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# What Remains of Man—Aldo Rossi's Modena Cemetery

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*Aldo Rossi's Modena cemetery design of 1971 has been one of the most widely discussed architectural projects of the past decade. Now under construction, on the basis of a revised plan of 1976, Rossi's cemetery demonstrates his use of established architectural types, in unexpected combinations, to convey specific ideas about architecture and life.*

*Some critics, such as Manfredo Tafuri, have taken the view that the meaning of Rossi's design cannot be verbalized. This article seeks to demonstrate that the opposite is the case. Here, Rossi's sources and writings are explored in tandem, in order to unravel the complex message contained in his cemetery design. In particular, Rossi's debts to Piranesi, Boullée. Loos, Hannes Meyer, Le Corbusier, and de Chirico are discussed. In addition, Rossi's uses of architectural types, autobiographical elements, and an anthropomorphic image are considered. Ultimately, the cemetery exemplifies Rossi's idea that architecture has a particular importance because it remains, through time, as a testament to humanity.*

THE NORTH ITALIAN CITY of Modena has prospered since World War II. Like all of the important centers of Emilia, nearby Bologna being the best known, it has done so under a Communist government. By the late 1960s Modena had outgrown its 19th-century cemetery, designed by Cesare Costa.<sup>1</sup> Costa's cemetery is located northwest of the city center, on land bordered by diverging railroad tracks that connect the city to Milan and Verona; it is joined on the west to a smaller Jewish cemetery, a testament to the city's long-standing Jewish population. In 1971 the municipality of Modena announced a competition for a new cemetery, and designated a large plot lying north and west of the old burial grounds as the proposed site. The deadline for entries was 2 November, and on 13 June of the following year the Milanese architect Aldo Rossi,<sup>2</sup> who had submitted a design in

collaboration with Gianni Braghieri (Fig. 1), was declared winner of the 6,000,000 lire first prize.<sup>3</sup> The vote of the jury, however, was not unanimous.<sup>4</sup> In 1976 Rossi revised his original scheme, and on the basis of this version (Fig. 2) construction began and continues today.

Rossi's design makes a very complex statement architecturally and, ultimately, poetically. The architect's interest in building

Rossi, *Scritti scelti sull'architettura e la città, 1956–1972*, ed. R. Bonicalzi, Milan, 1975, 518–526, and 523–539; V. Savi, *L'architettura di Aldo Rossi*, Milan, 1976, 265–269, and 277–280; R. Moschini, ed., *Aldo Rossi, Progetti e disegni 1962–1979 / Projects and drawings, 1962–1979*, New York, 1979, 158–162; Institute for Architecture and Urban Studies, *Aldo Rossi in America: 1976 to 1979*, New York, 1979, 50–55. In A. Rossi, *L'architettura della città*, 4th ed., ed. D. Vitale, Milan, 1978, 291–292, there is a list of the various editions and translations of this most important of Rossi's writings.

3. An exhibition of the entries in the competition was held in Modena from 23 September to 7 October 1972. The unpaginated catalogue for this exhibition, Comune di Modena, *Concorso nazionale di idee per il nuovo cimitero. Mostra dei progetti partecipanti*, Modena, 1972, contains the rules of the competition, a list of the projects submitted, the minutes of the meetings of the jurors, and a list of the jurors' names that included Paolo Portoghesi and Carlo Aymonino. Unfortunately, all of the projects are not illustrated in the catalogue. The winning design and a selection of other entries appeared in *Controspazio*, 10, October 1972, 4–37, and in F. Raggi, "Il concorso per il nuovo cimitero di Modena: Poesia contro Retorica/Poetry v. Rhetoric: The Competition for the Modena Cemetery," *Casabella*, 372, 20–26. Modena, *Concorso*, contains generous excerpts from the explanatory text that accompanied Rossi's competition designs. These excerpts appear in the catalogue under the heading "L'azzurro del cielo," the code name for Rossi's project. In drastically abridged form, this text is found in Raggi, "Poetry v. Rhetoric," 21. The text also is published, in a somewhat different version, as A. Rossi, "L'azzurro del cielo," *Controspazio*, 10, October 1972, 4–9; also, A. Rossi, "The Blue of the Sky," trans. M. Barsoum and L. Dimitriu, *Oppositions*, 5, 1976, 31–34.

4. The controversy is noted by two of the jurors: P. Portoghesi, who voted in favor of Rossi's plan, "Città dei vivi, città dei morti," *Controspazio*, 10, October 1972, 2–3, and G. Gresleri, who voted against, "... E le ossa di Etienne Boullée si voltarono nella tomba, ovvero: così si muore a Modena," *Parametro*, 15, 1973, 40–41. In Modena, *Concorso*, the final, equivocal public statement of the jury recorded that the Rossi project in particular had carried the debate about the entries to the level of a general discussion of contemporary architecture. Those favoring the Rossi proposal found it a unified and coherent whole, clearly related to the existing cemeteries. In the order of the Rossi design they found an alternative to the growing disorder of modern cities. The opposition felt that the monumental forms of the cemetery would be in conflict with the skyline of the city itself, and that its collective ethos sacrificed the feelings of the individual.

Earlier versions of this paper were given on the occasion of an exhibition of drawings by Aldo Rossi at the Williams College Museum of Art, Williamstown, MA, in the spring of 1980, and at the annual meeting of the Society of Architectural Historians at Victoria, B.C., in April 1981.

1. Costa was a local neo-classical architect whose best-known work is his handsome opera house at Reggio Emilia of 1852–1857. See R. Marmioli, *Il teatro municipale di Reggio Emilia*, Reggio Emilia, 1951.

2. At least four bibliographies of writings by and about Rossi exist: A.

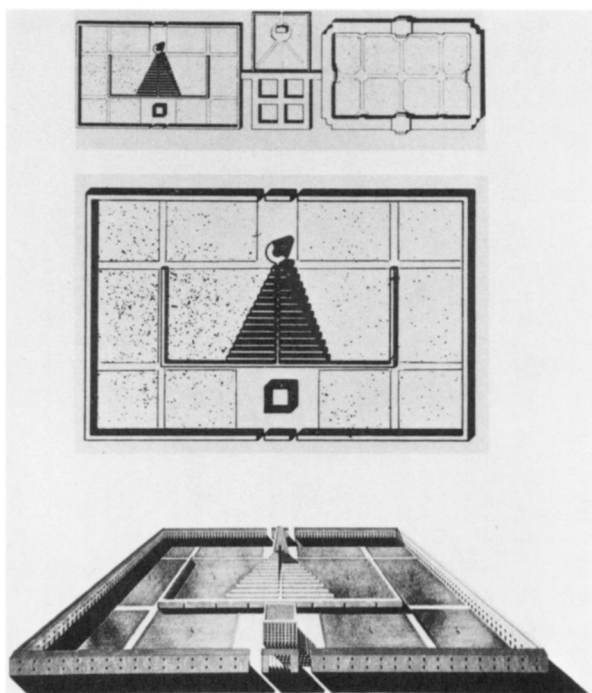


Fig. 1. Aldo Rossi, Modena Cemetery, 1971, competition entry, top to bottom, plan showing proposed design to left of pre-existing Jewish cemetery and Costa cemetery; plan of Rossi project; and bird's eye view of Rossi project (Comune di Modena, *Concorso nazionale di idee per il nuovo cimitero*, Modena, 1972).

types is clearly stated in his introduction to his Italian translation of Etienne Louis Boullée's *Architecture, Essai sur l'Art*, which he published in 1967:<sup>5</sup>

Boullée . . . poses the question of character and theme as the decisive question; that is, he poses a choice that arises before the architectural project and in doing this he places in the first rank . . . the typological aspect of architecture.

For Boullée, to give character to a work means not to make us experience sensations other than those intrinsic in the subject; the character constitutes the evocative, emotional part.<sup>6</sup>

5. E. L. Boullée, *Architettura saggio sull'arte*, trans. and intro. A. Rossi, Padua, 1967. The introduction to Boullée's essay, reprinted in *Scritti scelti*, 346–364, is one of Rossi's most important critical works. The influence of his edition of Boullée on Italian architects is seen in one of the entries in the Modena competition. In their project, code-named NEKRONOMIKON, R. Bonicalzi and A. Pracchi quoted part of Boullée's section on funerary architecture, as translated by Rossi (*Controspazio*, 10, October 1972, 31–33; Raggi, "Poetry v. Rhetoric," 26). Bonicalzi is also the editor of *Scritti scelti*.

6. Rossi, introduction to Boullée, 11: "Boullée . . . pone la questione del carattere e del tema come questione decisiva; pone cioè una scelta che sta prima del progetto architettonico e nel far questo pone in primo piano . . . l'aspetto tipologico dell'architettura." And, *ibid.*, 18: "Per B. mettere dell'carattere in un'opera significa usare tutti i mezzi propri per non farci provare altre sensazioni oltre quelle intrinseche del soggetto . . . il carattere costituisce la parte evocativa, emozionale." On the importance of architectural typology for Rossi, see J. Silveti, "On Realism in Architecture," *The Harvard Architectural Review*, 1, 1980, 11–31.

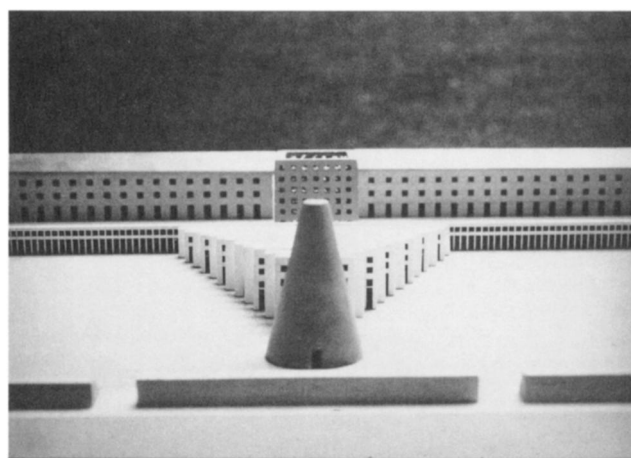


Fig. 2. Aldo Rossi, Modena Cemetery, definitive project, 1976, model from north (Alyce Kaprow).

Boullée summed up his notion of architectural character in a memorable sentence that Rossi quotes: "Temple of Death! Your aspect should freeze our hearts,"<sup>7</sup> a remark Rossi clearly had in mind when composing the design for the cemetery in Modena.

For Rossi, following Boullée, the evocative power of a work of architecture depends not only on choosing appropriate building types, but also on joining those known forms in unexpected ways. In the introduction to Boullée's text, Rossi quotes Louis Hautecoeur: "Boullée understands that there exists a higher grade of metaphor, a possibility to provoke emotions and to create that which Baudelaire will call *correspondances*."<sup>8</sup> This quality of *correspondance* is created by the analogies that exist between Rossi's design and other architecture, to be explored here, and by unexpected junctures of fixed architectural types and anthropomorphic images.<sup>9</sup> Rossi's use of types depends on his far-reaching knowledge of the history of architecture. He

7. "Temple de la mort! Votre aspect doit glacer nos coeurs." H. Rosenau, ed., *Boullée's Treatise on Architecture*, London, 1953, 80. An English translation of Boullée is now available in H. Rosenau, *Boullée and Visionary Architecture, including Boullée's 'Architecture, Essay on Art'*, London and New York, 1976. Rossi, introduction to Boullée, 18.

8. Rossi, introduction to Boullée, 9: "B. comprende che esiste un grado superiore della metafora, una possibilità di provocare delle emozioni e di creare ciò che Baudelaire chiamerà delle *correspondances*."

9. Rossi has expressed himself several times on the question of the unexpected. For instance, in the introduction to the Portuguese edition of *L'architettura della città*, Rossi, *Scritti scelti*, 451, proposes: "l'ipotesi di una teoria della progettazione architettonica dove gli elementi sono prefissati, formalmente definiti, ma dove il significato che scaturisce al termine dell'operazione è il senso autentico, imprevisto, originale della ricerca. Esso è un progetto."

For a general discussion of Rossi's architectural principles, see R. Moneo, "Aldo Rossi: The Idea of Architecture and the Modena Cemetery," *Oppositions*, 5, 1976, 1–30. A very useful article, that deals only with Rossi's early works, is E. Bonfanti, "Elementi e costruzione, Note sull'architettura di Aldo Rossi," *Controspazio*, 10, October 1970, 19–42.

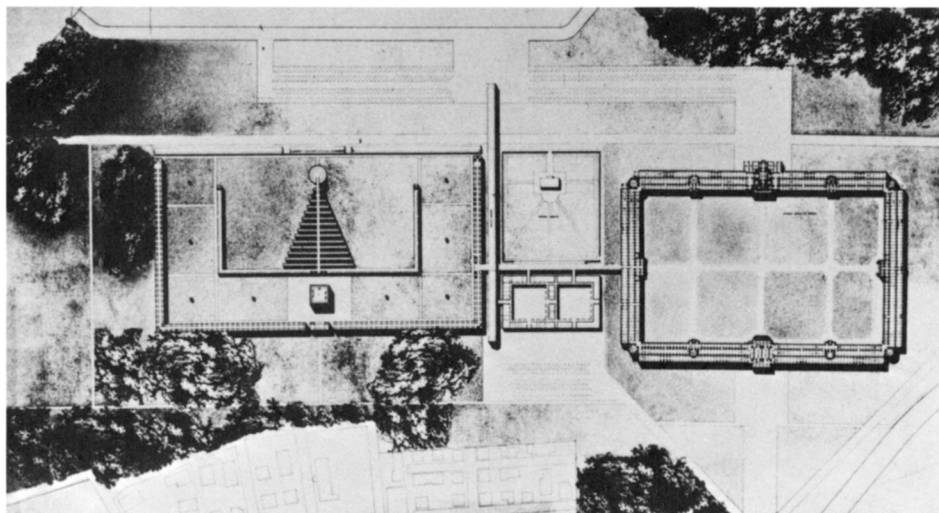


Fig. 3. Aldo Rossi, Modena Cemetery, definitive project, 1976, plan with existing cemeteries (F. Moschini, ed., *Aldo Rossi, Progetti e disegni 1962–1979/Aldo Rossi, Projects and drawings 1962–1979*, New York, 1979, tav. 45).

asserts that architects should be able to “formulate clearly from what architecture our architecture is born.”<sup>10</sup> It will be our task here to investigate from what architecture Rossi’s cemetery is born, and to suggest how a knowledge of these sources may contribute to an understanding of its meaning.

### *The Design as a Whole*

Rossi’s cemetery of 1971 (Fig. 1) consists of a rectangular area, roughly 320 x 175 m., enclosed by two-story buildings. The short axis of the rectangle is occupied, from south to north, by a cube, a U-shaped building, a stepped triangle, and a truncated cone (Fig. 2). This project also includes about two and a half kilometers of subterranean corridors located under the open burial fields that surround the central buildings. In the project of 1976 the underground corridors, which had been the focus of considerable criticism, were eliminated, and additional space for burial was provided by raising the height of the enclosing buildings to three stories (Fig. 3). At the same time, the north wall was moved to a position parallel to the east wall. There, it serves as a connecting link between the old and new cemeteries, and as an entrance corridor from the new parking lots laid out to the north and south. The north edge of Rossi’s cemetery is now defined by rows of steps. Burial is to take place in one form or another in all the structures, with the exception of the steps where trees will be planted.

Rossi, significantly, chose to ignore the shape of the site. Rather, he repeated the walled rectangle of the Costa and Jewish cemeteries. In contrast, the other entries in the competition that have been published spread buildings, in modernist asymmetry, over most of the available land. By adopting the old cemetery type,

Rossi set his own design emphatically within its traditions: “This project for a cemetery complies with the image of a cemetery everyone has.”<sup>11</sup>

In 19th-century cemeteries of the Costa type, such as the renowned cemetery at Genoa (Fig. 4),<sup>12</sup> the main entrance is located in the center of one long side, while a centrally planned church occupies the middle of the opposite wall. This church is the *famedio*, or burial place of the city’s most distinguished citizens. Small wonder that at Genoa and Modena the *famedii* recall the Pantheon at Rome. The severe porticoes that enclose the cemeteries act as foils for the display of highly idiosyncratic sculptural monuments, commissioned by the nobility and *alta borghesia*, the classes whose interests these cemeteries were developed to serve—at least from Rossi’s Marxist point of view. Burial for the well-to-do takes place in the porticoes, while the indigent are interred in the open ground in the center. Because this ground is restricted in area, the bones of the indigent may be exhumed after 10 years to make way for the new arrivals. Such bones are given final rest in a common grave.<sup>13</sup> At Modena, the common grave will be in the lower level of the cone (Fig. 5), a point to which we shall return.

The complex of buildings in the center of Rossi’s cemetery, however, is not found in the 19th-century cemeteries of the Modena/Genoa type (Fig. 4). That idea came from another source, Giovanni Battista Piranesi’s reconstruction of the Campo

11. Rossi, “The Blue of the Sky,” 31. Modena, *Concorso*: “questo cimitero non si discosta dall’idea di cimitero che ognuno possiede.”

12. The Genoa cemetery was designed, before his death in 1835, by Carlo Barabino and constructed, with changes, by his pupil G. A. Resasco, between 1844 and 1861. Cf. C. V. Meeks, *Italian Architecture, 1750–1914*, New Haven and London, 1966, 190. For Rossi, “The Blue of the Sky,” 32, the neo-classical cemeteries of Modena, Brescia, Musocco, and Genoa still have meaning.

13. An excellent survey of Italian cemetery laws and practices is found in R. Fabbrichesi, “Cimitero,” *Enciclopedia Italiana*, x, 251–255.

10. A. Rossi, “Architettura per i musei,” *Scritti scelti*, 332: “. . . formulare con chiarezza da quale architettura nasce la nostra architettura.” See Bonfanti, “Elementi e costruzione,” 19.

Fig. 4. Carlo Barabino and G. A. Resasco, Cemetery of Staglieno, Genoa, designed before 1835, built 1844–1861, air view (Alinari).

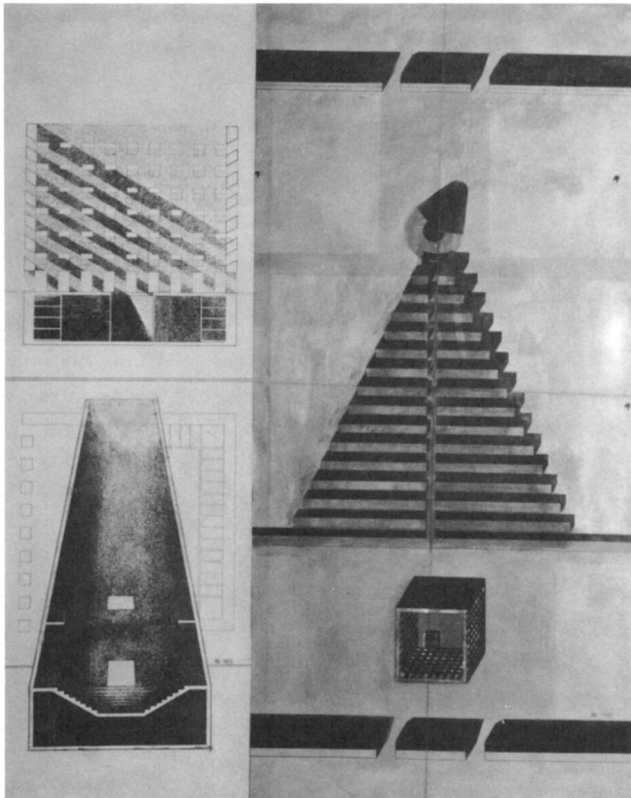


Fig. 5. Aldo Rossi, Modena Cemetery, 1973, cone, cube, and triangle, drawing (Williams College Museum of Art).

Marzio in Rome, as he imagined it stood in late imperial times.<sup>14</sup> In Piranesi's map, a large part of the right bank of the Tiber is occupied by a group of funerary monuments dominated by the Mausoleum of Hadrian (Fig. 6), which we now know as Castel Sant'Angelo. Hadrian's tomb sits on a square base placed near the river. Beyond this square is a U-shaped group of buildings marked *Sepulchra*. They embrace the bottom of a fan-shaped structure designated by the word *clitoporticus*. At the apex of the fan sits a round building called *Basilica*. This latter forms part of a group of monuments labeled *Bustum Hadriani*, designating the place where cremation occurs. The correspondence in general layout between the Piranesi and the Rossi is too close to be accidental. Rossi, who knows this Piranesi perfectly well (a frag-

14. G. B. Piranesi, *Il Campo Marzio dell'Antica Roma*, Rome, 1762, v–x. For a discussion of Piranesi's book, see L. Musso, "Il Campo Marzio," in Rome, Istituto Nazionale per la Grafica, *Piranesi nei luoghi di Piranesi, Orti Farnesiani*, Rome, 1979, 17–41. Of Piranesi's Rome, Rossi, "L'architettura della ragione," *Scritti scelti*, 372, writes: "[La] concezione dell'arte come pura speculazione sul figurare, come ricerca sulle forme esistenti dell'architettura apre una delle strade più importanti dell'arte moderna. Anche qui la combinazione di oggetti, di forme, di materiale della architettura è intesa a creare una realtà potenziale di sviluppi imprevisi, a far balenare soluzioni diverse, a costruire il reale." And, *ibid.*, 373: "i monumenti romani [of Piranesi] sono un materiale con cui si inventa la città e l'architettura" (author's italics).

At the congress in 1970 on Bernardo Vittone in which Rossi participated (see note 15 below), M. Tafuri presented one of the numerous versions of his paper on Piranesi (M. Tafuri, "Giovann Battista Piranesi: L'architettura come 'utopia negativa'," *Bernardo Vittone*, 265–319). In this paper, which Rossi presumably heard, Piranesi's Campo Marzio plays a significant role.

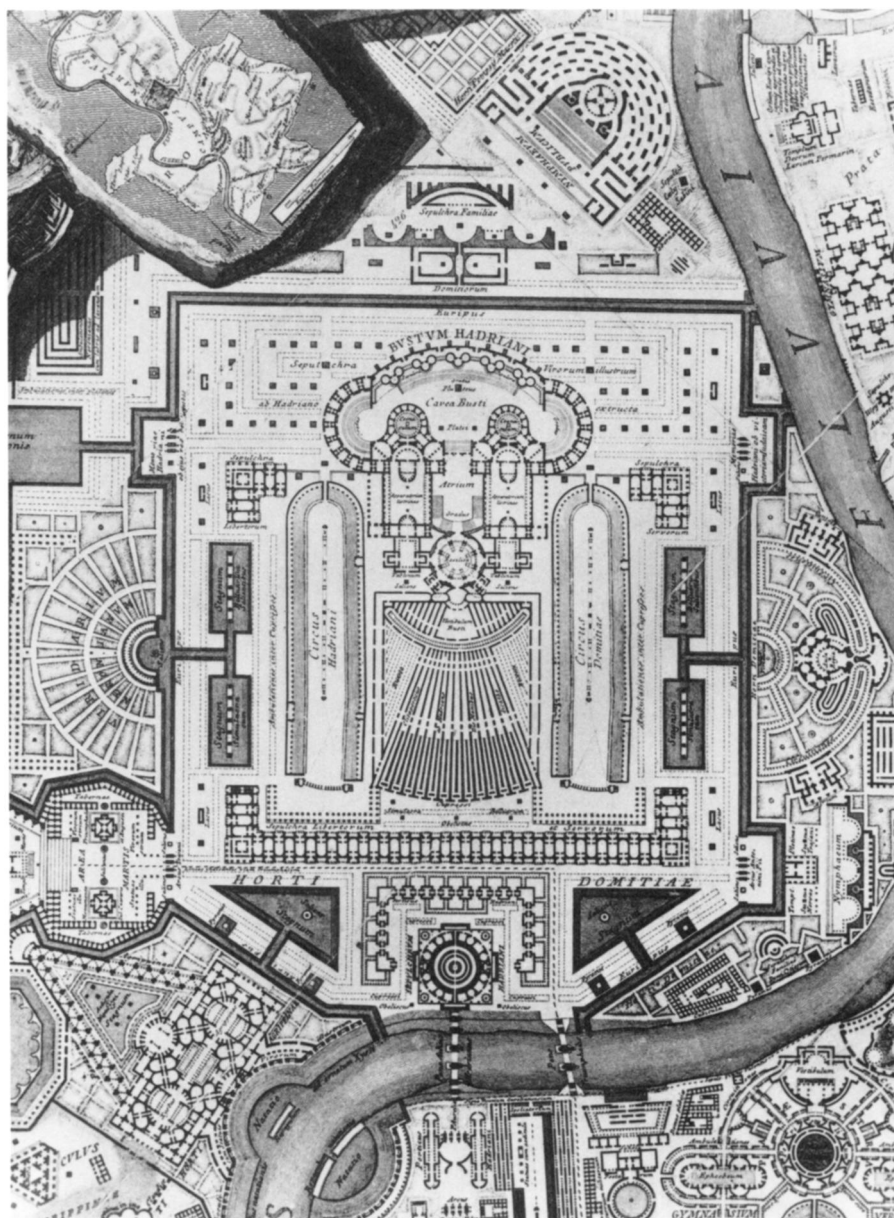


Fig. 6. Giovanni Battista Piranesi, Mausoleum of Hadrian, Rome, reconstructed plan, detail (G. B. Piranesi, *Il Campo Marzio dell'Antica Roma*, Rome, 1762, v-x).

ment of it appears in Fig. 25, above the left arm of the youth in Rossi's drawing *The Analogous City*, 1976), has lifted Piranesi's vision of an imperial ancient city of the dead placed within the context of Rome, and put it in the middle of a 19th-century cemetery plan.

The main entrance to the south side of the cemetery, retained in the 1976 version, is marked by verticals that resemble prison bars (Fig. 7). Prisons, as a building type, interest Rossi,<sup>15</sup> who

15. K. Frampton, *Modern Architecture. A Critical History*, New York and Toronto, 1980, 290, has rightly stressed Rossi's preoccupation with so-called institutional architecture—"the school, the hospital, the prison," types which Rossi singles out in his paper "L'architettura del illuminismo," *Bernardo Vittone e la disputa fra classicismo e barocco nel settecento*, Turin, 1972, 224; reprinted in Rossi, *Scritti scelti*, 454-473.

uses the gate to make his cemetery seem a place of no escape. At Modena, particularly in the first scheme, the idea of a prison is confounded with another kind of architectural trap, the labyrinth. In his *Entwurf einer historischen Architektur*, 1725, Johann Bernhard Fischer von Erlach reconstructs the Labyrinth of Crete as a two-story rectangular enclosure with bare walls into which square windows and rectangular doors are abruptly carved (Fig. 8). The walls are capped by triangular roofs.<sup>16</sup> In the middle of this enclosure stands the labyrinth itself, an arrangement of

16. J. B. Fischer von Erlach, *Entwurf einer historischen Architektur*, 2nd ed., Leipzig, 1725, I, xvii. P. Eisenman, "The House of the Dead as the City of Survival," *Aldo Rossi in America*, 11, suggests as a source for the Rossi design "Fischer von Erlach's Cemetery," without further clarification.



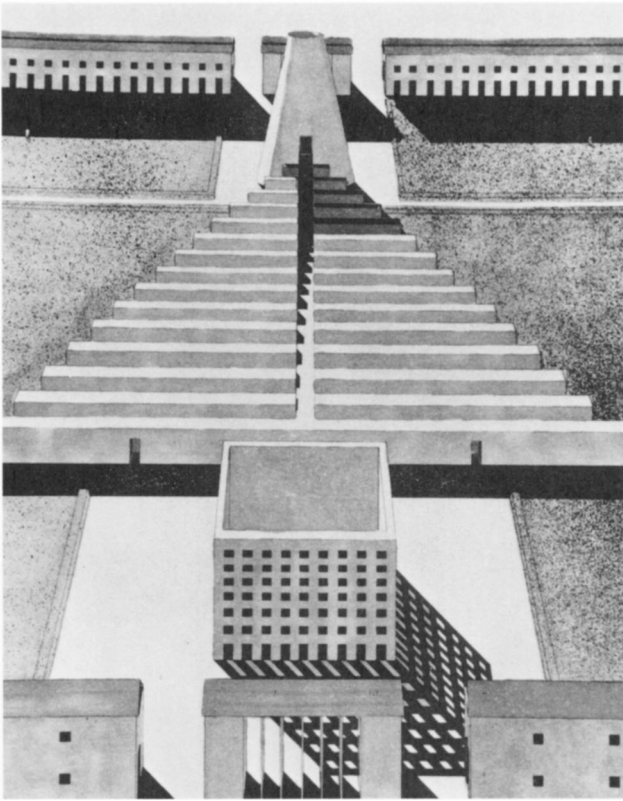


Fig. 7. Aldo Rossi, Modena Cemetery, 1971, competition project, bird's eye view of central buildings, drawing (Modena, *Concorso*).

equally bare buildings. The visual connection with Fischer von Erlach's labyrinth seems to be borne out by Rossi's collage of 1972 called *The Labyrinth* (Fig. 9), a design based on the Modena project. Rossi's original plan called for an arrangement of sub-

terranean passages, located beneath the open burial fields; in their length, darkness, and lack of clear architectural direction, they would have appeared to be a maze to any visitor. Fischer von Erlach notes that, according to Plutarch, the Labyrinth of Crete was used as a prison,<sup>17</sup> and this duality of meaning seems to have been incorporated by Rossi into the Modena design. The subterranean corridors in the scheme of 1971 also have parallels in the section of Boullée's treatise that deals with funerary architecture. There, Boullée writes about the possibility of an *architecture ensevelie*, a buried architecture, a character particularly appropriate for cemeteries.<sup>18</sup>

#### *The Enclosing Wall*

Rossi has said that his cemetery is a city of the dead.<sup>19</sup> The relentlessly plain surfaces (Fig. 2) of his buildings tell us that it is a modern city, whose inhabitants need not fear one crime, that of ornament. It is appropriate to recall Adolf Loos's essay of 1908,

17. Fischer von Erlach, *Entwürf*, I, xvii.

18. Rosenau, *Boullée's Treatise*, 80. The 1971 Modena project carried this idea of Boullée's to extraordinary lengths, and depths. The 2.5 kilometers of subterranean passages were to be almost without the benefit of natural light and buried even below the local water table. See Gresleri, "Le ossa," 40. For functional reasons, these buried galleries were eliminated in the version of 1976. The most moving modern example of *architecture ensevelie* is found at the Fosse Ardeatine, outside Rome, where 335 Italians were slaughtered by the Germans on 24 March 1944. The architects of this design of 1949, Aprile, Calcaprina, Cardelli, Fiorentino, and Perugini, placed all 335 separate tombs in a single chamber below grade and covered them with one great reinforced concrete slab that hovers just above the level of the ground outside, like the lid of a giant sarcophagus that is about to be closed.

19. Rossi, Modena, *Concorso*: "... L'insieme di questi edifici [of the cemetery complex] si configura come una città; nella città il rapporto privato con la morte torna ad essere rapporto civile con l'istituzione."

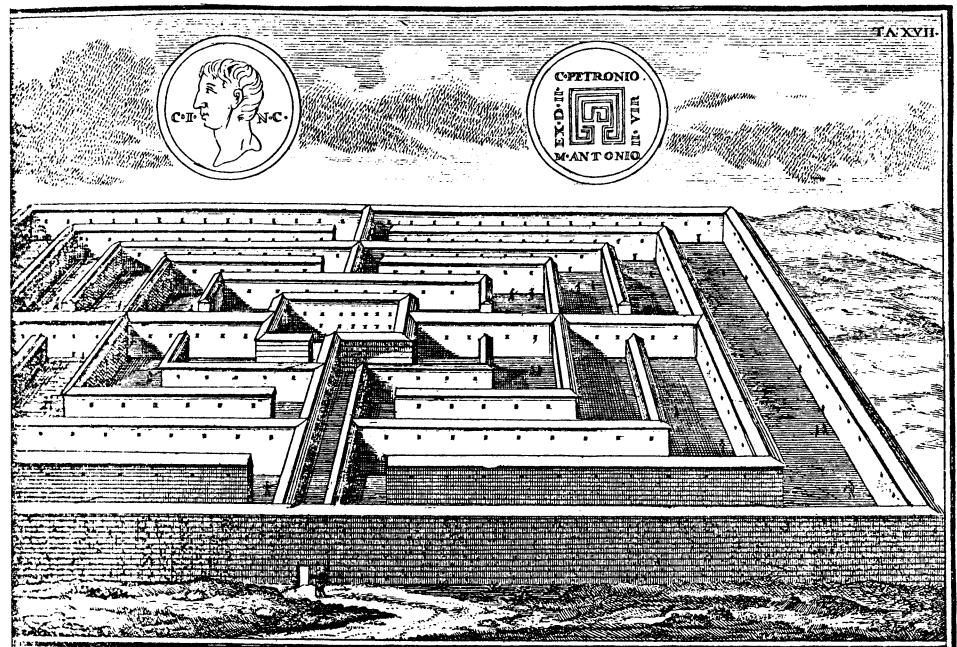


Fig. 8. Johann Bernhard Fischer von Erlach, *The Labyrinth of Crete*, reconstruction (J. B. Fischer von Erlach, *Entwürf einer historischen Architectur*, 2nd ed., Leipzig, 1725, I, xvii).

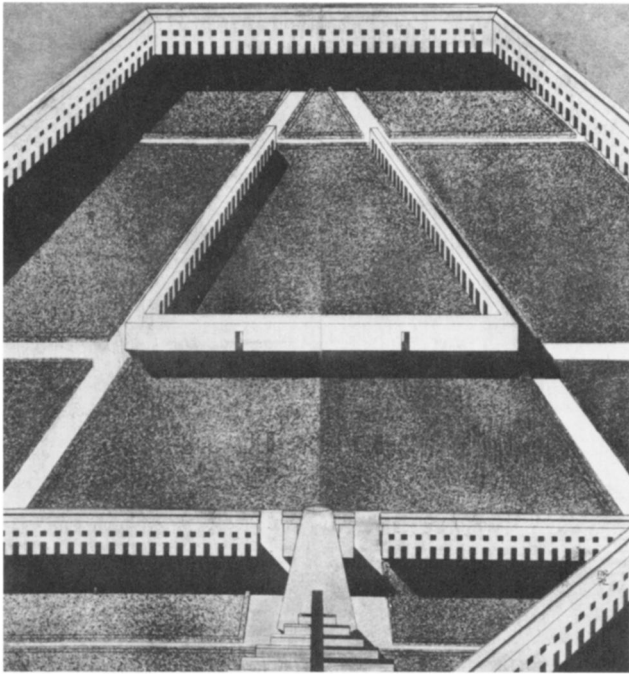


Fig. 9. Aldo Rossi, *The Labyrinth*, 1972, collage (Moschini, Aldo Rossi, tav. 2).

*Ornament and Crime*,<sup>20</sup> because the influence of Loos has been almost as important for Rossi as that of Boullée. The structures that wall in the Modena cemetery recall in their bareness Loos's building of 1910 on the Michaelerplatz in Vienna (Fig. 10), which Rossi, in his essay of 1959 on Loos, found to possess a "superior, classical modernity of the spirit."<sup>21</sup>

If we compare Rossi's wall at Modena with his apartment block in the Gallarate section of Milan (Fig. 11), completed in 1970,<sup>22</sup> or with his later designs for housing at Setubal or Berlin,<sup>23</sup> we see that Rossi has enclosed his cemetery with mass housing. For Rossi, each category of building has an archetype, which he uses over and over, modifying it to fit the particulars of each commission or project. Obviously, the archetype of Rossi's housing block owes as much to the *Unités* of Le Corbusier as it does to the house on the Michaelerplatz of Loos.

But unlike the *Unités* of Le Corbusier or Rossi's own housing projects, the Modena wall houses are capped by a triangular roof (Fig. 2). In Rossi's hands this form refers specifically to the pitched roofs of Etruscan funerary urns; Rossi alludes to these urns in the form of houses in his description of the Modena



Fig. 10. Adolf Loos, Building on the Michaelerplatz, Vienna, 1910, exterior (H. Kulka, *Adolf Loos*, Vienna, 1931, Abb. 44).

design.<sup>24</sup> Actually, he had used the pitched roof as a kind of sarcophagus lid in his Monument to the Partisans at Segrate, 1965 (Fig. 12).<sup>25</sup> Thus, at Modena, his residential units with their pitched roofs become residential units for the dead.

There is, of course, something disconcerting in the fact that Rossi can design quarters for the living and the dead that look so much alike; it is this disconcerting similarity that raises the whole issue of character in Rossi's work. All of the structures in his cemetery design conform admirably to a passage in Boullée's section on funerary monuments:

It does not seem possible to me to conceive anything sadder than a monument composed of a smooth, naked and unadorned surface, of a light absorbent material, absolutely bare of details, and of which the decoration is formed by a composition of shadows, drawn by shadows still darker.<sup>26</sup>

20. Loos's essay has been translated into English. L. Münz and G. Künstler, *Adolf Loos, Pioneer of Modern Architecture*, New York and Washington, 1966, 226–231.

21. A. Rossi, "Adolf Loos, 1870–1933," *Casabella-continuità*, 233, 1959, 5–12; reprinted in Rossi, *Scritti scelti*, 78–106.

22. A. Rossi, "Due progetti," *Lotus*, 7, 1970, 62–85; reprinted in Rossi, *Scritti scelti*, 434–442.

23. Illustrated in Moschini, *Aldo Rossi*, pls. 75 and 86.

24. Modena, *Concorso*: "... le urne a forma di casa degli etruschi, e la tomba del fornaio, esprimono il rapporto storico tra la casa deserta e il lavoro abbandonato."

25. Eisenman, "The House," 14, cites several other sources for the pitched roof/sarcophagus image Rossi used at Segrate, but he misses the Etruscan urn, which is surely the most important source, and one that Rossi himself has noted.

26. Rosenau, *Boullée's Treatise*, 83. "Il ne me paroît pas possible de



Fig. 11. Aldo Rossi, Housing Unit, Gallarate, Milan, 1970, elevation (Moschini, *Aldo Rossi*, tav. 36).

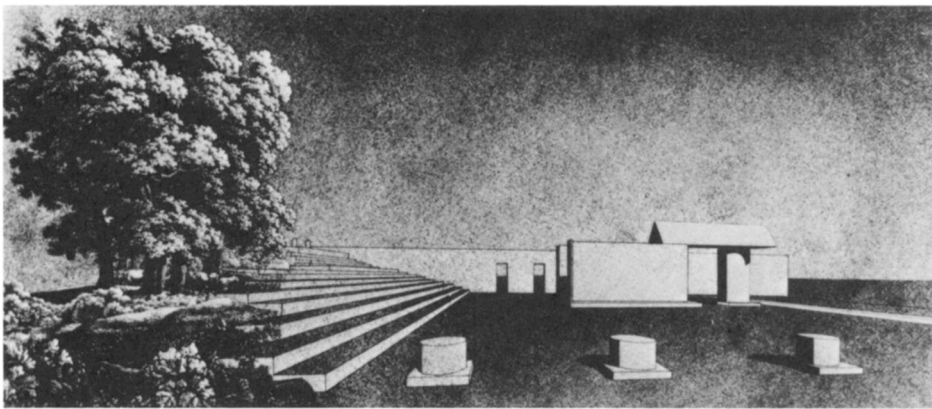
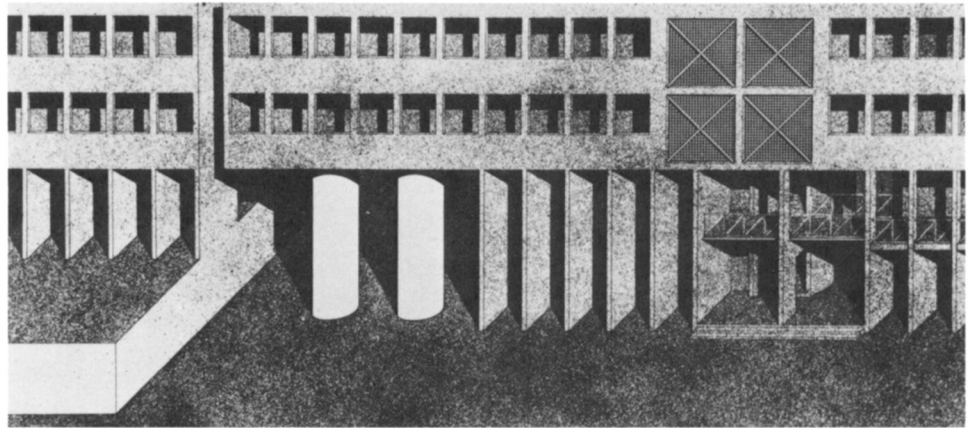


Fig. 12. Aldo Rossi, Monument to the Partisans, Segrate, 1965, perspective drawing (Moschini, *Aldo Rossi*, tav. 27).

Rossi's entire oeuvre, from housing to elementary school, abides by this prescription.<sup>27</sup> Little inconsistency appears in his work. For Rossi, only a very subtle line divides architecture for the living and architecture for the dead.<sup>28</sup> One need not share his view, but one can hardly deny him the right to hold it, or to express it in his architecture.

### *The Cube*

For Rossi, "the cube is an abandoned or incomplete house, with empty windows, unroofed."<sup>29</sup> In another comment on the

Modena design, he notes that "the urns in the shape of houses of the Etruscans and the Baker's Tomb [outside Porta Maggiore, Rome] express the historical connection between the deserted house and abandoned work."<sup>30</sup> Clearly the empty holes in Rossi's cube, even though square, are analogous to the empty round holes in the Roman tomb. At Modena, the cube will have the actual function of a monument to those who died in war.

The cube, as a war-related memorial structure, appears early in Rossi's work, in his proto-minimalist project of 1962 for the Monument to the Resistance at Cuneo (Fig. 13). The Cuneo cube was to be penetrated by a set of steps, triangular in plan, that reappears in the stepped triangle of the Modena project. These steps ascended to an unroofed space resembling a kind of inverted mastaba. Through a narrow slit in the back wall of this

concevoir rien de plus tristes qu'un monument composé par une surface plane nue et dépouillée, d'une matière absorbant la lumière, absolument dénuée de détails, et dont la décoration est formée par un tableau d'ombres, dessiné par des ombres encore plus sombres" (author's trans.).

27. Rossi, Modena, *Concorso*, writes: "La malinconia del tema non lo [il cimitero] stacca troppo dagli altri edifici pubblici. Il suo ordine e la sua collocazione comprendono anche l'aspetto burocratico della morte."

28. See Rossi's remarks about his project for the Casa dello studente at Trieste quoted in note 58 below.

29. Rossi, Modena, *Concorso*: "... il cubo è una casa abbandonata o incompiuta, con finestre vuote, scoperchiate."

The cube, because of its resemblance to Guerrini, La Padula, and Romano's Palazzo della Civiltà del Lavoro of 1942 in Mussolini's new suburb, EUR, south of Rome, is doubtless the building that has prompted

some critics to see Rossi's designs as Fascist. See, for instance, C. Jencks, *The Language of Post Modern Architecture*, New York, 1977, 20, and note 2. M. Tafuri, "L'architecture dans le boudoir," *Oppositions*, 3, 1974, 45, has come to Rossi's defense, but he has done so by laying a false scent rather than facing the issue squarely. It is absurd to call Rossi's architecture Fascist, but in any comprehensive analysis of Rossi's work the visual parallels will have to be discussed more rigorously than they have been in the past. Because of the political issues raised, the task will not be easy.

30. See note 24 above.

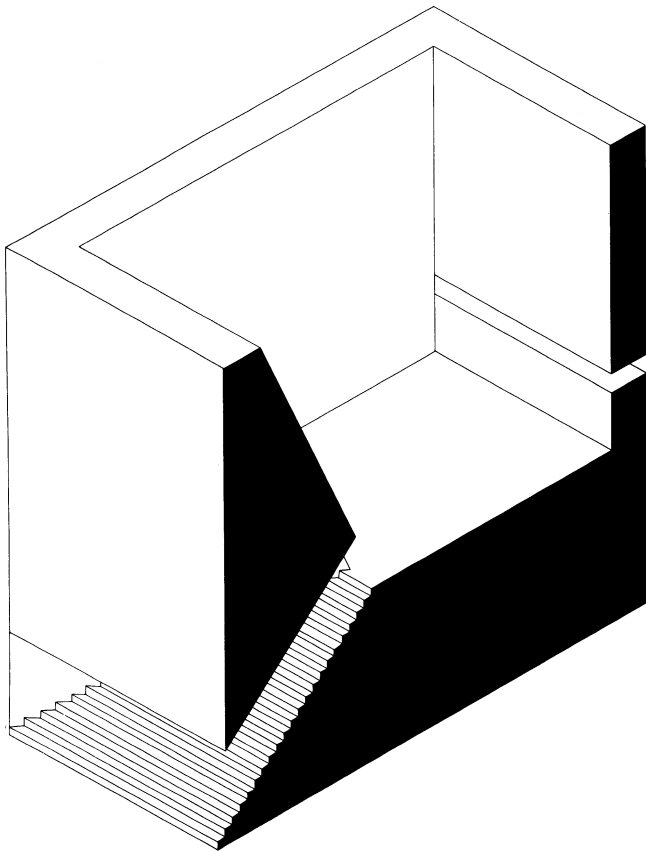


Fig. 13. Aldo Rossi, project for the Monument to the Resistance, Cuneo, 1962, axonometric section (author).

space the nearby hills for which the partisans fought were to be visible. Such use of a cube for a memorial was doubtless suggested to Rossi by the delicate, constructivist cube of the *Monumento ai Morti nei Campi di Germania*, 1946, by Belgiojoso, Peressutti, and Rogers in the Cimitero Monumentale at Milan (Fig. 14). Early in his career, Rossi had been particularly close to Ernesto N. Rogers; together they worked on *Casabella-continuità* from 1955 to 1964.<sup>31</sup>

The cube punctured by several rows of square windows actually appears in Rossi's work prior to the design of the Modena cemetery. In a study for the competition for the Monument to the Resistance in Milan, 1970, Rossi uses such a cube at the beginning of an architectural *promenade* that continues in three cylinders and terminates in a skeletal steel tower.<sup>32</sup> Because the

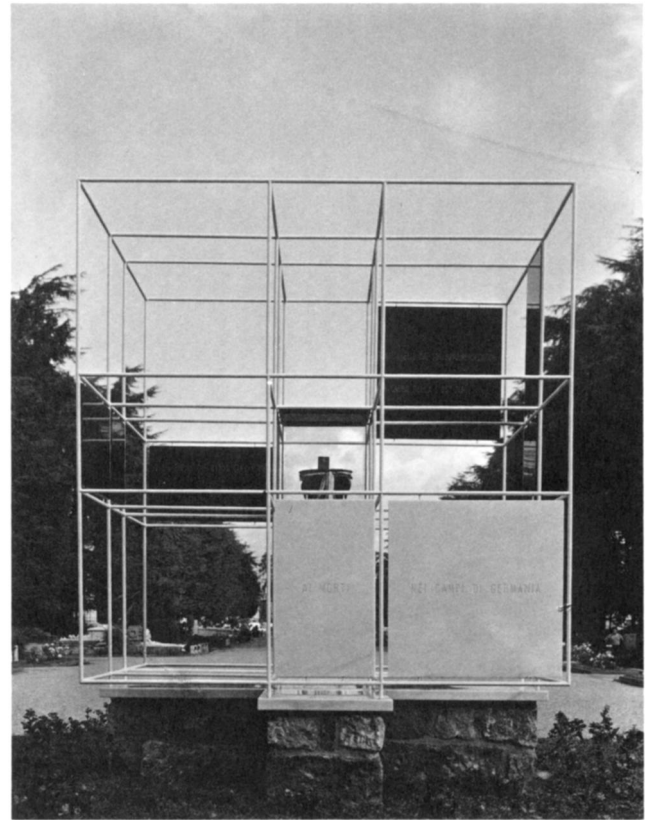


Fig. 14. Belgiojoso, Peresutti, and Rogers, Monument to the Dead in the Camps in Germany, Milan, Cimitero Monumentale, 1946 (BBPR Architetti).

Milan cube is roofed, it must have been intended to carry somewhat different connotations from its counterpart at Modena.

An early 20th-century project also stands behind Rossi's cube, namely, Hannes Meyer's design of 1923 for the Central Cemetery at Basel.<sup>33</sup> The Meyer project is dominated by a circular building whose wall is punctured by five rows of identical round arched windows (Fig. 15). Omitting its conical roof and colonnaded portico, the elevation of the building is remarkably similar to Rossi's cube. Meyer and Loos, according to Rossi, were "the two greatest personalities of modern architecture,"<sup>34</sup> a statement that probably tells us more about Rossi than it does about Meyer and Loos. While Rossi edited a series of books on architecture and urbanism for Marsilio Editori in Padua (1965–1972), he oversaw the publication in 1969 of a group of Meyer's essays.<sup>35</sup> Meyer was the Marxist architect *par excellence*, and it is surely

31. Rossi, *L'architettura della città*, 4th ed., 289.

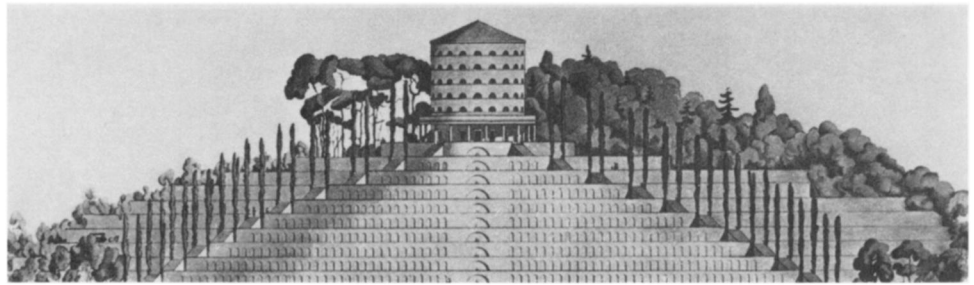
32. Bonfanti, "Elementi e costruzione," 27. The strict axial arrangement of different elements in one large scale architectural composition first makes its appearance in Rossi's work in his project of 1968 for the Town Hall at Scandicci (*ibid.*, 35–36), where, in plan, one finds in sequence a square, a long corridor with transverse projections, and a circle. Bonfanti, 28, notes Rossi's interest in the Baptistery and Cathedral of Pisa, whose discreet forms arranged axially on a flat surface may have inspired Rossi to create an analogous design.

33. C. Schnaidt, *Hannes Meyer, Bauten, Projekte und Schriften / Buildings, Projects and Writings*, New York, 1965, 16. This project is illustrated in Rossi, *Scritti scelti*, 506.

34. "[L]e due maggiori personalità dell'architettura moderna." Rossi, "L'architettura del illuminismo," 217.

35. H. Meyer, *Architettura e rivoluzione, Scritti 1921–1942*, ed. F. Dal Co, Padua, 1969. A list of the titles that Rossi supervised for Marsilio Editori is provided in Rossi, *Scritti scelti*, 514.

Fig. 15. Hannes Meyer, project for the Central Cemetery, Basel, 1923, elevation (C. Schnaidt, *Hannes Meyer*, New York, 1965, 16).



his application of Marxist, and even Leninist, principles to architecture that appealed so strongly to Rossi. The Basel cemetery project is an early work by Meyer, before he had begun to assimilate the principles of the new architecture as they developed in the early twenties in Holland, France, Germany, and Russia. Indeed, the simple geometry of Meyer's forms and their plane surfaces relate the project directly to the neo-classical architecture of the late 18th century; Meyer particularly embraced this mode in the years immediately following World War I.<sup>36</sup> Thus for Rossi the Meyer project is doubly resonant, and, as we shall see, it influenced the Modena design in more than one way.

#### *The Cone*

The cone at Modena will serve two functions. An upper level is filled with an amphitheatre containing seats to accommodate groups gathered for services (Fig. 5). Below will lie the common grave, the final resting place of the bones of the indigent:

In the common grave are found the remains of the abandoned dead . . . , persons who came from asylums, hospitals and prisons, desperate beings, or forgotten and oppressed. As for those who died in war, the city builds a monument and this rises above all the other buildings: the conical tower of the common grave.<sup>37</sup>

In the Rossi design the cube and cone deliberately vie for attention to underscore the fact that there are two separate monuments, one for the indigent and one for the war dead. But the indigent win out.

The cone operates as the crucial link between the two cemetery types that Rossi has used to form his overall scheme. It occupies the site of the centrally planned Basilica in the Piranesi Campo Marzio (Fig. 6) and the site of the *famedio* in the cemeteries of Modena and Genoa (Fig. 4). By its placement and central plan, it recalls the Pantheon-like churches that dominate 19th-century Italian cemeteries. Indeed, Rossi's enormous oculus suggests the Pantheon itself, a building that has been used as a Christian church since the early 7th century, and as a place for

36. Schnaidt, *Hannes Meyer*, (21).

37. Rossi, Modena, *Concorso*: "Nella fossa comune si trovano i resti dei morti abbandonati . . . , persone uscite dagli ospizi, dagli ospedali e dai carceri, esistenze disperate o dimenticate e oppresse. Come a coloro che sono morti nelle guerre, la città costruisce un monumento e questo sovrasta tutti gli altri edifici: la torre conica della fossa comune."

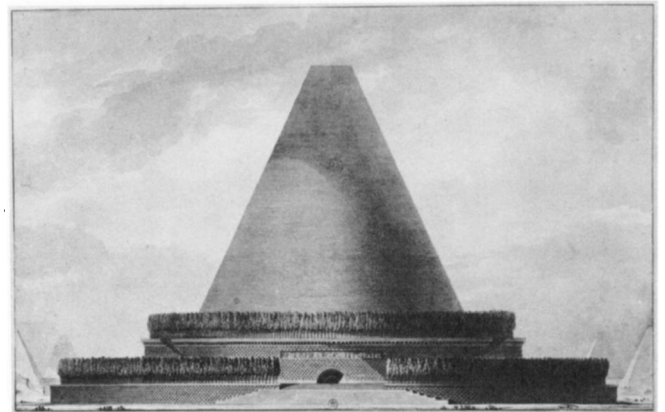


Fig. 16. Etienne Louis Boullée, project for a conical cenotaph, 1780s, elevation (Paris, Bibliothèque Nationale, HA5710).

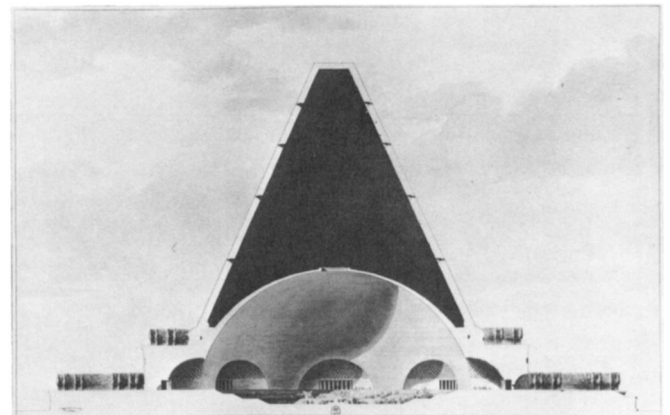


Fig. 17. Etienne Louis Boullée, project for a conical cenotaph, 1780s, section (Paris, Bibliothèque Nationale, HA5714).

burial in modern times; Raphael and the kings of Italy lie within.<sup>38</sup> The most obvious and closest formal source for Rossi's cone is not a church, however, but a funerary monument, Boullée's project for a conical cenotaph (Figs. 16, 17).<sup>39</sup> Rossi has even

38. Rossi, "The Blue of the Sky," 32, writes: "The Pantheon is a tomb."

39. Eisenman, "The House," 11, suggests a Boullée pyramidal cenotaph as a prototype, but the conical project is clearly closer. Rossi, *Boullée*, tav. 21, illustrates this conical project. The same Boullée drawing, turned upside down, is used by Gresleri, "Le ossa," 40, to illustrate

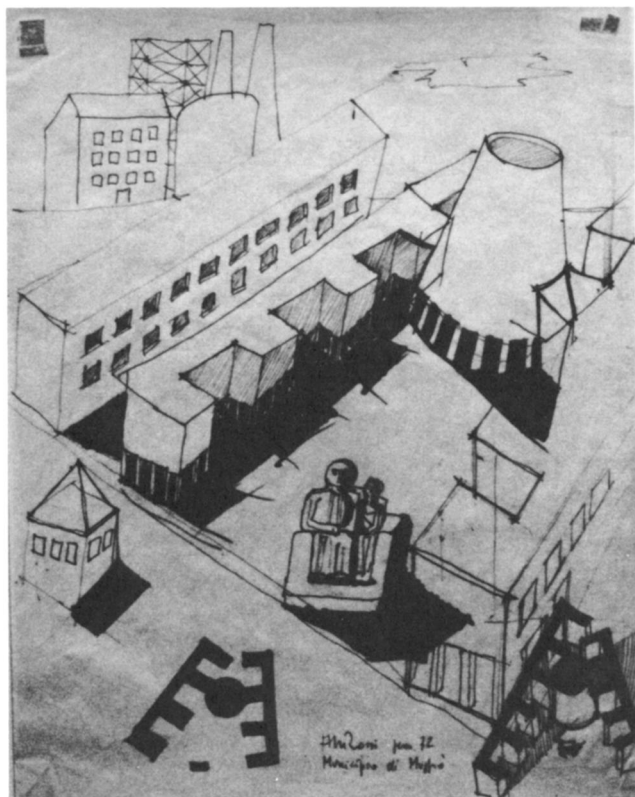


Fig. 18. Aldo Rossi, project for Town Hall, Muggiò, 1972, drawing (courtesy Max Protetch Gallery).

adopted Boullée's section (Fig. 17), inverting the inner dome to create his circular seating arrangement (Fig. 15). But Rossi's cone is a monument to the oppressed; this fact separates it dramatically from all these prototypes.

Conical parallels occur in two works by Rossi contemporary with the cemetery design. His project for the Town Hall of Muggiò, 1972, features a truncated cone that forms the fulcrum on which the whole composition turns (Fig. 18). Here the cone is secular, a symbol of government derived from Le Corbusier's Assembly Building at Chandigarh. Both cones have parallels in modern industrial water towers.<sup>40</sup> Since Rossi intends the cone at Modena to house both civil and religious functions,<sup>41</sup> it is fitting that it should formally express both uses.

The Muggiò cone would have been white; the one at Modena will be red. Originally the concrete of the Modena cone was to be

his attack on the Rossi project. In *Boullée*, tav. 52, Rossi reproduces another Boullée conical cenotaph which has slimmer proportions than the one illustrated here, and thus is closer to the actual shape of the Modena cone. See also E. Sekler, "Formalism and the Polemical Use of History: Thoughts on the Recent Rediscovery of Revolutionary Classicism," *The Harvard Architectural Review*, 1, 1980, 34.

40. Le Corbusier, *Oeuvre complète 1952-1957*, New York, 1957, 94. See also note 42 below.

41. Rossi, Modena, *Concorso*: "... in questo edificio si svolgono cerimonie ... di carattere religioso e civile."



Fig. 19. Aldo Rossi, Elementary School, Fagnano Olona, 1972, exterior (Moschini, *Aldo Rossi*, tav. 54).

unpainted;<sup>42</sup> it changed color in 1976, in an attempt, I believe, to underline one of its meanings. Red is the color of smokestacks, and a red smokestack dominates the central axis of Rossi's elementary school at Fagnano Olona, 1972 (Fig. 19). In the paintings of Giorgio de Chirico from 1912 to 1917, conical towers and smokestacks abound. No less than nine pictures by de Chirico, containing cones, smokestacks, or both, appeared in an exhibition of his work held in Milan in the spring of 1970.<sup>43</sup> A white cone, very close to the one Rossi designed for Muggiò, is in the background of *Weariness of the Infinite* of 1912,<sup>44</sup> while a red smokestack, a red cone, and a white cone are juxtaposed at the top of *The Philosopher's Conquest* of 1914 (Fig. 20).<sup>45</sup> A single smokestack dominates *The Agony of Parting* of 1913-1914 (Fig. 21),<sup>46</sup> and another single smokestack rises inside the courtyard of a factory, in a position reminiscent of that of the cone at Modena, in *Metaphysical Interior with Small Factory* of 1917.<sup>47</sup> Rossi himself, in his essay of 1971 on the Modena project, called the cone the chimney of an abandoned factory.<sup>48</sup> This

42. Rossi, "The Blue of the Sky," 33: "The conic tower . . . has a cement finish, utilizing the technique of building towers for industrial plants."

43. Comune di Milan, *Giorgio de Chirico*, Milan, 1970, cat. 7, 11, 12, 13, 14, 23, 24, 28, 31.

44. *Ibid.*, cat. 7.

45. *Ibid.*, cat. 14.

46. *Ibid.*, cat. 13.

47. *Ibid.*, cat. 31. This picture, in a private collection in Milan, seems to have played a very important role in Rossi's 1976 competition project for the Casa dello studente at Chieti. Moschini, *Aldo Rossi*, pls. 80-81.

48. Rossi, Modena, *Concorso*: "... il cono è la ciminiera di una fabbrica deserta."

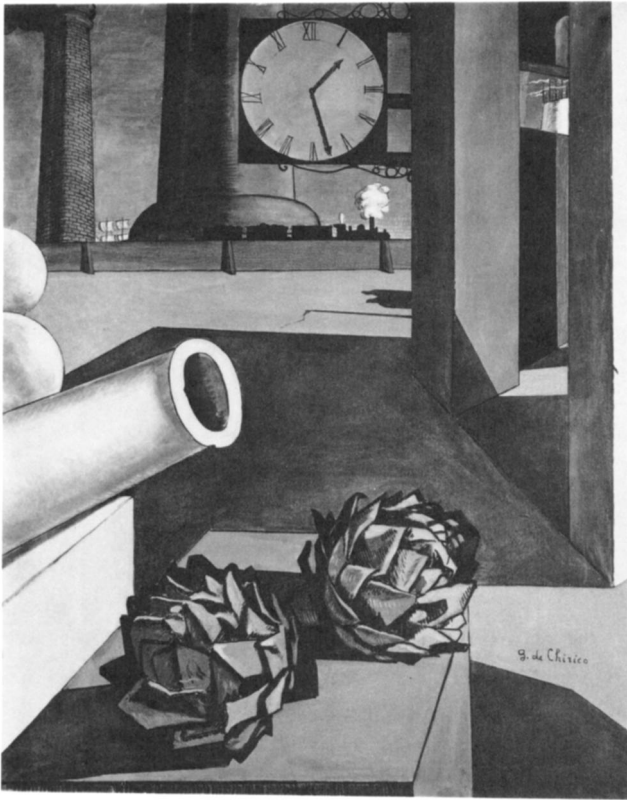


Fig. 20. Giorgio de Chirico, *The Philosopher's Conquest*, 1914, The Art Institute of Chicago (courtesy of The Art Institute of Chicago).

analogy must surely have been suggested by de Chirico's paintings, which seem to have had an immediate impact on his work following the exhibition of 1970.

The suggestion of a smokestack in the context of a cemetery obviously raises the issue of cremation. We would be left to speculate on this point, were it not for the fact that Rossi's smokestack/cone rises precisely in that part of Piranesi's Campo Marzio plan labeled *Bustum Hadriani* (Fig. 6). Since World War II, smokestacks in the context of death raise the spectre of Nazi concentration camps. To Rossi, a European Jew born in 1931, memories of these camps must be considered as strongly felt presences.<sup>49</sup> Indeed, 18 kilometers north of the Modena cemetery on the Modena-Verona rail line lies the concentration camp of Fossoli di Carpi, established by the Germans in 1944 as a point for the deportation of Italian Jews to Auschwitz.<sup>50</sup> With this cone/smokestack Rossi has converted an allusion to oppres-

49. Savi, *Aldo Rossi*, 138, finds overtones of the concentration camp at Modena and in Rossi's project for the Casa dello studente at Trieste, 1974. He explains this observation geographically: "la Casa dello studente a Trieste è vicina all'risiera di San Saba e il cimitero di Modena al Lager di Fossoli." The suggestion of a concentration camp did not escape Frampton, *Modern Architecture*, 291.

50. See M. Michaelis, *Mussolini and the Jews: German-Italian Relations and the Jewish Question in Italy, 1922-1945*, Oxford, 1978, esp. Ch. x.

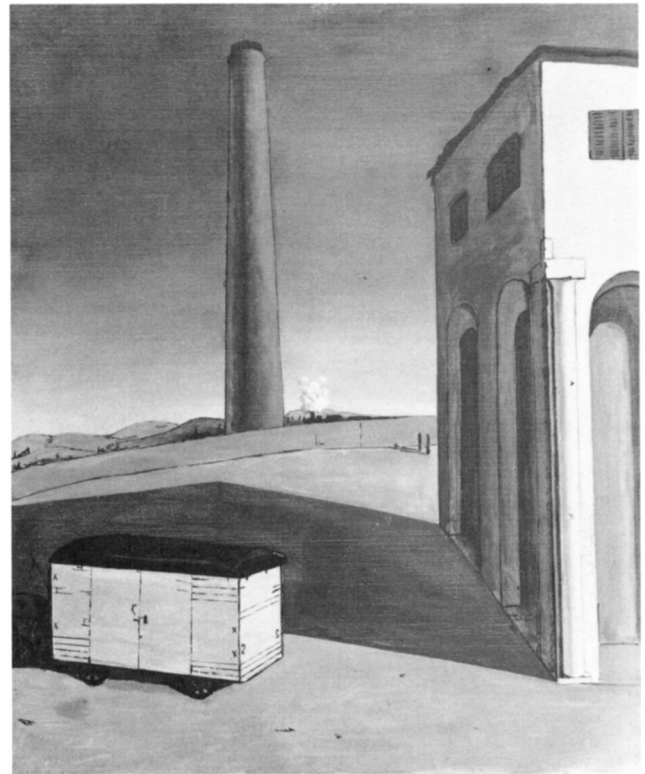


Fig. 21. Giorgio de Chirico, *The Anguish of Departure*, ca. 1913-1914, Albright-Knox Art Gallery, Buffalo, New York, The Room of Contemporary Art Fund, 1939 (courtesy of the Albright-Knox Art Gallery).

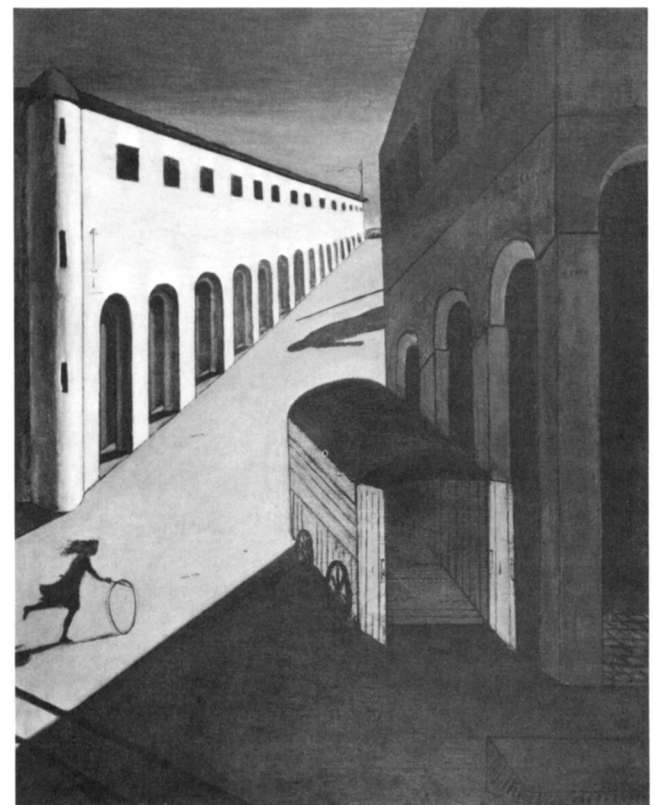


Fig. 22. Giorgio de Chirico, *The Mystery and Melancholy of a Street*, 1914 (Private Collection).



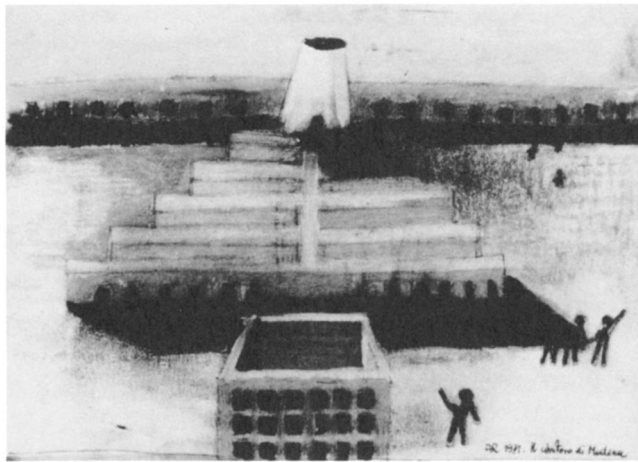


Fig. 23. Aldo Rossi, Modena Cemetery, 1971, drawing (Alyce Kaprow).

sion and destruction into a monument to the oppressed. Cremation will not take place in Rossi's cone.

#### *The Triangle and the U-Shaped Building*

In Rossi's city of the dead, porticoes occur in the triangle and in the U-shaped building that embraces it (Fig. 2). If the cities of Rossi's home territory, Emilia and Lombardy, are famous for any urban forms, it is for their porticoed streets and squares. Rossi's porticoes, however, are filtered through a painter's vision of the cityscape of north Italy, the buildings that define the sun-struck piazzas of de Chirico's early paintings, such as *The Mystery and Melancholy of a Street* of 1914 (Fig. 22). Of de Chirico, Rossi writes:

In [my] project for the piazza of the Pilotta at Parma [1964] I sought to understand the architectural relations of the cities of Emilia through the space of the porticoes, the piazzas, the architecture of shadows. . . . There does not exist, perhaps, a more precise, and architectonic relation between study and reality than the piazzas of Italy of De Chirico. . . .<sup>51</sup>

The loneliness and implicit silence of de Chirico's paintings, their melancholy and mystery are made concrete in Rossi's cemetery, while the painter's forceful play of light and shade informs both Rossi's buildings and copious graphic work, as exemplified in a small drawing of 1971, a de Chirico-like fantasy on the Modena project (Fig. 23). Rossi even adopts de Chirico's technique of turning humans into shadows, as in the portrayal of the little girl in *Mystery and Melancholy of a Street* (Fig. 22).<sup>52</sup> Shadows walk

51. A. Rossi, "Architettura e città: passato e presente," *Werk*, 4, September 1972, 108. Reprinted in Rossi, *Scritti scelti*, 474–481: "... nel progetto per la Piazza della Pilotta di Parma, ho cercato di capire i rapporti architettonici delle città emiliane attraverso lo spazio dei portici, delle piazze dell'architettura delle ombre; queste sono le motivazioni che l'architettura trae da quanto la circonda. Non esiste forse un rapporto più preciso, e architettonico, tra studio e realtà delle Piazze d'Italia di De Chirico. . . ."

52. This picture was also in the exhibition of works by de Chirico at

in Rossi's shadowy cemetery, a city of the dead that approaches the surreal.<sup>53</sup>

The triangle at Modena is composed of urban housing blocks that may briefly suggest the *superquadras* of Brasilia (Fig. 24). Closely placed, the blocks alternate blank walls with porticoes in such a way that every other space between the blocks becomes a short street flanked by *logge*. That Rossi intends this pattern to be analogous to city streets is made abundantly clear in one of his most complex drawings, *The Analogous City* (*La Città Analoga*) of 1976 (Fig. 25).<sup>54</sup> In the upper right-hand corner of the drawing, a youth points directly to a plan of the Modena triangle, which is placed inside the walls of Cesare Cesariano's 16th-century reconstruction of the Vitruvian city and juxtaposed with that city's street pattern.

There is an extraordinary parallel between Rossi's insertion of his triangle into a centrally planned Renaissance city and a small sketch by Leonardo da Vinci on fol. 217v. of the *Codex Atlanticus*.<sup>55</sup> Here Leonardo lays out a triangular residential quarter, with stepped sides, that radiates from a centrally planned square placed in the middle of the city (Fig. 26). The same pattern occurs in Rossi's drawing of the cemetery triangle. It also relates to the old city in a manner that recalls the relationship of Loos's Michaelerplatz building to *Alt Wien*. It is clear from Rossi's writings, especially from his *L'architettura della città*, 1966, that he knows some Leonardo drawings,<sup>56</sup> but it is not clear that he knows this particular sketch.

Palazzo Reale, Milan, in the spring of 1970: Milano, *Giorgio de Chirico*, cat. 15. In his essay for the catalogue, W. Schmied, *op. cit.*, 8, described this picture in a way that may have struck a responsive chord in Rossi: "Vista così, in controluce, la bambina . . . sembra essa stessa un'ombra, un buio profilo."

53. Both the relationship to de Chirico and the quasi-surrealist nature of the cemetery have been noted by Moneo, "Idea," 18, and others.

54. This drawing is rich enough to deserve a separate analysis. The city maps that it contains are made up of plans of *édifices trouvés*, such as the Spanish Steps and Borromini's S. Carlo alle Quattro Fontane, both in Rome. These buildings, shown only in plan, are juxtaposed with three-dimensional renderings of Rossi's own projects. Here Rossi creates "analogous cities" similar to the one in Canaletto's capriccio with three Palladian designs: Palazzo Chiericati, the Rialto Bridge project, and the Basilica at Vicenza (Parma, Galleria Nazionale). This picture, extremely important as a source for Rossi's ideas about the city, is discussed in A. Rossi, "L'architettura della ragione come architettura di tendenza," *Illuminismo e architettura del 700 veneto*, Castelfranco Veneto, 1969. Reprinted in Rossi, *Scritti scelti*, 370–378. The painting is taken up again in Rossi's introduction to the Portuguese edition (Lisbon, 1977) of *L'architettura della città*, reprinted in Rossi, *Scritti scelti*, 443–453. This latter essay, a splendidly brief and lucid exposition of the architect's views on architecture and the city, has been reprinted in slightly modified form in A. Rossi, *L'architettura della città*, 4th ed., 234–246.

55. Accademia dei Lincei, *Il codice atlantico di Leonardo da Vinci*, ed. G. Piumate, Milan, 1894–1904, DCCXIX.

56. Rossi, *L'architettura della città*, 4th ed., 215. Here Rossi discusses Leonardo's drawings of a city with multiple levels of circulation. Rossi, 154, also notes Leonardo's numerous drawings of centrally planned churches. In A. Rossi, "I piani regolatori della città di Milano," *Scritti*

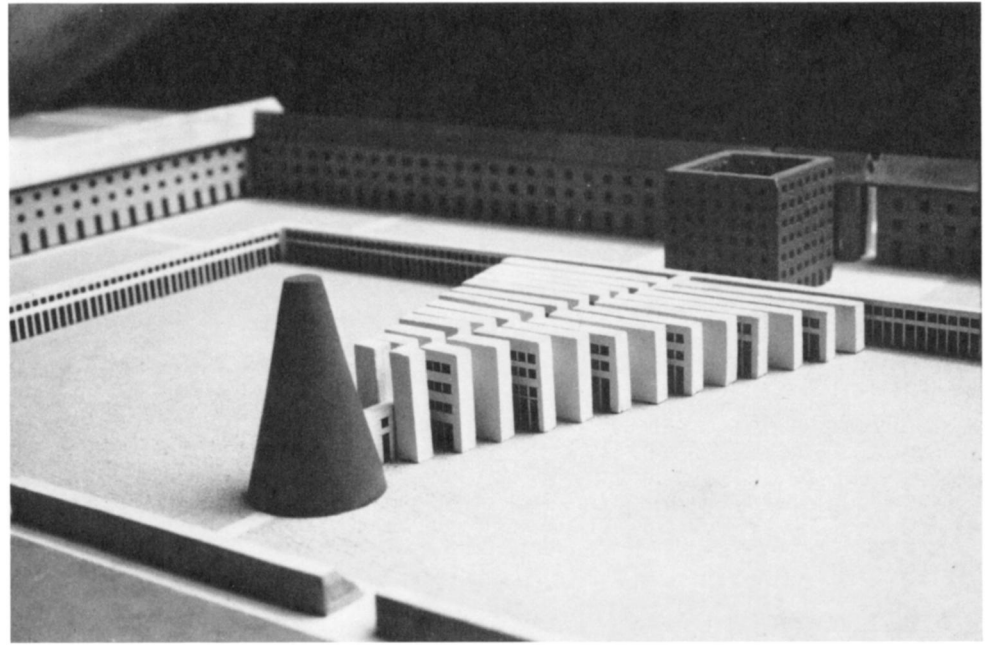


Fig. 24. Aldo Rossi, Modena Cemetery, 1976, model, from northwest, detail of central buildings (Alyce Kaprow).

The rather troubled young man who points out the triangle is David, as painted around 1620 by the Lombard artist Tanzio da Varallo (Fig. 27). Although this “David” normally hangs in relative obscurity in the Pinacoteca di Varallo, the painting was in Milan in 1973 in the exhibition *Il seicento lombardo*.<sup>57</sup> Presumably Rossi saw it here. Rossi removed the head of Goliath from David’s left hand and redrew the index finger so that it points to the Modena triangle. One hesitates to speculate on the meaning of this sardonic switch.

The urban character of Rossi’s triangle is only part of its meaning. As the blocks that project from the central corridor grow shorter, they grow taller, creating a giant set of steps clearly related, as we noted, to the steps inside the cube of the Cuneo project (Fig. 13). The idea for a set of colossal triangular steps<sup>58</sup>

*scelti*, 263, he mentions Leonardo’s city planning efforts for Lodovico Sforza in Milan.

57. Comune di Milano, *Il Seicento Lombardo, Catalogo dei dipinti e delle sculture*, Milan, 1973, cat. 151, tav. 175. I am extremely grateful to Rafael Fernandez for leading me to this picture.

58. Another analogy may be drawn between Rossi’s steps and Giovanni Greppi’s cemetery at Redipuglia. There, ascending a hillside, 22 colossal steps contain the bodies of 100,000 Italians who died in World War I. At the base, the steps are preceded by the cubic, monolithic sarcophagus of the Duke of Aosta. (R. Aloï, *Architettura funeraria moderna*, 2nd ed., Milan, 1948, 23.) Rossi mentions Redipuglia in relation to his design for the Casa dello studente at Trieste of 1974: “Il modello di questa collina [at Trieste] formata e costruita da una gradinata a terrazzo è in tutte le città che si sviluppano su livelli diversi ma soprattutto nella collina di Redipuglia che costituisce dimora e ricordo di altri giovani; a Redipuglia ogni retorica è allontanata dalla conformazione del terreno fino a confondere storia e geografia. Qui il rapporto con la salita del terreno è impostato in modo analogico rispetto a Redipuglia accettando anche il limite sottile che si stabilisce tra città dei vivi e città dei morti.” (A. Rossi, “La calda vita. Concorso per una Casa dello studente a Trieste, 1974,” in Savi, *Aldo Rossi*, 254.)

was probably suggested to Rossi by Hannes Meyer’s project for the Basel cemetery (Fig. 15). Admittedly, in the Meyer project the great steps are curved in plan to conform to a hillside, but in the elevation drawing of the project the curve is flattened out; the segment of a cone which the steps would have defined becomes a rather flat triangle. Meyer’s steps lead up to a round building capped by a conical roof, the *columbarium*, that seems to have influenced Rossi’s cube. On the other hand, the relationship between steps and centrally planned building in the Meyer project is very close to the relationship between triangle and cone in many of Rossi’s bird’s eye views of the Modena design (Figs. 7, 23).

From the elevated perspective that Rossi frequently uses to show the triangle, it takes on the character of a stepped pyramid, a type we know from the oldest monumental funerary complex we have, that of the Pharaoh Zoser at Saqqara, of ca. 2650 B.C. But the pyramid at Modena does not stand erect. Rather, it appears tilted over and partially sunk into the ground, perhaps once again a reference to Boullée’s notion of an *architecture ensevelie*.

Why suggest a tilted, partly buried pyramid? The explanation is found in a paper Rossi read in Turin in September 1970, at the congress on the 18th-century Piedmontese architect Bernardo Vittone. In this paper, entitled “The Architecture of the Enlightenment,” Rossi quoted a passage from Hannes Meyer’s essay “The Soviet Architect”:

... 150 years ago, with the French Revolution, a new ruling class emerged in western Europe from the collapsing feudal society, the free bourgeoisie. The result of this historic crisis, as it affected architecture was a new concept of ‘Classicism’. . . . Down with the baroque and rococo of the feudal lords!

Liberty, fraternity and equality for all citizens and ho! for a new architecture.

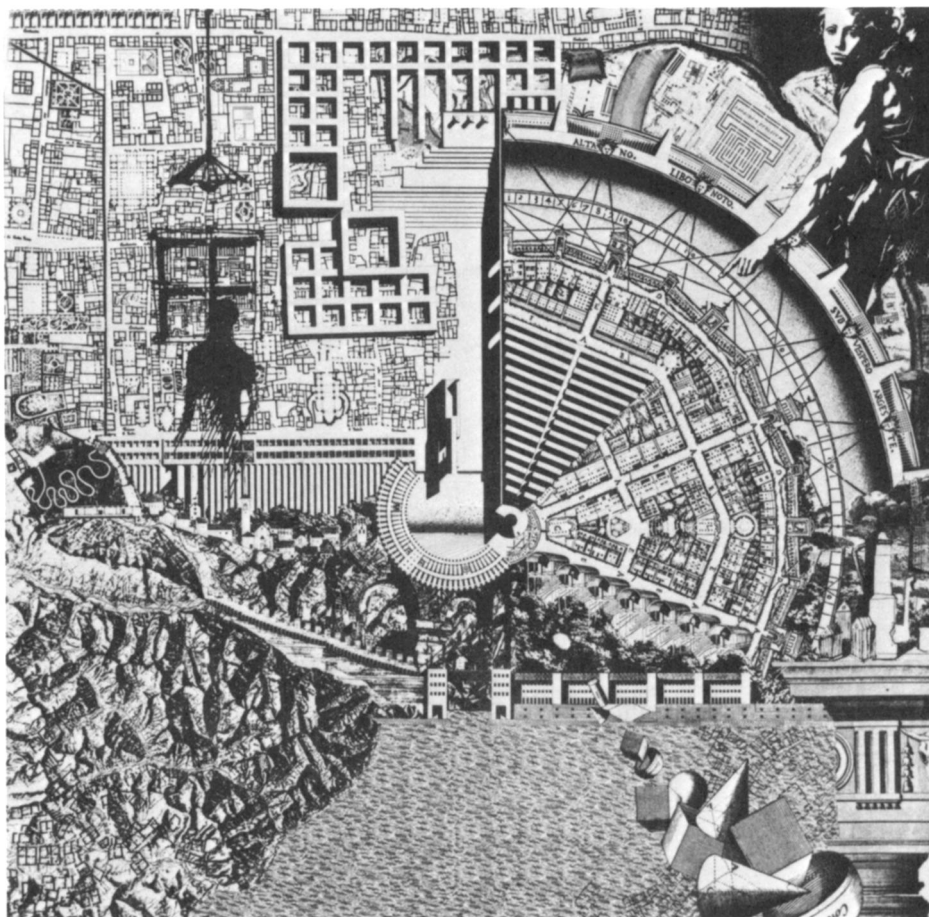


Fig. 25. Aldo Rossi, *The Analogous City*, 1976, drawing (Moschini, Aldo Rossi, tav. 87).

It was in this period of transition that the French architect Claude-Nicolas Ledoux, who had been employed by worn out nobles to build palaces of languid baroque, decided to throw away his aristocratic notions and to take an active part in the bourgeois revolutionary movement. . . . He designed the 'City of Salinas'. . . . Among his plans for private houses some are remarkable for their pyramidal form; these he called 'Houses for Foresters' [Fig. 28]. On the square base of these modest houses he placed a pyramidal stone roof. In all architectural periods the pyramid had symbolized the dominant power of king or priest (e.g. the pyramids of Gizeh, of Cestus-Rome [*sic*], of Teotihuacán-Mexico, etc.). This architect deliberately handed over the pyramid to the new dominant class and placed it in the service of the liberated and revolutionary bourgeoisie. Daring deed!<sup>59</sup>

The pyramid at Modena appears partly buried because it has been overturned, an act of revolution, to say the least. As Ledoux gave the pyramid to the bourgeoisie, Rossi has given it to the *popolo*, a deed that suits his own politics as well as those of his client, the Communist government of Modena. Thus Rossi has answered the question posed in 1942 by Hannes Meyer in "The Soviet Architect": "Shall we, the architects of the democratic

countries, be found ready to hand over the pyramids to the society of the future?"<sup>60</sup>

#### *The Remains of Man*

Rossi says the Modena triangle/pyramid resembles vertebrae because, when he was first thinking of the cemetery project, he was in a hospital in Yugoslavia, recovering from an automobile accident.<sup>61</sup> Although Rossi is well known for the stress he lays on

60. Meyer, "The Soviet Architect," 32.

61. Rossi has stated this idea in several places—for instance, Modena, *Concorso*: the cone and cube "sono collegati alla spina centrale degli ossari con una configurazione osteologica." Later in the same essay, speaking of the same form, he writes: "Si configura così una forma analogica alla colonna vertebrale, o comunque una conformazione osteologica." See too A. Rossi, "My Designs and the Analogous City," *Aldo Rossi in America*, 18, and A. Rossi, "The Meaning of Analogy in My Last Projects," The Cooper Union School of Architecture, *Solitary Travelers*, New York, 1980, 94. According to Savi, *Aldo Rossi*, 34–36, the skeleton motif appears in Rossi's drawings as early as 1969. The form may have developed out of the Scandici project of the previous year (see note 32 above), and it continued into the early stages of the planning of the elementary school at Fagnano Olona in 1972. Savi, 36, illustrates a sketch of a fish skeleton in the margins of a Rossi drawing for Modena, and then recalls a passage from *The Old Man and the Sea*, by one of Rossi's favorite writers, Ernest Hemingway. See also, *ibid.*, 126, tav. 36–37, two Rossi drawings of 1970 that show skeletal forms con-

59. H. Meyer, "The Soviet Architect," *Task*, 3, 1942, 32. Rossi, "L'architettura del illuminismo," 217–218, made use not of Meyer's English text, quoted here, but of F. Dal Co's translation of the English text into Italian (see note 44 above). For Meyer's distortions of history in this passage, see Sekler, "Formalism," 34–35.

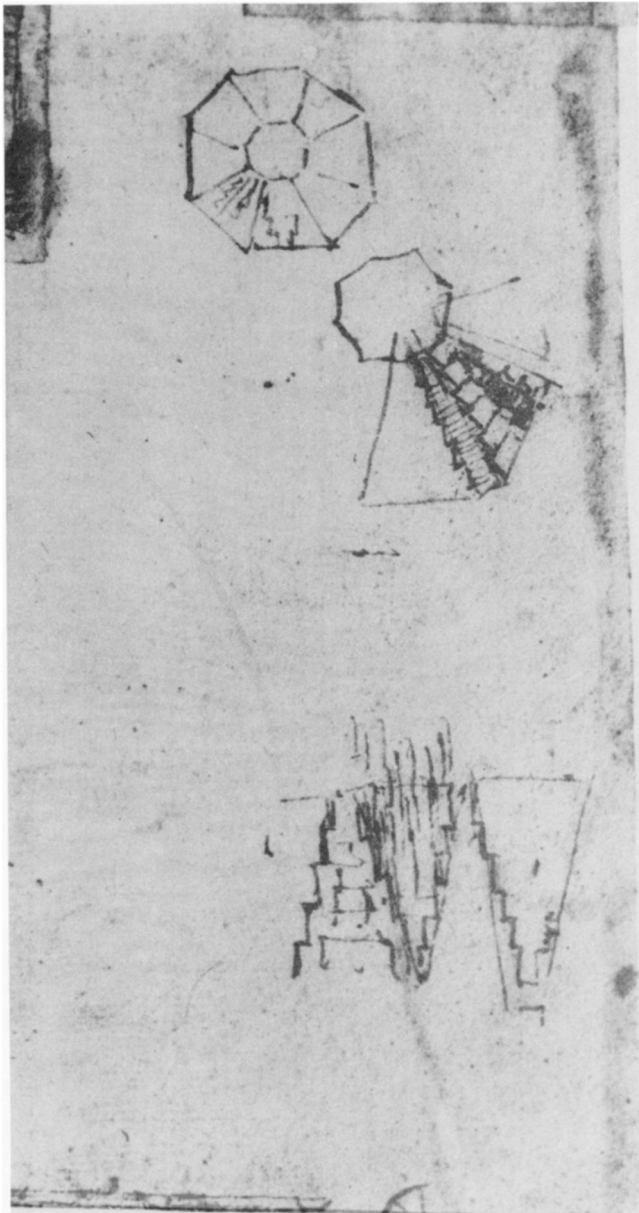


Fig. 26. Leonardo da Vinci, a radially planned city, drawing, *Codex Atlanticus*, fol. 217v., detail (Accademia dei Lincei, *Il codice atlantico di Leonardo da Vinci*, ed. G. Piumate, Milan, 1894-1904, DCCXIX).

the autonomous nature of architecture,<sup>62</sup> he emphatically leaves room in his theory for autobiographical elements.<sup>63</sup>

The triangle (Fig. 1), composed of a spine with attached blocks, does indeed suggest a rib cage. If we move back to survey the

nected to round forms, and, in tav. 36, blocks, connected to a spine, that increase in height and length as they approach an apparently circular, stepped tower. Thus the ideas of stepped blocks, linked to a central corridor, and of a building planned in the form of an abstract rib cage, occurred in Rossi's work before he began the Modena designs.

62. For instance, Rossi, Modena, *Concorso*, writes: "L'architettura non deve fare altro che usare i propri elementi con coerenza, rifiutando ogni suggestione che non nasca dal suo stesso costruirsi." On this point,

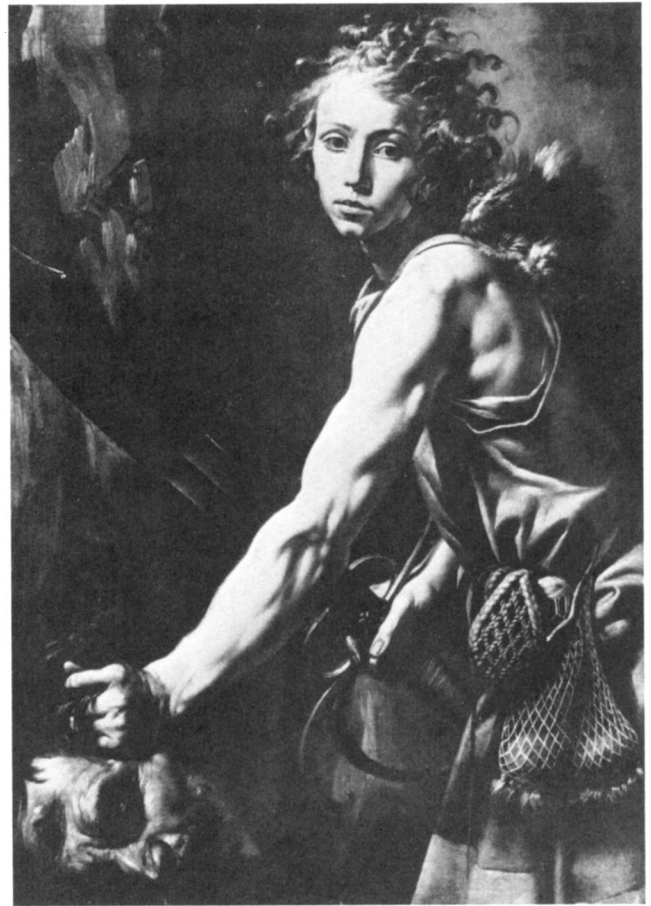


Fig. 27. Tazio da Varallo, *David and Goliath*, ca. 1620, Pinacoteca, Varallo, n. 57 (photo by Sergio Anelli, courtesy of Electa Editrice, Milan).

central buildings of the Modena complex, we realize that those rib bones are connected to other parts of a body (Fig. 29). The cube is a head; the U-shaped porticoes form shoulders and arms.<sup>64</sup> In this context the cone becomes a 25 m. phallus that carries the dual, and wholly unexpected, meaning of cremation and generation, of death and life. There is even, inside the cone, a kind of seminal material, the bones of the indigent in the common grave. "Ironical act!" we might well exclaim. But Rossi has more in mind than irony.

see Moneo, "Idea," 4f. Despite the strong nature of such a statement, which seems to leave very little room for equivocation, Rossi feels that critics of his work have forced him into too strict a mold. In the introduction to the Portuguese edition of *L'architettura della città* (*Scritti scelti*, 443), he writes: "In realtà io no ho mai parlato di una autonomia assoluta della architettura o di una architettura *an sich* come alcuni pretendono di farmi dichiarare ma semplicemente mi sono preoccupato di stabilire quali fossero le proposizioni tipiche dell'architettura."

63. Rossi, introduction to *Boullée*, 18. "Non esiste arte che non sia autobiografica." See also note 62 above.

64. Rossi, Modena, *Concorso*, points out the arm-like character of this part of the design: "... questa spina centrale o vertebra si dilata verso la base e le braccia dell'ultimo corpo trasversale tendono a richiudersi."

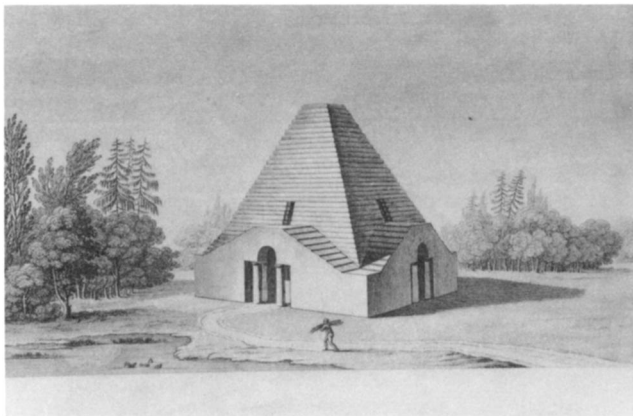


Fig. 28. Claude Nicolas Ledoux, project for a Woodman's House, Chaux, 1773-1779 (Claude Nicolas Ledoux, *L'architecture considérée sous le rapport de l'art*, Paris, 1804, I, 102).

The shadows in Rossi's numerous graphic works based on the Modena project reveal Rossi's further purpose.<sup>65</sup> Indeed, shadows are so necessary to show Rossi's ends that he sometimes makes them fall, against nature, to the south (Figs. 7, 23). Although his pictorial rendering of shadows is based on de Chirico's works, the idea of shadows in a cemetery derives from Boullée's text. Writing of funerary architecture, Boullée recalls a night in the country when he saw his shadow cast on the ground by the light of the moon. An idea came to him: an architecture of shadows. In such an architecture, the masses of objects detach themselves in black, producing in the beholder "une tristesse extrême."<sup>66</sup> Rossi, in his introduction to Boullée, pays homage to the force of this idea and then carries it even beyond extreme sadness. The effect of light, writes Rossi, is at one with that of time.<sup>67</sup>

For the final version of the Modena cemetery Rossi replaced the north wall with a bank of steps that seems to belong to a stadium (Fig. 29), an idea probably suggested by the two stadia in Piranesi's Hadrianic necropolis (Fig. 6).<sup>68</sup> The steps are the

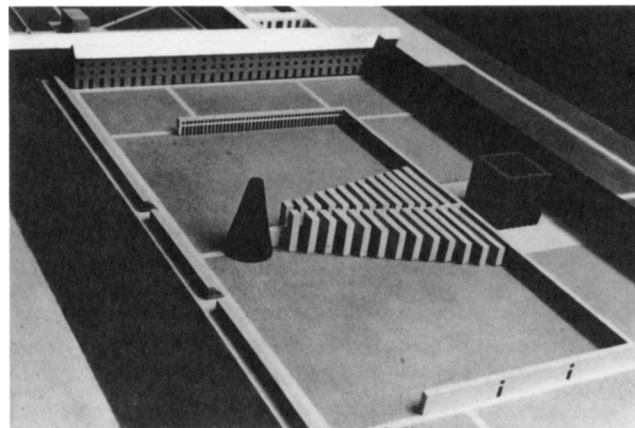


Fig. 29. Aldo Rossi, Modena Cemetery, 1976, model, from northwest (Alyce Kaprow).

only part of Rossi's composition that appear to be exclusively for the use of the living. But what drama will unfold for the spectators who take their seats there, amid the trees? The sun, moving across the sky, will create a spectacle of time. The dancers in this spectacle will be shadows cast by the cone and stepped pyramid, by Rossi's prostrate, procreating, colossal skeleton that contains, in its ribs, houses of the dead, and that is contained by the prison bars of the gate beyond its head.

This meaning of the cemetery as an arena of time, of death, and of regeneration is clarified in one of Rossi's most poetic passages in his introduction to Boullée.

The monument, having overcome its relation to history, becomes geography. Perhaps, is not the light that creates shadows the same light that consumes matter, giving us a more authentic image of that which artists themselves want to give us? For this, more than because it is personal and collective at once, architecture is the most important of the arts and sciences, for its cycle is natural, like the cycle of man, but it is what *remains* of man.<sup>69</sup>

69. Rossi, introduction to Boullée, 20. "Il monumento, superato il suo rapporto con la storia, diventa geografia; e la luce che crea le ombre non è forse la stessa luce che corrode la materia, dandoci un'immagine più autentica di quella che gli stessi artisti volevano offrirci? Con questo, ancora di più che per essere personale e collettiva a un tempo, l'architettura è la più importante delle arti e delle scienze; perchè il suo ciclo è naturale come il ciclo dell'uomo ma è quanto *resta* dell'uomo" (italics author's).

65. For another view of shadows in Rossi's drawings, see Eisenman, "The House," 9.

66. Rosenau, *Boullée's Treatise*, 82.

67. Rossi, introduction to *Boullée*, 20. "B. . . non vede . . . come l'effetto della luce sia tutt'uno con quello del tempo." See also Rossi's remark about the monument at Segrate (Savi, *Aldo Rossi*, 178): "La piazza e il monumento costruiscono un architettura delle ombre; le ombre segnano il tempo e il passaggio delle stagioni."

68. Rossi is fascinated by arenas in urban contexts. See, for instance, *L'architettura della città*, 4th ed., 110-112 and ill. 49-55.