, 1934–1935.



stairway. Site of the inscription that names the recipient of the gold medal for valor, it figures as the geometrical head on a sprawled body that it elevates into the sky like a sacrificial offering.

To so characterize this work is to place it within a lineage of prior monuments stretching back to Goethe's Monument to Agathe Tyche—where atop a rectangular base sits a sphere, much as atop Terragni's block "sits" a 360-degree alpine panorama—and stretching forward to Figini and Pollini's 1950 Achille Tomb, with its cubical burial cases enclosed within a larger floating cube, suspended in a shallow theater set whose walls are pierced by regular cruciform cuts. It is also to suggest closer ties than might at first seem obvious to an array of other twentieth-century monuments, such as Walter Gropius's Weimar *Monument to the March Dead* (1921), Mies's *Monument to Karl Liebknecht and Rosa Luxemburg* (1926), and Alvar Aalto's sculptural *Monument to the Winter War* (1960), all of which propose destabilizations or levitations of the stele or dolmen. In the case of Gropius, dynamism is achieved by means of a series of intersecting diagonal volumes, whose rhythmic reiteration and rotation suggest the notion of rising, lifting, striking like lightning. In the case of Mies, a complex of massive blocks, themselves composed of irregular stone bricks, shuttle freely in and out of supporting wall, as if still seeking their definitive place within a perpetual work in progress (the building of a just world). The paradox of solidity animated by movement was reinforced by the monument's use as a podium and stage for political rallies from the time of its construction to the era of Nazism. In the case of Aalto, the monolith becomes a leaning bronze column that tapers off at its end to suggest the fragile materiality of a flame flickering against and amid snowfields. Here, as in the Sarfatti monument, countergravitational effects are achieved within the context of a bivalent staging of gravity. The scale is small. Monumental effects are sought but never without an intimation of (potential) motion.

The Exploded Cube

That the levitated cube has a career extending beyond the confines of the *little monument* is attested to everywhere in Terragni's work, one of whose signatures is the rhythmic alternation

Top: Walter Gropius. *Monument to the March Dead*, Weimar, 1920–1922 (destroyed). Period photograph.

Bottom: Ludwig Mies van der Rohe. *Monument to Karl Liebknecht and Rosa Luxemburg*, Friedrichsfelde Cemetery, Berlin, 1926 (destroyed). Period photograph.

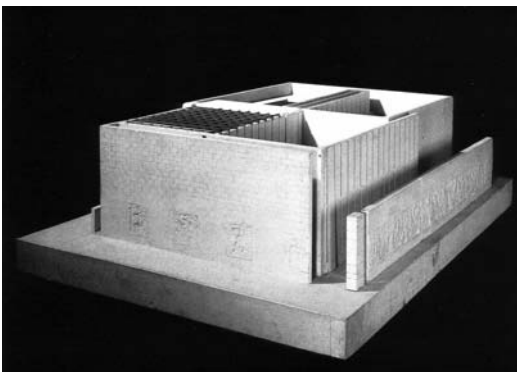
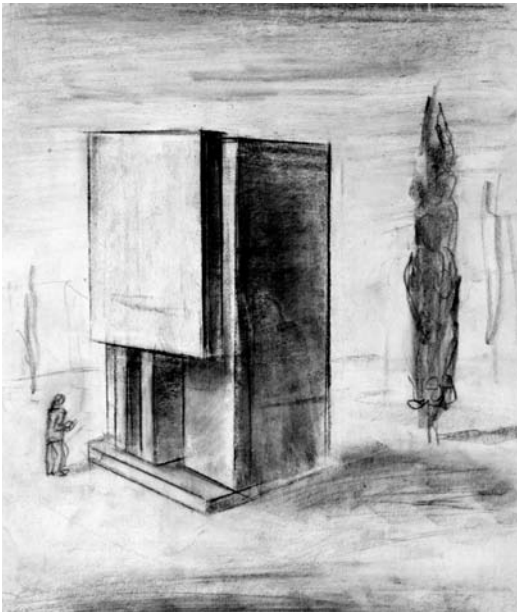
Opposite, top: Giuseppe Terragni. Mambretti Tomb, Fino Mornasco, 1938. Pastel and charcoal on paper, 1936.

Opposite, bottom: Pietro Lingeri and Giuseppe Terragni. Danteum, 1938–1941. Wood and plaster model, 1940.



between positive and negative rectangular volumes. A legion of examples come to mind: villa projects like the Lake House for an Artist presented at the 1933 Milan Triennale, the B version of the Palazzo del Littorio (1934), and the Asilo Sant’Elia (1934–1937), with their syncopated swapping of empty, glazed, and walled cubes in and out of visible three-dimensional grids. They are anticipated in the early funerary *edicole* built for the Pirovano, Ortelli, and Stecchini families, with their secret inner cells and outer shells with symmetrical niches carved into rectangular geometries. But the variant on this operation that first breaks open the levitated cube occurs in Como’s Casa del Fascio, where the play of reflective surfaces (glass, metal, stone) dematerializes its contours. As a result, walls start to drift free from the core box, opening vertical and horizontal fissures, slotted windows into and out of the crypt, secret passageways between the monument and the world. The cube’s ideal geometry is left intact, but instead of finding itself staged as an elevated mass, it is leavened, expanded, even exploded.

The theme is central to the Mambretti tomb, with its uplifted square façade (first version), peekaboo crypt, and free-standing side wall and façade (1938 version). It triumphs in the Terragni-Lingeri Danteum (1938–1941), which blows the lid right off the box. After traversing a series of side entry passages, crafted by means of double walls, the visitor to this “living monument” is guided through a sequence of environments, each the architectural transcription of one of Dante’s canticles. The point of departure consists in an experience of the cube as a space of weight and confinement (Hell as prison cell); the point of arrival, in an experience of the cube as a space of weightlessness and freedom (Heaven as flight). Terragni figures the latter as an elevated open-air courtyard with a naked grid perched atop an array of (barely material) glass columns mirrored in a floor that assumes the form of a grid of glass-surrounded stones. Like these lateral glass “cuts” in the floor of the *Paradiso*, vertical cuts throughout selected portions of the building’s overall structure dematerialize the building’s contours while establishing sight lines between its interior spaces and the monumental complex of the Via dell’Impero as if to insinuate that the Danteum’s overall drive toward a celestial empire entirely “emancipated from enslavement to weight” could potentially enfold the entirety of



ancient and modern Rome: from the Basilica of Maxentius and the Colosseum to Piazza Venezia.¹⁵

The productivity of this re- or decomposition of the cube is everywhere in evidence in the new architecture of monuments, whether pre- or post-Rationalist. In a minor key, it is already implicit in Adolf Loos's proposed black basalt Mausoleum for Max Dvořák (1921) whose elementary boxlike structure tapers upward like a ziggurat but lightens the upright block at its base by means of windows and a door. Likewise, Kay Fisker's 1925 brick-and-cement Danish pavilion, monumental in its lineaments though not a monument in the strict sense, effects a subtle play of subtractions, additions, and displacements of rectilinear volumes that at once enforce the openness and closure of its rectilinear core and infuse the horizontality of its lines and mass with a powerful vertical thrust off of the massive cruciform base.

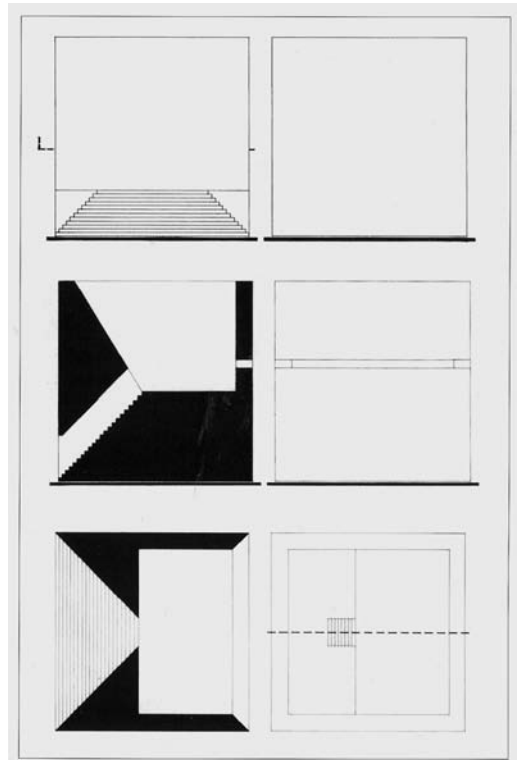
On a more direct line of descent from Terragni, however, are three masterpieces of Italian postwar memorial architecture: Aldo Rossi's Cuneo *Monument to the Resistance* (with Luca Meda and Gianugo Polesello; 1960), BBPR's *Monument to the Victims of the Nazi Death Camps* (1945; 1951; 1961), and Carlo Scarpa's posthumous Galli Tomb (1978). With an extraordinary economy of means, the first sections a twelve-meter cube by means of a staircase that cuts an ascensional path into the mass of the cube, leading upward into what might appear like the crypt lodged at the heart of a pharaonic pyramid. The narrow passageway at its end instead delivers an upraised open-air courtyard like the Danteum's *Paradiso*: a stately private-public square and skybox fissured only by an eye-level embrasure cut into the wall opposite the point of entry.¹⁶ BBPR's monument, to the contrary, displaces the mass of a conventional stone funerary cube with a metallic grid open on all six sides. The corner units of the grid are cubical, while the inner units are rectangular, providing a spatialization of the marble-top platform in the form of a Greek cross atop which the cage is perched. A glass-encased urn (with soil from the Mauthausen concentration camp) hangs in the centermost cubical recess as if hovering in the air above the juncture of the cross, while a scattering of laterally suspended panels evokes the resurgence of liberty and a "swath of light [that] recalls our martyrs."¹⁷ Scarpa's work, while of course explicitly sepulchral in nature, performs a rich set of textural and formal variations, emphasizing the intrusion of vertical and horizontal seams that subtly disrupt the integrity of the cubical mass and are played off against a frontal cutout in the

Bottom: Luca Meda, Gianugo Polesello, and Aldo Rossi. *Monument to the Resistance*, Cuneo, 1960. Drawings for proposed monument, ink on paper, 1960.

Opposite, top: Kay Fisker. Danish Pavilion for the International Exposition of Decorative and Industrial Arts, Paris, 1925 (destroyed). Sketch, tempera on paper, 1925.

Opposite, bottom left: Banfi, Belgioioso, Peressutti, and Rogers (BBPR). *Monument to the Fallen in Nazi Death Camps*, Monumental Cemetery, Milan, 1945–1961. Photograph 1970.

Opposite, bottom right: Carlo Scarpa. *Galli Tomb*, Sant'Illario Alto Cemetery, Nervi, Genoa, 1978.



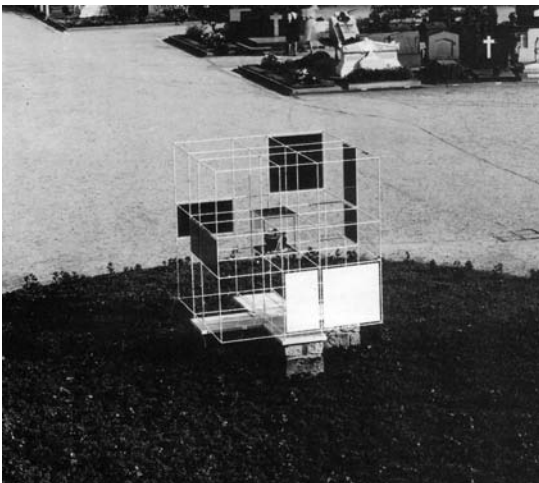
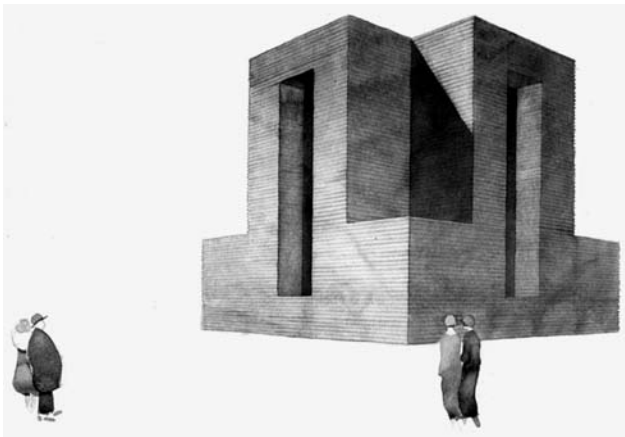
shape of a *tau*, the final letter in the Hebrew alphabet, associated with notions of hermetic unveiling and with apocalypse.

In these and other similar monuments (including the Sarfatti monument), traditional symbols such as the cross return, but less as a sacrificial symbol than as a structural principle with connotations that are traditional only in part. On the one hand, architects reach far back into time to tap into a repository of pre- or paleo-Christian signs that associate the cross with the architecture of the cosmos: for instance, the Greek cross as representation of the equator and ecliptic, as the cosmic *chi* of Plato's demiurge in his creation story, the *Timaeus*. On the other hand, architects cross-breed these cosmological signs—with modern chiasmic markers such as the landing pad, the target, the X on a map with an eye toward situating the monument within the ideal grids and geometries of the globe.

The Reversible Stairway

The relay between horizontality and verticality, between ground and sky or surface and depth, is provided by the stairway, whether understood as a means of ascent or descent or as an emblem of reversible motion. The stairway links the living to the dead in the form of a pathway, a corridor, a site of passage. If monoliths figure the head or feet of Terragni's monuments, stairways supply the heart, the circulatory system, and the musculature.

The Erba Incino *Monument to the Fallen* is a startling case in point with its elevated open-air crypt poised at the summit of five long tiers of stairs. The upward thrust of the stairway is countered by the downward thrust created by the illusion that the stairs have flowed down the hillside and spilled out over the rectangular volume at their base, giving rise to a semicircular first tier of stairs whose rounded contours echo those of the crypt (itself flanked by curved stairways leading to



a crowning exedra). This upward-downward reversibility is integral to Terragni's reduction of stairs to their core geometrical components in major projects such as the Casa del Fascio in Como and Lissone, where naked stairways hang, as if precariously balanced in the air, their risers and landings equally visible from above and below. Glass side railings wind around and follow their upward/downward zigzag course; sometimes the stairs themselves are fabricated out of glass. The effect is staged against alternately transparent and semitransparent glass walls and is supported by cast concrete walls sectioned with lateral or vertical cuts.

Halfway between open treatments of stairways and enclosed counterparts such as the sandwiched corridor-ramps of the Danteum and the *Integral Reclamation Monument* lies the Sarfatti monument with its half-visible and half-concealed staircase. The upper portion plows through the work's rectangular mass, eventually merging with the platform atop which sits the monolith; the lower portion overflows into the landscape, revealing the jagged contours of the stairway's side cut, reflected, in turn, in the slope of the Col d'Echele. Climbing it, one doesn't accede to the sort of "event" that traditional monuments of this kind would have delivered: the inscription "Roberto Sarfatti, seventeen year old volunteer, recipient of the gold medal, corporal in the 6th Alpine Brigade, fell here, claiming this land for Italy" is neutral in tone and marks the site without making any particular claim on our emotions.¹⁸ Rather, the visitor is supplied with an experience of the raw contours of a twelve-ton cube and of the vast void and distant mountainscapes that encircle the summit. Much as in the case of Rossi's *Monument to the Resistance*, the stairway is cast in a paradoxical role. It grants access not so much to a commemorative emotion as to a kind of no-place: an elevated viewing platform that, by dint of either the natural setting (Terragni) or of a walled enclosure (Rossi), performs a subtle perceptual trick.¹⁹ Ascending its steps, the viewer finds himself at once elevated and located below even more elevated surroundings.

Top: Giuseppe Terragni. *Monument to Roberto Sarfatti*, 1934–1935. Inscribed monolith atop built version. Photo: Václav Sedý, 2004.

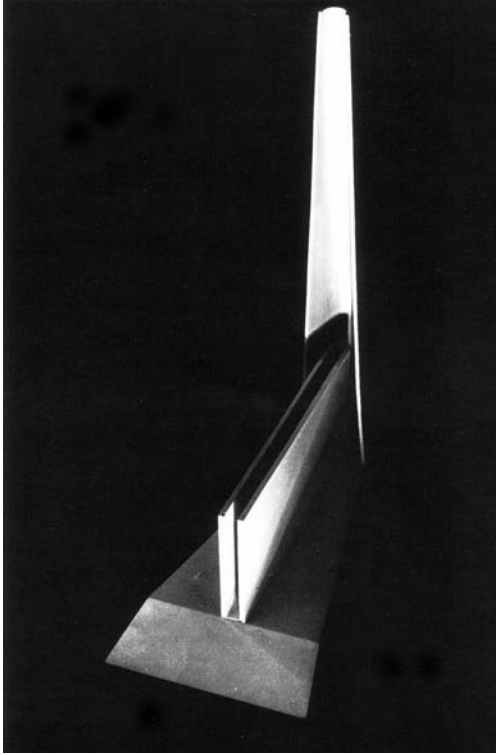
Bottom: Giuseppe Terragni. *Monument to the Fallen*, Erba Incino, 1926–1931. Photo: Václav Sedý, 2004.

Opposite, top: Giuseppe Terragni. *Integral Reclamation Monument*, 1932. Scale wood model, 1932.

Opposite, bottom: Aldo Rossi. *Monument to the Partisans*, Piazza Municipio, Segrate, Milan, 1965. Photograph 1970.



This same abstraction of the stairway away from simple equations with upward and downward movement or with goal-oriented progress extends to the third of Terragni's approaches to the theme of the stair: that typified by the *Integral Reclamation Monument* whose enclosed staircase leads one quarter of the way up inside the arc of an eighty-meter parabolic tower. The tower soars like a sliced-off version of a De Chirico smokestack or a supporting rib of a hydroelectric dam, its curvature accommodating a wedge-shaped platform at its base upon which the stairwell rests. A brief ramp up to a two-walled enclosure anticipates the diagonal sectioning of the recumbent walls carried out by the invisible flight of steps. The passage is purposeless, "disinterested" in the Kantian sense. It simply bisects, offering an inside experience of the sublimity and expressive power of pure geometries that bear witness to an era of heroic public-works projects: dams, canals, electric power plants. The new (counter-)commemorative monument becomes a geometrical viewing device that transfigures historical particulars into formal and structural universals.



That the sandwiched stairway thus finds itself assigned a propagandistic function does not exclude other uses: funereal in the case of the corridor leading into the Mambretti tomb, demonstrative in the case of the Danteum's entryway into a "dark wood" of columns. Nor does it rule out reworkings of the same theme, such as Rossi's 1965 Segrate *Monument to the Partisans*. Here, much as in the *Reclamation* monument, the Sarfatti stairway has glided fully in between two massive walls, giving shape to an open-ended sarcophagus. In what amounts to an astute geometrical adaptation of the iconography of the resurrection of souls at the Last Judgment, however, Rossi has transformed the abstract stairway into an instrument for prying the lid off the traditional tomb. It is as if a mischievous unseen titan had slid the tomb's hollow pyramid-shaped top all the way to end of the crown of the stairwell, propping it atop a fat column like a megalithic dolmen. Other architectural remains are scattered around the Piazza del Municipio like so many broken toys, the remains of an Assyro-Babylonian Lego set.



The Open-Air Crypt

With Rossi's resurrectional *Monument to the Resistance*, this exploration of the new architecture of monuments reaches the ultimate destination of every journey to the realm of the dead: the *cripta* (derived from the Greek *kryptos*, meaning "hidden"), the vault of secrets and place of burial by antonomasia—a space entrusted with no less a task than that of keeping the dead eternally alive. Doubts regarding modernity's wish and/or ability to build such spaces have been a recurring feature of debates on monuments and monumentality from Mumford to Sert, Léger, and Giedon. For Mumford, the task was at once undesirable and impossible: "undesirable" because undemocratic and contrary to the self-renewal of life; "impossible" because, in an era of disbelief in the eternity of the soul, stone gives "a false sense of continuity, a deceptive assurance of life . . . stones that are deserted by the living are even more helpless than life that remains unprotected and preserved by stones."²⁰ For Sert, Léger, and Giedon, the issue instead is the loss of a "unifying consciousness and unifying culture" that would confer upon monuments the requisite expressive force: "periods which exist for the moment have been unable to create lasting monuments."²¹ Yet there remains the prospect of a new monumentalism that transcends mere functionality in the name of a lyrical approach that animates dead stones with color, light, vegetation, feather-light materials.²² In either case, the challenge faced by a modern architecture of commemoration, possible or impossible, consists in placing the crypt in the service of life. The modern monument must perform what, for Freud, is the successful work of mourning: to keep the dead alive by keeping them eternally buried; to remember them, yes, but also to partition them off from the contemporary scene; to consecrate them as that which is over, complete, finite, enfolded within the dynamism and infinity of the present moment.²³

Such is the significance of the new architecture of crypts, whose emblematic gesture is to mine an archaic vocabulary of elementary construction forms while relocating the Holy of Holies out under the open sky, be it a mountaintop or a city square. Exposed to public view, the vault of secrets becomes a showplace rather than a place of haunting. No longer must it necessarily house physical remains—Sarfatti, Luxemburg, Liebknecht, the fallen . . . are buried elsewhere or nowhere.²⁴ Even when it does, the dead stay buried despite the fact that the vault is missing its top.

BBPR's evocative Tomb for Rocco Scotellaro (1957) accordingly avails itself of one of the most archaic of ancient construction forms and one that predates the entire history of Western architecture: the corbeled arch. Rising atop the poet's grave, two vertical extensions of a retaining wall below (invisible to a visitor facing the monument),

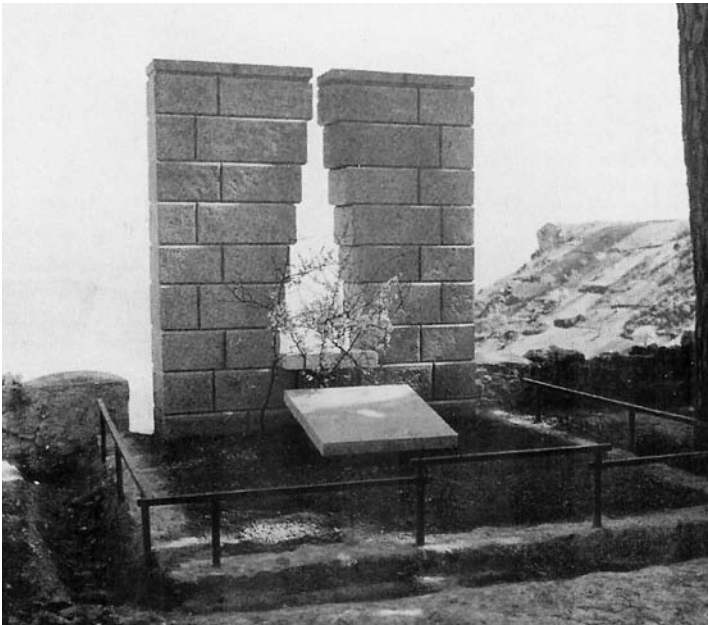
heap block upon block, moving ever inward as they approach their summit. Yet in the place of the capstone is a void. The sky invades the space of the crypt and “completes” the arch, much as the perpendicular stone slab traversing the monument and bearing the funerary inscription serves as a kind of suspension bridge between the terra firma of the cemetery and the void that lies beyond the cemetery’s wall.

From the Ortellì tomb (1929) with its semi-opaque onyx ceiling to the soaring Sant’Elia monument to the glass encased *sacra*ria of the Casa del Fascio to the Danteum with its open-air paradise, Terragni’s crypts, like his monuments as a whole, follow some version of this same script. They pit gravitation against levitation, opacity against transparency, solid against void, stone against glass, putting into play forms of concealment in the name of an apocalypse of structure. Such disclosure does not, of course, promise an overcoming of history’s losses, not to mention an outright resurrection of the dead. Rather, it furnishes the secular equivalent: an experience of beauty in purest, most elementary form; a natural supernatural suited to the needs and tastes of a mechanical age; a crypt that crackles with the latest news:

Whether or not an observer understands the allegorical concept of a monument isn’t of decisive importance to me. Essential is that he feel deeply *moved* by the harmony of its proportions, the imposing nature of its mass, the balanced play of light and shadow amidst its volumes. Our contemporary sensibility has led us to this greatly simplified sense of aesthetic pleasure. We “overlook” the beautiful carvings that ornament the entire surface of an obelisk in order to admire the strength of the monolith itself, the chromatic qualities of the stone struck by the sunlight, the beauty of its upward thrust. We approach columns like Trajan’s as “architectural” masses rather than

allowing ourselves to become absorbed in contemplating the “sculpted history” that they unfold. We prefer the rough structural beauty of the basilica of Maxentius with its powerful coffered vaults to the “decorative frivolity” of the arch of Septimius Severus. That which drives us so far back in time in pursuit of the pure and simple emotions of archaic architecture is a

Banfi, Belgioioso, Peressutti, and Rogers (BBPR). Tomb for Rocco Scotellaro, Tricarico, 1957. Photograph 1967.



need characteristic of our marvelous mechanical era: an era that veils beneath the four smooth walls of a “case” the most perfect, decorative in its delicate organs, and supernatural machine of which I am aware: the radio.²⁵

The task of modern architecture as understood by Giuseppe Terragni: to endow the monument with the present’s voice.

Notes

This essay was composed on the occasion of the inauguration of *In cima—Giuseppe Terragni per Margherita Sarfatti—Architetture della memoria nel '900*, an exhibition on view from 27 June 2004 through 9 January 2005 at Palladio's Palazzo Barbaran da Porto in Vicenza, Italy (also online: <http://www.cisapalladio.org/cisa/mostra.php?sezione=5&valo=1&lingua=e>). The essay is based upon the lead essay in the exhibition catalogue. "Il monumento senza stile," in *In cima—Giuseppe Terragni per Margherita Sarfatti—Architetture della memoria nel '900*, exh. cat., ed. Jeffrey T. Schnapp (Venice: Marsilio, 2004), 13–23. I wish to thank the Centro Internazionale di Studi di Architettura Andrea Palladio and Marsilio Editori for allowing the publication of this revised English version.

All permissions obtained from Centro Studi Giuseppe Terragni, Centro Internazionale Di Studi Di Architettura Andrea Palladio, and Marsilio Editori.

1. On the general topic of monuments in modern culture, see Alois Riegl's classic essay, "Der moderne Denkmalkultus, sein Wesen und seine Entstehung" (1903), repr. with a commentary by Marion Wohlleben, in Georg Dehio, *Alois Riegl: Konservieren nicht restaurieren: Streitschriften zur Denkmalpflege um 1900* (Braunschweig: Vieweg, 1988), 152–189. Within the abundant literature on the current state of monuments, I would single out Andreas Huyssen, "The Monument in a Post-modern Age," in *The Art of Memory: Holocaust Memorials in History*, ed. James E. Young (Munich: Prestel, 1994); and James E. Young, *The Texture of Meaning: Holocaust Memorials and Meaning* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1993).

2. Le Corbusier, *Towards a New Architecture*, trans. Frederick Etchells (London: J. Rodker, 1931), 269. But note the absence of any reference to newness in Le Corbusier's original title, *Vers une architecture*.

3. Le Corbusier, 98.

4. On this subject, see Reinhard Koselleck's essay "Monuments to the Fallen and Their Role in Identity Formation," in Reinhard Koselleck, *The Practice of Conceptual History: Timing History, Spacing Concepts*, trans. Todd Pressner, Kerstin Behnke, and Jobst Welge, 178–221 (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 2002).

5. Though modest in scale and ambitions, the work has long drawn the attention of those concerned with Terragni's techniques of composition and decomposition as, for example, Antonino Saggio, *Giuseppe Terragni: Vita e opere* (Rome-Bari: Laterza, 1995); and Mirko Galli and Claudia Mühlhoff, *Terragni Virtuale, il Caad nella ricerca critica e storica* (Turin: Testo & Immagine, 1999).

6. On Margherita Sarfatti, see Sergio Marzorati, *Margherita Sarfatti: Saggio biografico* (Nodolibri: Como, 1990); Philip V. Cannistraro and Brian R. Sullivan, *Margherita Sarfatti, l'altra donna del duce*, trans. Carla Lazzari (Milan: Mondadori, 1993); Elena Pontiggia, *Da Boccioni a Sironi, il mondo di Margherita Sarfatti* (Milan: Skira, 1997); and Simona Urso, *Margherita Sarfatti, dal mito del duce al mito americano* (Venice: Marsilio, 2003). Urso's discussion of the manner in which Sarfatti made use of her son's death to establish her credentials as the mother of a "martyr to the fatherland" is particularly acute (see Urso, 131–134, 190–192).

7. On this topic one may consult the recent special issue of *Modernism/modernity*, "Archeologies of the Modern," ed. Jeffrey T. Schnapp, Michael Shanks, and Matthew Tiews. *Modernism/modernity* 11, no. 1 (January 2004).

8. Le Corbusier, 156–157.

9. Le Corbusier, 158–159. Earlier Le Corbusier writes, "Rome's business was to conquer the world and govern it. Strategy, recruiting, legislation: the spirit of order.

In order to manage a large business house, it is essential to adopt some fundamental, simple and unexceptionable principles. The Roman order was simple and direct. If it was brutal, so much the worse—or so much the better” (155–156).

10. Le Corbusier, 159.

11. On archeology in/and Rationalism, see Jeffrey T. Schnapp, “Excavating the Corporativist City,” *Modernism/modernity* 11, no. 1 (January 2004): 89–104.

12. See Friedrich Nietzsche, “Vom Nutzen und Nachteil der Historie für das Leben,” in *Werke und Briefe* 2, S. 18, Digitale Bibliothek Band 31: Nietzsche, S. 3876 (Nietzsche-W Bd. 1, S. 219).

13. The original reads: “con Giuseppe Terragni, si meditava spesso lungamente sul concetto di *monumentalità*, la cui arte appartiene alla disciplina dell’architettura. Un edificio di dimensioni ridotte può anche essere un monumento: non è una questione di grandi proporzioni. Il grande monumento non ha nulla a che vedere con il colossale. Deve offrire le parvenze della *grandeur* naturale, come il Danteum. La raffigurazione del monumento è creazione del genio, della padronanza ideativa.” Alberto Sartoris, “Giuseppe Terragni dal vero,” in *Giuseppe Terragni, 1904–1943*, ed. Giorgio Ciucci (Milan: Electa, 2003), 14.

14. For both a full account and bibliography of the Sarfatti monument see Alessandra Muntoni’s entry in *Giuseppe Terragni 1904–1943*, ed. Ciucci, 445–451.

15. For overviews of the Danteum project one may consult Thomas L. Schumacher, *Il Danteum di Terragni e Lingeri* (Officina Edizioni: Rome, 1980); Richard Etlin, *Modernism in Italian Architecture, 1890–1940* (Cambridge: MIT Press, 1991), 517–568; and Jeffrey T. Schnapp, “Un tempio moderno,” in *Giuseppe Terragni 1904–1943*, ed. Ciucci, 267–280.

16. This project is documented in *Aldo Rossi: Architetture 1959–1987*, ed. Alberto Ferlenga (Milan: Electa, 1987), 25–26.

17. On this monument see Ulrike Jehle-Schulte Strathaus and Bruno Reichlin, *BBPR Monumento ai caduti nei campi nazisti 1945–1995: Il segno della memoria* (Milan: Electa, 1995).

18. In the original: “Roberto Sarfatti, volontario diciasettenne, Medaglia d’Oro, Caporale del 6° Alpini, qui cadde, questa terra rivendicando all’Italia.”

19. See *Aldo Rossi*, ed. Ferlenga, 33–38.

20. Lewis Mumford, *The Culture of Cities* (New York: Harcourt, Brace, Jovanovich, 1949), 434.

21. Point 3 of José Luis Sert, Fernand Léger, and Sigfried Giedon, “Nine Points on Monumentality” (1943), in Sigfried Giedon, *Architecture You and Me: The Diary of a Development* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1958), 48.

22. “Monumental architecture will be something more than strictly functional. It will have regained its lyrical value. In such monumental layouts, architecture and city planning could attain a new freedom and develop new creative possibilities, such as those that have begun to be felt in the past decades in the fields of painting, sculpture, music, and poetry.” Point 9 of Sert, Léger, and Giedon.

23. Sigmund Freud, “Mourning and Melancholia,” in *The Standard Edition of the Complete Psychological Works of Sigmund Freud*, ed. James Strachey (London: Hogarth Press, 1968), vol. 14, 237–243.

24. Sullivan and Cannistraro’s assertion in *Margherita Sarfatti, l’altra donna del duce* that Terragni’s monument marks the actual location of Roberto Sarfatti’s buried body is erroneous. The monument is emphatically not a tomb but rather a memorial.

25. The original reads: “Che l’osservatore entri o non entri nel concetto allegorico del monumento è per me una cosa di importanza non definitiva; l’importante è che

egli si senta 'commosso' dall'armonia delle proporzioni, dall'imponenza delle masse, dall'equilibrato rapporto di luci e di ombre sui volumi. La sensibilità nostra attuale ci porta a questa grande semplicità di godimento estetico: 'che non ci accorgiamo' delle pure bellissime incisioni che decorano tutte le superfici di un obelisco, per ammirare in tale monumento il pregio dell'opera monolitica, il valore cromatico della pietra al sole, la bellezza dello slancio verticale; che preferiamo considerare nella massa 'archittonica' una 'colonna traiana' anzichè addentrarci nella contemplazione della 'storia scolpita' che tutta l'avvolge; che preferiamo la rude bellezza costruttiva di una basilica di Massenzio dalle nude imponenti volte a lacunari, alle 'frivolezze decorative' di un arco di Settimo Severo. Quello che ci spinge tanto lontano a ritroso nel tempo alla ricerca di emozioni pure e semplici dell'arcaica architettura è un bisogno tutto nostro di questa nostra meravigliosa età meccanica che cela sotto quattro pareti lisce di un 'cofanetto' la più perfetta, la più decorativa nei suoi delicati organi, la più sovranaturale macchina che conosca: la radio." Cited from the entry on the Integral Reclamation Monument by Claudio Poli in *Giuseppe Terragni, 1904–1943*, ed. Ciucci, 376.

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