CEMETERY ARCHITECTURE

Mors Construens by Bianca Felicori

In Italy, the most widespread religion is Christianity. The Church, embracing the joys and hopes, the sorrows and anxieties of all men and women of all times,[1] ritualizes death. The celebration of this passage follows a precise and traditional ritual, which starts by defining the space where it should take place: the funeral in a church and the burial rite in a cemetery. Funeral services include the "Liturgy of the Word,"[2] with or without Liturgy of the Eucharist celebration, and the rite known as "Committal and final commendation." The funeral celebration is arranged, then speeches by civil authorities, relatives, or other public figures may follow as long as they are not part of the liturgical celebration—and should possibly be held in another place. Any words in remembrance of the deceased can follow the introductory "Committal and final commendation" part and must never be voiced from the ambo, the liturgical space reserved for the proclamation of God's word in the cultural assembly. The funeral services include prayers to accompany in-ground and above-ground entombment and the deposition at the cemetery of the cinerary urn after cremation.[3]

Today, the Church must deal with the hyper-kinetic evolution of our social and cultural context. The burial ceremony of a funeral merges with elements that are not part of the celebration, such as the presence of objects of the deceased, the use of texts or images, the performance of music and songs that do not conform to the liturgy of the Church, and so forth. All this is accompanied by new forms of farewell to life, such as the scattering of the ashes after cremation, the preservation of the cinerary urn in private homes, and the spread of secular rituals. On top of all this, today physical burial is also accompanied by a virtual burial, celebrated with other users on line, or on platforms to which people can entrust the memory of a loved one. This is the case with Facebook. By googling "What happens to my Facebook account if I die?" all answers can be found in the "Help Center" section in "Profiles and Settings." There are three options: the first is the appointment of a "legacy contact" to manage a memorial account as if it were a virtual tombstone, the second is turning the account into a memorial account, and the third is permanent deletion. If one chooses the "legacy contact," that person may take care of the profile of the person after their death; Facebook in fact strongly recommends this option to assure a second never-ending virtual life. The "legacy contact" will be in charge of accepting or turning down friend requests, posts, may change the profile and cover picture, and so on. If the choice falls on the memorial account, the profile will become an open space for the celebration of the deceased. The words "In memory of" will appear next to the name, and friends will be able to post messages on the wall, all the content that was previously shared will remain in place, as will other formal aspects. If the profile is permanently deleted, all messages, photos and posts will be removed forever. But there is more: Facebook in fact suggests that friends and family of members who decide to disappear from the platform, create a group dedicated to the person who passed away, in order to share content dedicated to them, just to make a little extra profit on grief.

The accelerated evolution of society calls for a reflection aimed at understanding what the fate of cemetery architecture will be with the passing of time. If a virtual headstone will be enough for loved ones to fill their hearts with memories, what will happen to cemetery architecture? What will be its destiny? Will it be forgotten? Will there still be human significance, religious or otherwise, in visiting a grave in a cemetery? If one gets into a conversation about cemetery architecture, "there is a chance that the interlocutor won't react with much interest and give signs of being slightly bored because the topic itself is not a happy and inviting one,"[4] and this is one of the main reasons why, despite being a pillar of architectural history, this subject is often banned from conversations.

The obtuse western tendency to reduce death to a taboo is a legacy of the past that

1. See Second Ecumenical Council of the Vatican, *Pastoral Constitution on the Church in the Modern World: Gaudium et Spes* (December 7, 1965), no. 1 (EV 1, no. 1319).

2. See *Rito delle Esequie*, nos. 74-87.

3. Information regarding the celebration of Christian funeral services is drawn from the recent text by the Archbishops and Bishops of the Pastoral Region of Emilia Romagna and the Introduction to Ritual of Funeral Services by CEI (Italian Episcopal Conference). The bibliographical material was granted to the author by Father Mario Micucci. See Commissione Liturgica Regionale, *CRISTO NOSTRA SPERANZA. Orientamenti pastorali sulla celebrazione delle Esequie Cristiane* (Conferenza Episcopale Emilia Romagna, 2019).

4. B.M., "Architettura cimiteriale," *Domus*, no. 179 (November 1942): 486–487.

has gradually consolidated in our culture since the 19th century. Although "it is very difficult to study the totality of human activities without reference to death, its presence becomes a technical fact, which diminishes evocative power of its very name."

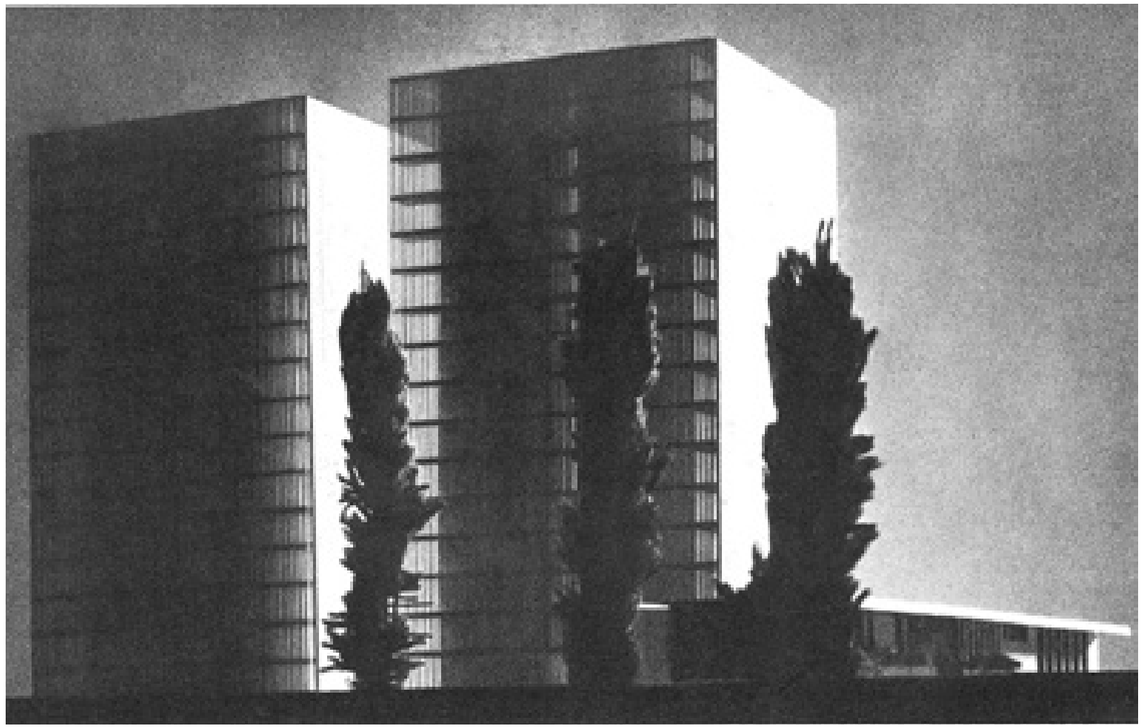
This has caused the widespread use of euphemisms, to "mask a reality that, if revealed in all its rawness, would be difficult to reconcile with the optimism of the times."[5] Added to this already tragic cultural condition is the fact that, after the great flowering of cemetery architecture in the 19th century, apart from a few important episodes, the 20th century is characterized by the design of "anonymous and banal architecture, as if the cemetery was no longer a central place in the city's topography, but something to be hidden and forgotten."[6] Perhaps the mass society of the 20th century, pressed by other urgencies, failed to recognize the centrality of this architecture, leaving projects of poor quality to posterity. Although good architecture has begun to be made again in recent years, many unresolved issues remain: between the spread of crematory practices and the saturation of space for future cemetery expansions, what will be the future of cemetery architecture? Will people abandon the idea of returning to the earth? Most importantly: will we simply visualize the virtual headstone or will we still feel the need to walk among the graves to visit our deceased loved ones?

Clearly the problem does not lie in the motivations that have led the western world to forget cemetery architecture, which is considered "secondary." Rather, it consists in the future that this architecture will have in this affluent society where it is filed in the virtual world, stuck and frozen in a reality in which we apparently never die, because the endless reproduction of images and the indigestible sharing of files, voice messages, texts, videos, and photos seem to make us eternal. If we forget for a moment that we are in the midst of a religious discourse, the issue raised by the Church regarding Christian funeral services is a common problem throughout the western world. If we also want to set aside for a moment the architectural discourse, and thus the reasons why certain cemetery architecture shared on the *Forgotten Architecture* Facebook group can be considered "forgotten," the discourse turns to the uncertain future of this typology. In the not too distant future, we will forget what it means to cross the threshold of a cemetery, to let our hearts crumple as we gaze at the hundreds of headstones we are passing. We will forget what it means to lay a bouquet of flowers where our loved one lies, and all sorts of celebratory rituals; in essence, we will forget what it means to go to a cemetery, in favor of a virtual headstone, perhaps more powerful than a stony concretization of death.

5. Francisco Javier Rodriguez Barberán, "La memoria abitata. Gli spazi della morte nella cultura europea contemporanea," in Mauro Felicori (ed.), *Gli spazi della memoria: Architettura dei cimiteri monumentali europei* (Rome: Luca Sossella Editore, 2004), 69.

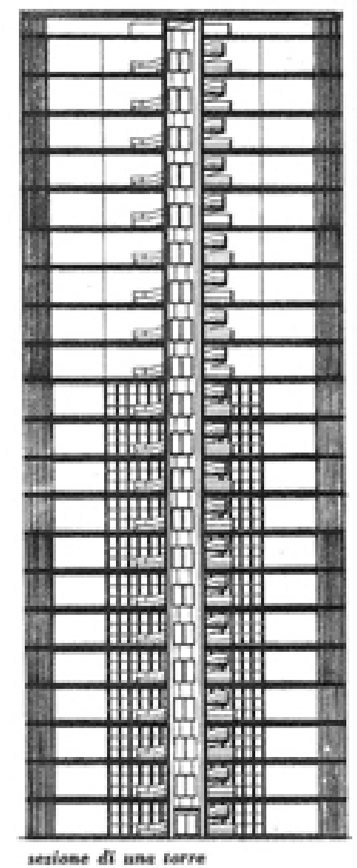
6. Mauro Felicori, "Memoria e futuro nell'architettura dei cimiteri europei," in Mauro Felicori (ed.), *Gli spazi della memoria: Architettura dei cimiteri monumentali europei* (Rome: Luca Sossella Editore, 2004), 10.

Nanda Vigo, Cemeterial Towers, Rozzano, Italy, 1959

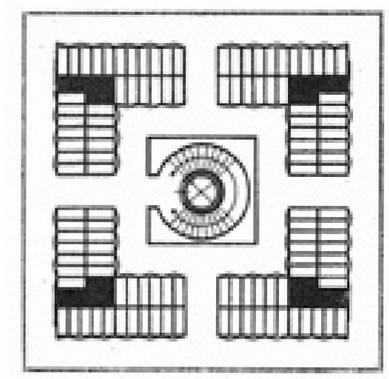


COORDINATES:	45°22'45.1"N 9°08'37.8"E
CURRENT CONDITION:	Of the entire project only the chapel, offices, niches, and florist stores have been built
PROJECT:	cemetery extension
IMAGE CREDITS:	Archivio Nanda Vigo
MENTIONED BY:	Bianca Felicori

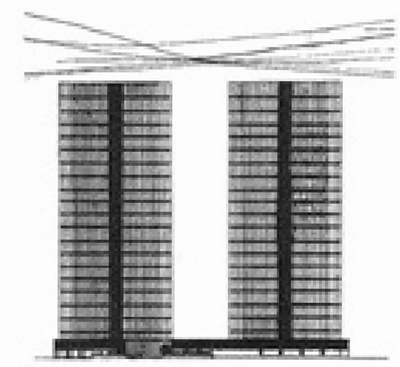
In 1959 Nanda Vigo envisioned a vertical cemetery for the municipality of Rozzano (Milan) in collaboration with engineers Corraglio and Giavanardi and architect Cesare Tacchio. The tower cemetery idea is to be read as a solution to the future saturation issue of horizontally developed 19th-century European monumental cemeteries and urban sprawl. With the proliferation of cities, in fact, cemetery areas have become increasingly closer to residential areas, preventing them from growing further. Nanda Vigo planned a bright building bearing no trace of the typically gloomy cemetery atmosphere and of burial classism since all burials in the tower are the same. The tower is quadrangular with a large centralized staircase and elevator, the internal routes are double-loop, and the niches are arranged in the space in between the outer and inner layer of the building. The project allows the insertion of chapels for groups of six or more niches. The façade consists of a series of glass window frames that can also be replaced with prefabricated brise soleil elements. Of the entire project only the chapel, offices, niches, and florist stores have been built. At the entrance Nanda Vigo chose to place a large Lucio Fontana sphere.

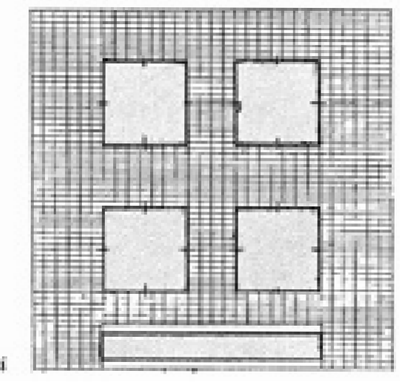


sezione di una torre

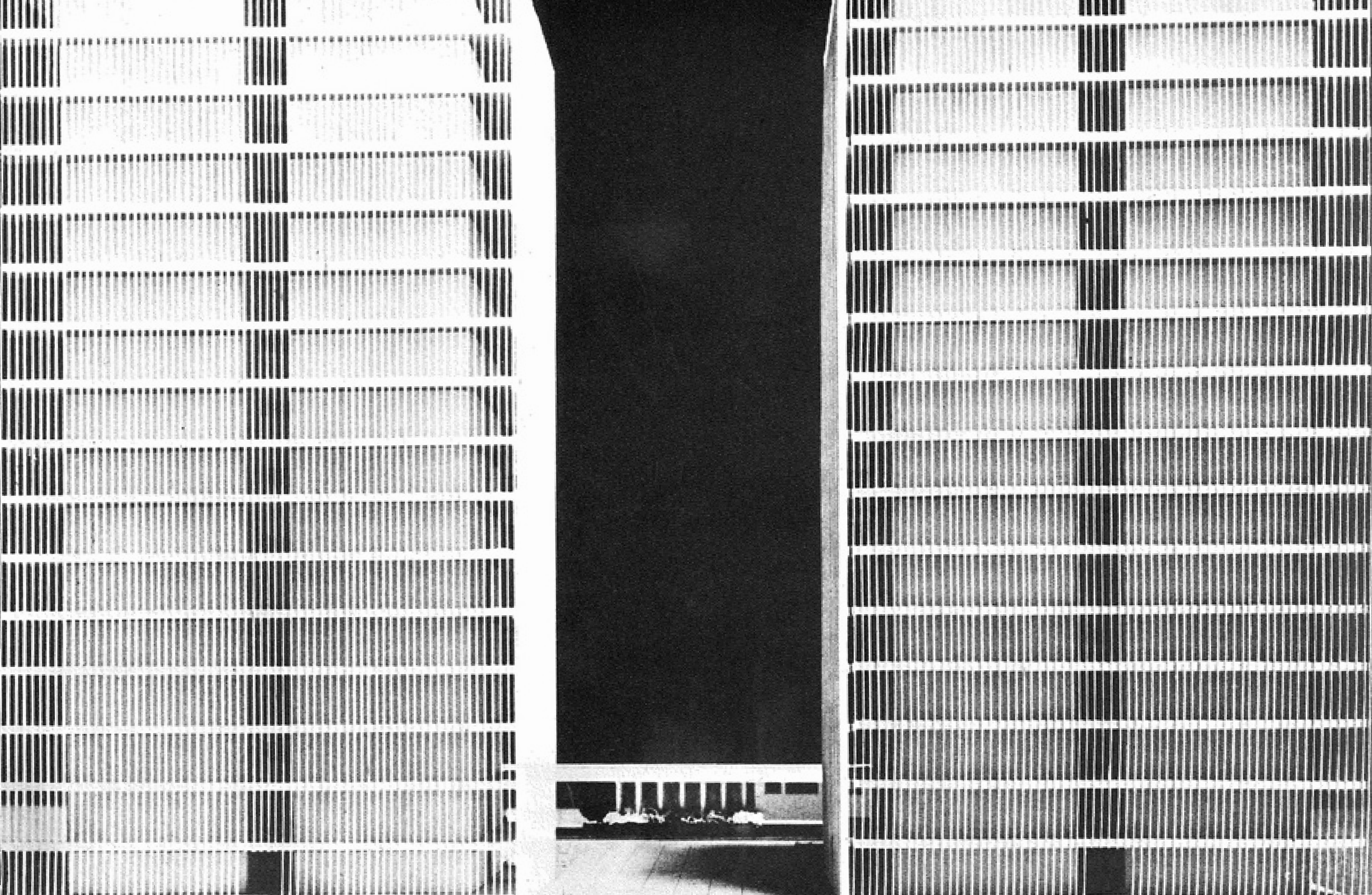


pianta di una torre





quattro torri e il corpo dei servizi

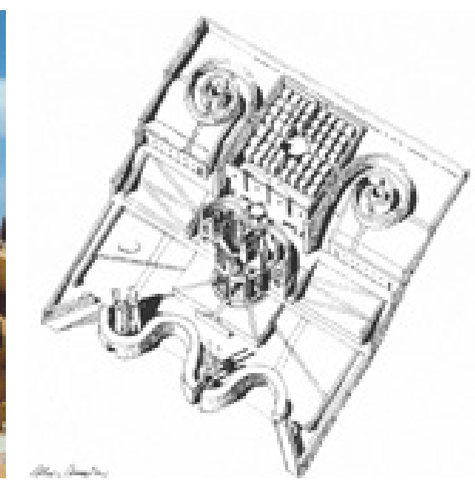


Alessandro Anselmi and Paola Chiatante, Municipal Cemetery of Parabita, Italy, 1967–82

COORDINATES:	40°03'18.8"N 18°07'29.7"E
CURRENT CONDITION:	good
PROJECT:	cemetery extension
IMAGE CREDITS:	SAA&A, Studio Alessandro Anselmi e Associati
MENTIONED BY:	Anna della Tommasina, Ilaria CZ, Gian Marco De Vitis

Between 1967 and 1982 Alessandro Anselmi and Paola Chiatante designed the new municipal cemetery of Parabita, in the province of Lecce, of which we publish an axonometric drawing and original printed photos. This cemetery was conceived as a set of buildings as described in the axonometry, linked in a unified spatial design. "The design of the Parabita cemetery," affirmed Anselmi, "was created in an atmosphere of dialogue and debate regarding the situation of Italian and European architecture in those years [...] We were obsessed with two categories that we considered constitutive of the conceptual dynamic of architecture: geometry and history, the rigor and consistency of form, that is the image that form takes on at particularly significant moments of human evolution [...] We were very young back in 1967 and proud to be exploring a new path of architectural research; we needed strong images because of our naiveté as architects, and in order to clearly define the innovative concepts. So our memory—albeit intuitively—significantly opted for the iconic image of the Corinthian capital [...] We manipulated an archetype, we distorted this image with a simple formal act: the dimensional leap, the leap of scale. The capital thus became the base of the plan of our entire project [...] Today I personally believe that this experience can be considered a thing of the past and I see as weak many of the categories that informed the design of the Parabita cemetery. However, the intelligence and daringness of that playful approach, the detachment permitted by irony, the wisdom of melancholy, as well as the definition of a methodology based on ambiguity that proves extremely effective in spaces of creativity, represent the legacy with which we are finally about to cross and visit a room that is now no longer forgotten."[1]

1. Claudia Conforti, Jacques Lucan, *Alessandro Anselmi architetto* (Milan: Electa, 1997).



Abraham Miletskyj with Ada Rybachuk and Vladimir Melnichenko, Crematorium of Kyiv, Ukraine, 1980-81

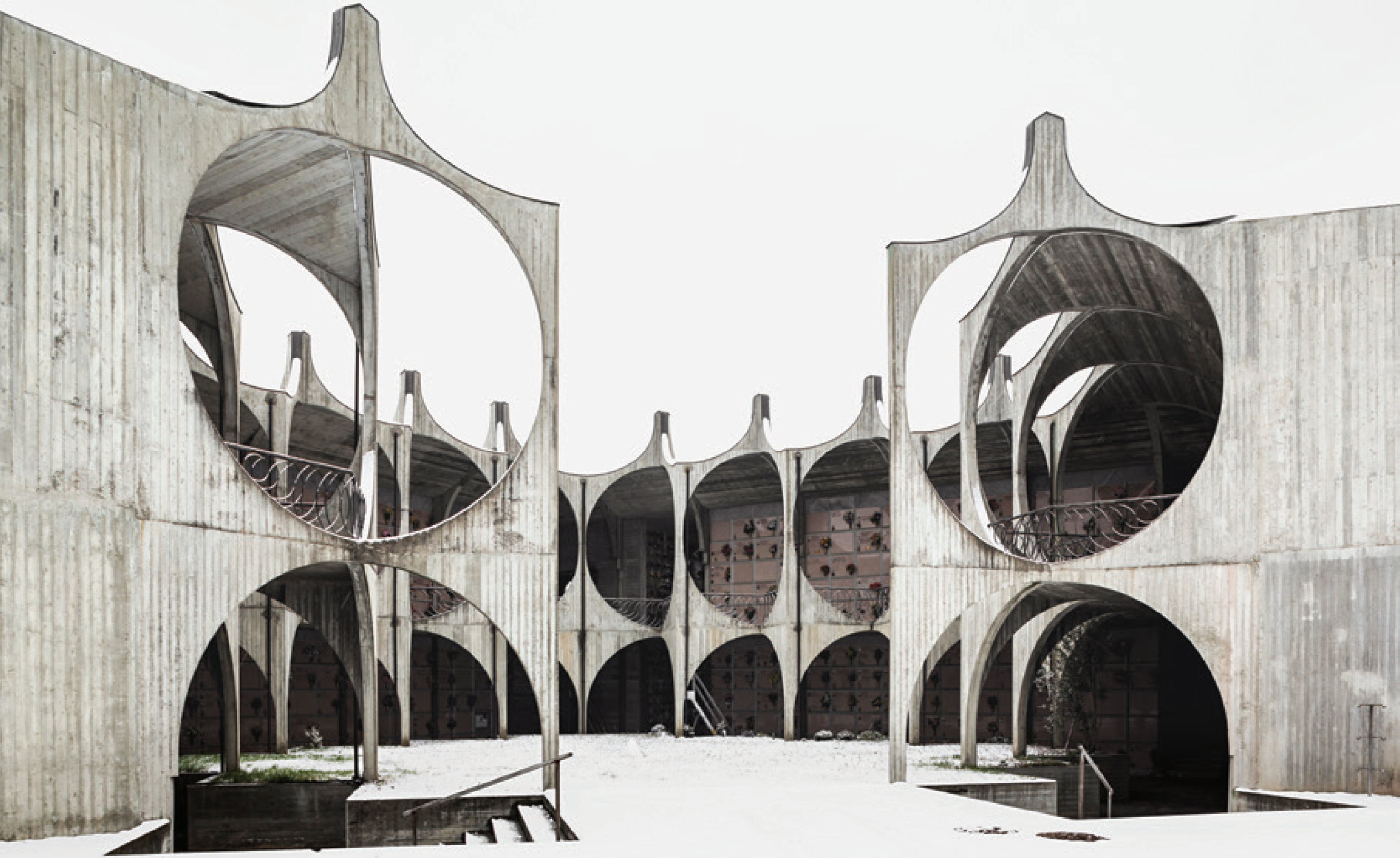
COORDINATES:	50°24'54.8"N 30°30'07.8"E
CURRENT CONDITION:	good
PROJECT:	crematorium
IMAGE CREDITS:	Gabriele Serrau
MENTIONED BY:	Gabriele Serrau

During the second half of the 1960s, architect Abraham Miletskyj was commissioned to design a project for the Kyiv crematorium, in collaboration with artists Ada Rybachuk and Vladimir Melnichenko. The development of the project was rather complex; at an early stage, the artists rejected the architect's initial design, which they felt was too focused on the functional aspects of a crematorium and not on the psychological impact that such architecture could have on those attending a ceremony. So Rybachuk and Melnichenko worked on the design of a memory park, a memory wall (that was never built), and farewell halls, spaces characterized by a strong evocative and cathartic quality. The result was a complex spatial elaboration collaboratively created by the artists and the engineers, in which art becomes totalizing while harmoniously combining with the plastic and organic forms of architecture.

Luigi Ciapparella, Extension of the Cemetery of Busto Arsizio, Italy, ca. 1970

COORDINATES:	45°36'32.4"N 8°49'43.2"E
CURRENT CONDITION:	good
PROJECT:	cemetery extension
IMAGE CREDITS:	Stefano Perego
MENTIONED BY:	Salvatore Scandurra

Located at the beginning of Via Favana, Busto Arsizio's monumental cemetery is the result of a series of projects that were developed between the 19th and 20th centuries. The 19th-century cemetery (1894) was built by engineer Ercole Seves on the model of Carlo Maciachini's cemetery in Milan. Thirty years later, a new extension was designed by architect Franco Poggi, who doubled the area; the last project, which we publish here, was done by architect Luigi Ciapparella during the 1970s. This area of the cemetery is characterized by the presence of patios, supported by exposed reinforced concrete pillars, giving the structure a mono-material appearance. The use of reinforced concrete also allowed Ciapparella to envision a cemetery architecture based on free forms, with large openings visually connecting the elevated parts to the surrounding landscape.



Mariano Pallottini, Extension of the Municipal Cemetery of Carassai, Italy, 1979-80

COORDINATES:	45°36'32.4"N 8°49'43.2"E
CURRENT CONDITION:	good
PROJECT:	cemetery extension
IMAGE CREDITS:	Francesca Girolami
MENTIONED BY:	Francesca Girolami

Mariano Pallottini was born in Carassai, in the province of Ascoli Piceno, on June 27, 1911. After graduating in Architecture from the University of Rome La Sapienza in 1937, Pallottini devoted himself to the collection of graphic and archival documentation on the historical phases of formation and transformation of urban layouts in the Marche Region, from the Neolithic age to the late Middle Ages. His work as an architect and urban planner focused on the design of private and public buildings: churches, schools, hospitals, residential and public use buildings. Among these was the expansion of the Carassai municipal cemetery, which he carried out in collaboration with architect Roberto Pallottini.

Guerino Galzerano, Tomb of Guerino Galzerano, Castelnuovo Cilento, Italy, 1979-82

COORDINATES:	40°12'52.7"N 15°10'51.1"E
CURRENT CONDITION:	good
PROJECT:	monumental tomb
IMAGE CREDITS:	Cristina Calicelli and Gabriele Mina (Costruttori di Babele)
MENTIONED BY:	Augusto Fabio Cerqua

Guerino Galzerano was born on May 2, 1922, in Castelnuovo Cilento, in the province of Salerno. His life was marked by a series of painful events, including being charged with the murder of his cousin Emanuele in 1949 for which he was arrested. After being acquitted, he married Teresa and emigrated to Germany; but in 1970, upon his return, following an argument with his wife, who was accused of adultery, he killed one of her women friends whom he believed was responsible for the betrayal. Galzerano fled but after a few days on the run he turned himself in at the Vallo della Lucania prison. He was then sent to the criminal asylum in Aversa, where he remained until 1977. It was during his time in prison that Guerino started making his first sea pebble sculptures. From 1977 onward, when he returned to Castelnuovo Cilento, he began to use pebbles to redesign the surfaces of this town, working on his house, which he made entirely with this technique, and his monumental tomb, which we publish in this chapter. Guerino Galzerano continued this practice until the day he died in July 2002.

Leonardo Ricci with Silvio Rossini and Franco Luminari, Extension of the Cemetery of Jesi, Italy, 1984-2001

COORDINATES:	43°32'10.3"N 13°15'04.9"E
CURRENT CONDITION:	good
PROJECT:	cemetery extension
IMAGE CREDITS:	Flavia Rossi
MENTIONED BY:	Federica Gerini, Marco Theseider Duprè, Benedetta Badiali, Heimo Prünster

In 1984, the project by Leonardo Ricci, developed with architect Silvio Rossini and engineer and architect Franco Luminari, won the competition announced by the municipality of Jesi for the extension of the monumental cemetery. The extension, which was completed after Ricci's death in 1994, has a trapezoidal-shaped plan, which conforms to the alignments of the pre-existing cemetery architecture. The complex is divided into several buildings enclosing a central courtyard; the most significant edifice designed by the group is the pyramid-shaped building on the north side at the highest point of the hill. This six-floor pyramid stands as a veritable landmark on the surrounding area and is visible from afar. Ricci, Rossini (a young former student of Ricci's) and Luminari chose to build this extension in reinforced concrete; the choice allowed the group to think and design blocks characterized by plastic, protruding, and indented forms. The cemetery is a real city of the dead, made up of internal routes defined by walkways at various heights.

HOFLAB, Extension of the Cemetery of Pila, Italy, 2000

COORDINATES:	43°03'31.1"N 12°20'17.3"E
CURRENT CONDITION:	good
PROJECT:	cemetery extension
IMAGE CREDITS:	HOFLAB
MENTIONED BY:	Bianca Felicori

The Pila cemetery extension is nothing like typical cemeteries (mostly characterized by a grotesque competition for the most lavish grave) and embodies the choral symbolism of a parallel city: a large, eroded tombstone intrusively welcomes a collection of revisited historical relics (a cloister, a basilica, a hollow column, an enclosure, the central plan, etc.), designed to fulfill the various required functions (private aediculae, a public columbarium, a fountain, the Thebaid, a chapel, etc.). The silent character of the outer perimeter, defined by the iteration of the private aediculae and ordered by the regular rhythm of the travertine slabs, is contrasted by the lively surrounding agricultural landscape. This hermetically compacts the interior space, paved with a bare concrete cast and marked by a votive stele that scenically concludes the main pedestrian pathway. The masonry walls of the public columbaria and equipment, finished with skimming mortar and painted in an earthy color, define an articulated sequence of alleys and small squares that, as a whole, create a picturesque city of the dead. The project was selected for the 1988 Andrea Palladio International Prize for Architecture, and the work was awarded the City of Vicenza Prize at the 2001 Dedalo Minosse International Prize for Architecture Commissions.