

## Enrico Prandi

# Architectural sculpture in Italy as a compositional method. From impressions to principles

### Abstract

This essay is a re-elaboration of a lesson held at the "Sculptural Presences" Workshop of the CSAC of Parma on 23 July 2016. The lesson entitled "Architectural sculpture" started from the hypothesis that certain 20th-century architecture had an architectural design attitude that tended towards sculpture, without actually reaching it. Architectural examples have been identified since Rationalism and throughout the 20th century which can be considered "architectural sculpture" for various characters. The thesis subsequently opened the field to more in-depth reflection on the relationship between architecture and sculpture, and above all on some common composition elements in architecture and sculpture as well as on some tendencies of architecture to present itself as a pure formal act.

### Parole Chiave

Architectural sculpture — Architecture and Sculpture — Art — Sculptural Presences — CSAC



**Fig. 1**

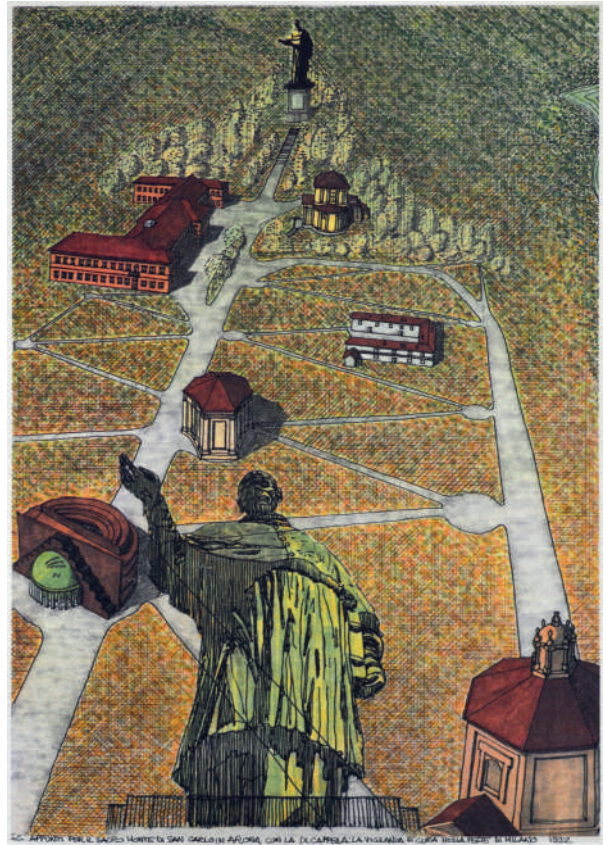
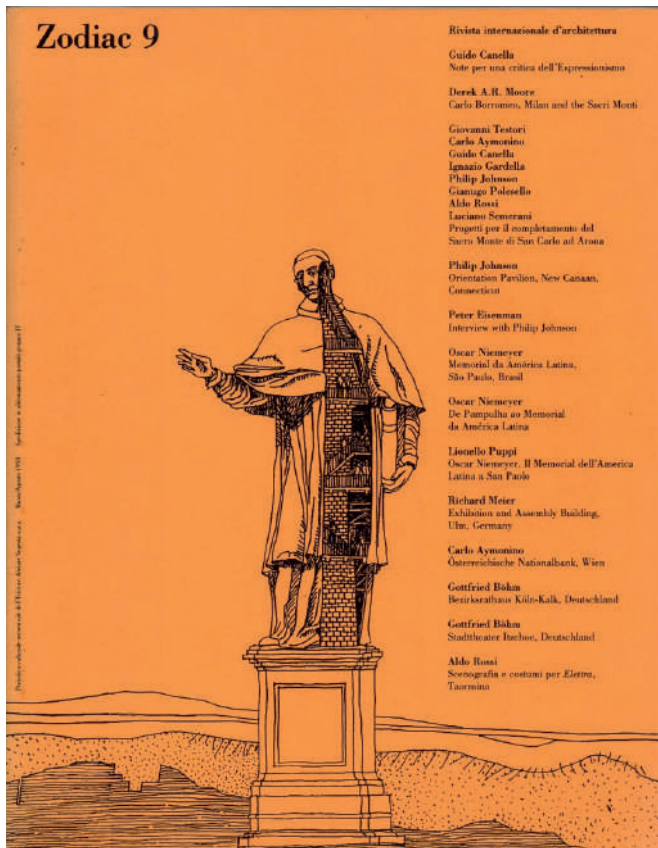
Presenze scultoree nel chiostro, nel recinto, nel parco. [Sculptural Presences in the cloister, in the enclosure, in the park]. CSAC, Parma, July 21-29, 2016.

As products of artistic creation, sculpture and architecture have a shared territory consisting of formal expression. In general, therefore, the visible manifestation of the artistic creative act can lead to one discipline or the other.

I will try to stay on a rather narrow ridge, attempting not to fall (on one side or the other) while seeking to demonstrate how there is an "architectural sculpture" that is a balanced attitude of the formal expression of architecture that tends towards sculpture without actually becoming sculpture. Also moved by epistemological reflection and the verification of my affirmations, I will moreover indicate examples of tendencies in which architecture does not "tend to" sculpture, but "flows into it" with disappointing results both as regards the architectural discipline and, a fortiori, sculptural discipline. In other words, there is nothing worse than an architecture that claims to be sculpture, becoming a purely formal (or formalistic) approach to architecture.

If there is a substantial difference between architecture and sculpture, it is precisely in the field of functionality: in general, sculpture is made not to be used internally, while architecture must necessarily be such in order to ensure a usability that is an integral part of its body as well as its disciplinary statute. However, the internal functionality is not a great concern for the purposes of this essay, as in many cases it is still guaranteed in sculptures: there are Architectures (with a capital "A") without a precise internal functionality, such as monuments or all the outfitting, temporary, symbolic architectures and so on.

I will equally discuss both the compositional process that leads to formal expression and the relationship that the work establishes with the outside.

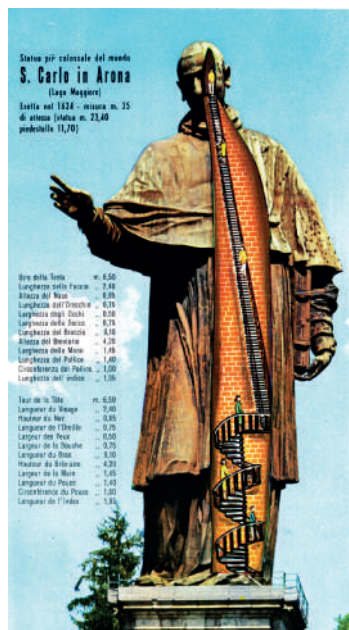


**Figg. 2-4**

Cover of Zodiac no. 9-1993 with projects by C. Aymonino, G. Canella, I. Gardella, P. Johnson, G. Polesello, L. Semerari, A. Rossi, for the completion of the Sacro Monte of San Carlo.

Guido Canella, Notes for the Sacro Monte of San Carlone in Arona with the IX chapel: vigilance and care in the plague of Milan, 1992.

The San Carlone at Arona in an advertising postcard.



As for the architectural critique (and there is no doubt that this essay represents a critique of the works for the purpose of exemplification in the discussion) it is customary to proceed, as Baudelaire argued, "from the impression to the principles"; thus the title of this essay, *Architectural sculpture in Italy as a compositional method. From impressions to principles.*

It may be interesting to evaluate the other half of the moon, that is, an approach which for an inversion of terms could be defined as "Sculptural architecture." What is the difference? The point of view is that of an architect who goes beyond disciplinary boundaries to probe the potential inherent in this limine.

As often happens between neighboring disciplines – and there is no doubt that architecture and sculpture are such – it is interesting to analyze the limits, i.e., the field of investigation, that lies between the two disciplines: those examples that take the meaning of a work that "is no longer completely that same discipline" but at the same time "is not yet the other discipline" to the extreme. There is a presence and an absence of certain specific values that make the works eloquent without their knowledge of

these hermeneutical probes. The compositional principle defined as “architectural sculpture” is based on these examples.

The first example was created as a sculpture, even if the considerable size projects it into the field of architecture-monument.

The Colossus of San Carlo Borromeo (known as San Carlone) in Arona, the statue built between 1624 and 1698 at the behest of Federico Borromeo by Giovanni Battista Crespi, known as “il Cerano,” was erected as a complement to the works of the Sacro Monte to celebrate the memory of the Saint. It has a hollow brick core covered with copper plates, all fixed above a block of marble about 12 meters high. It is the first case of a violation of the sculptural form imagined as such.

It is interesting to note how it becomes Architecture when Aldo Rossi describes its importance in his formation (education) within his prosaic work, *A Scientific Autobiography*.

«This interior-exterior aspect of architecture was certainly first suggested to me by the San Carlone at Arona; a work which I have drawn and studied so many times that it is now difficult for me to relate it to the visual education of my childhood. I subsequently understood that it pleased me because here the limits that distinguish the domains of architecture, the machine, and instruments were dissolved in marvelous invention. As with the Homeric horse, the pilgrim enters the body of the saint as he would a tower or a wagon steered by a knowing technician. After he mounts the exterior stair of the pedestal, the steep ascent through the interior of the body reveals the structure of the work and the welded seams of the huge pieces of sheet metal. Finally, he arrives at the interior-exterior of the head; from the eyes of the saint, the view of the lake acquires infinite contours, as if one were gazing from a celestial observatory.» [Rossi 1987, p.11]



**Fig. 5**  
Luchino Visconti, *Osessione*  
[Obsession], 1943.

He discusses the interest he has for objects of affection that can be imagined as “livable and practicable architectures” such as coffee pots or pans intended as a “reduction of fantastic architectures.” «Today I still love to draw these large coffee pots, which I liken to brick walls, and which I think of as structures that can be entered!» [Rossi 1987, p.11].

In the case of Arona, the theme of the formal expression and ideation is rather the reproduction of the Saint. There is no specific compositional theme other than to reproduce the essential features or to portray San Carlo. Aldo Rossi was obsessed with the Saint, and in the period between the beginning of the 1970s and the beginning of the 1990s (Vittorio Savi traces its origin to some drawings of 1973), (Savi 1976), he drew him almost everywhere, becoming a subject of affection.

Obsession is a theme dear to Aldo Rossi (Obsession like the film by Luchino Visconti that Rossi describes in *Architetture Padane* about his competition project for the Fiera Catena area in Mantua). Obsession, then, must be understood (as Polesello suggests) as repetition. «... Obsession is very important. [...] Architecture that repeats itself, that restates itself, tireless and undaunted, is the so-called (unspeakable) theme of Aldo Rossi» (Polesello 2002, p.7).

Rossi portrays San Carlo together with his architecture, he inserts it in the scenography of his Scientific Theater, next to the Milan Cathedral, the Gallarate, the Teatro del Mondo. It watches over his architectural fantasies. Often, however, only one part of it tends to appear – no less important and strongly symbolic – which is the hand. This limb (not yet an osteological representation) becomes a significant presence when it turns into the subject of a specific drawing in which the hand is repeated obsessively, be-



9. ALDO ROSSI, «Le mani del Santo», 1979.



48. ALDO ROSSI, «San Carlone», 1990.



1. ALDO ROSSI, disegno di studio con il San Carlone e il Gallaratese, 1975.



4. ALDO ROSSI, disegno di studio per il teatro Carlo Felice a Genova.

**Figg. 6-12**

Aldo Rossi, "Le mani del Santo"  
[The Saint's hands], 1979.

"San Carlone", 1990.

Per il completamento del Sacro  
Monte di San Carlo in Arona  
[For the completion of the Sacro  
Monte of San Carlo in Arona],  
1991.

Disegno di studio con il  
San Carlone e il Gallaratese  
[Sketch with San Carlone and  
Gallaratese], 1975. Disegno di  
studio per il teatro Carlo Felice  
a Genova [Sketch for the Carlo  
Felice Theatre in Genoa].

Disegno di studio con la mano  
del Santo [Sketch with The  
Saint's hands].

Disegno di studio con la mano  
del Santo [Sketch with The  
Saint's hand], 1987.



6. ALDO ROSSI, disegno di studio con la mano del Santo.

3. ALDO ROSSI, disegno di studio con la mano del Santo, 1987.

coming the absolute protagonist of the drawing “Le mani del Santo” [The Saint’s hands] (1971). What does that hand obsessively repeated in Aldo Rossi’s drawings indicate?

If the hand as a subject in figurative art is rather typical, especially when compared to the strongly symbolic meaning (from prehistoric depiction, to Leonardo’s cognitive studies, up to Michelangelo’s representations in painting, while Rodin suffices in sculpture), it is regardless not new in architecture: starting from Le Corbusier, who transforms it into a built monument shaping it as a tangible cement form, to a symbol of Chandigarh, up to the theoretical contribution of Henri Focillon who praises its virtues in one of his best-known essays.

Taking up Focillon’s thesis, Vittorio Savi wrote that, «the hand is the symbol of technique and craftsmanship» (Savi, 1976, p. 21).

One of the various functions that architecture and sculpture must perform is remembrance. Both lead to something else: they remember or favor the memory. After all, remembrance means bringing something back to memory.

Thus the sense of the presence of the hand in Aldo Rossi’s compositions could be to favor the memory of something, perhaps forgotten or lost. We do not yet know if this invitation to remember is addressed to those looking at the drawing or if, autobiographically as Rossi himself has accustomed us, is addressed directly to those who drawing.

But widening the scope of interpretation – borrowing the words of Gianugo Polesello who was in turn strongly affected by that hand – could also constitute an “admonition,” a warning. In the latter case we can only subjectively hypothesize with respect to who and what Rossi warns, or warns himself, about.

I like to think that Rossi warns against certain tendencies of architecture which, *mutatis mutandis*, then as now, represent a danger to architecture.

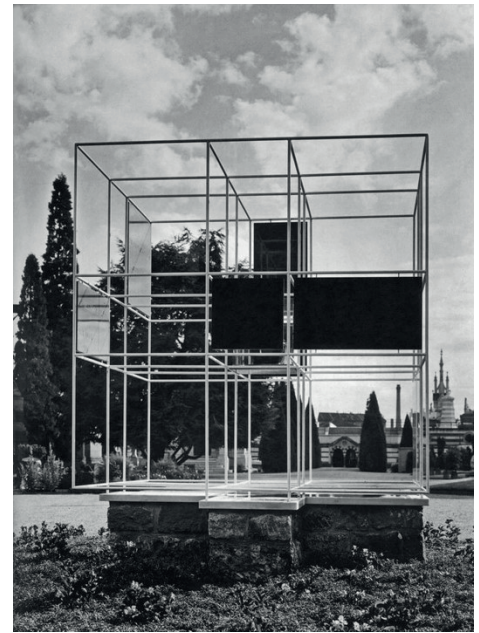
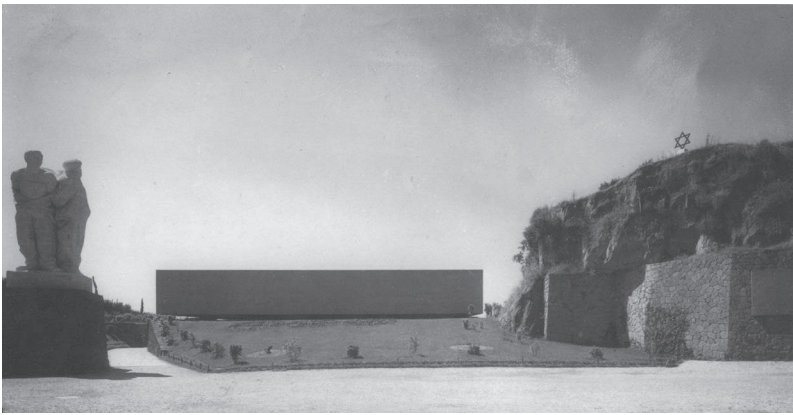
Memory and Warning are often complementarily juxtaposed above all in the memory of certain errors in history: one favors the memory of painful and traumatic facts; the other is a warning so that such errors (and such facts) do not repeat themselves.

The theme of memory then guides us towards a very specific season of architectural sculpture: that of the Italian post-war monuments, above all the two most emblematic with which Manfredo Tafuri opens his *History of Italian Architecture* [1984]. In this context, works of Architecture such as the Monumental Cemetery of the BBPR (1946) or even the Monument to the Fosse Ardeatine by Mario Fiorentino (1944-1949) – even if the work is penetrable, the sculptural dimension remains strongly pervasive – are by all means examples of architectural sculpture.

Little by little towards strongly symbolic, elementary architectural sculpture like that of the Monument to the Resistance of Udine by Gino Valle (1959-1969) to the Monument of the Resistance in Cuneo by Aldo Rossi, (1962) or, again by the same author, to the Monument-Fountain in the square of Segrate (1965), up to that marvelous sculpture-architecture which is the backdrop for the competition project for the reconstruction of Paganini Theater in Parma (1964). Indeed, architectural sculpture.

After having outlined some of its characteristics, can we ask ourselves the origin of that tendency to blend architecture and sculpture in the cases mentioned?

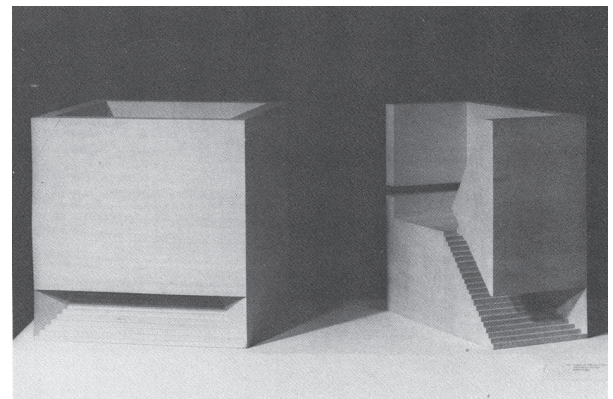
I like to trace it back to the joyous season of Italian Rationalism in which



**Figg. 14-16**  
Mario Fiorentino, Monumento alle Fosse ardeatine, Rome 1944-49.

BBPR, Monumento al Cimitero monumentale, Milan, 1946.

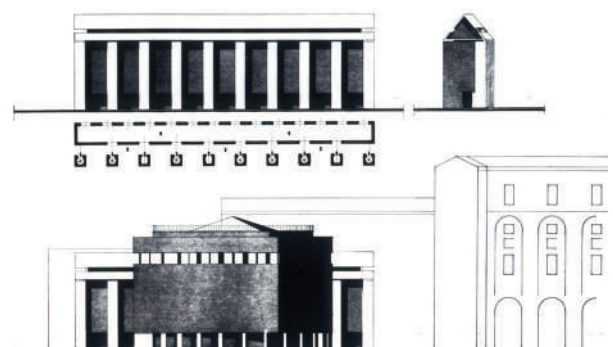
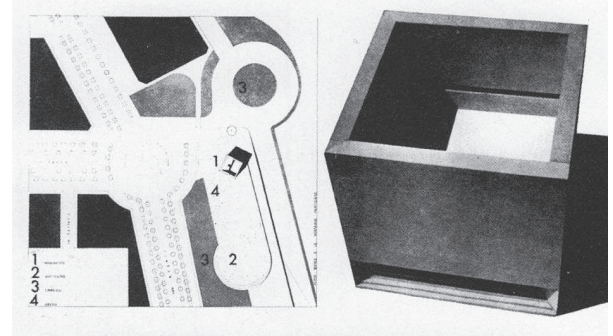
Gino Valle, Monumento alla Resistenza, Udine, 1959-69



**Figg. 17-19**  
Aldo Rossi, Monumento della Resistenza, Cuneo, 1962

Aldo Rossi, Monumento ai Partigiani, Segrate, 1965.

Aldo Rossi, Ricostruzione del Teatro Paganini, Parma, 1964.



the so-called plastic arts proved to be able to blend into a unicum still unmatched today, starting with the perhaps most emblematic image of the Hall of Honor of the VI Triennale of 1936 by Edoardo Persico. In this work, his highest ever, architecture and sculpture complement each other in a game of references that makes one part indistinguishable from the other:

«This project does not want to be a mere decoration (...) but an original work of architecture like the others that will appear at the VI Triennale: a contribution to the solution of a problem which is more evidently placed for its consideration by modern artists» (Persico 1936).

In distancing himself from pure decoration by rightly rising to the work of architecture, Persico identifies the character of originality as the quality that can synthesize the architectural sculpture.

«In the project, sculpture and mosaic works are not thought of as 'decoration,' or in any case as parts added to architecture, but they almost constitute the subject for their stereometry and intimate stylistic adherence.»



**Fig. 20**  
Edoardo Persico, Marcello Nizzoli, Giancarlo Palanti, Lucio Fontana (scultura), Progetto per il Salone d'Onore at the VI Triennale, Milan, 1936.

In the next page:

**Fig. 21**  
Edoardo Persico, Marcello Nizzoli, Giancarlo Palanti, Lucio Fontana (scultura), Progetto per il Salone d'Onore at the VI Triennale, Milan, 1936.

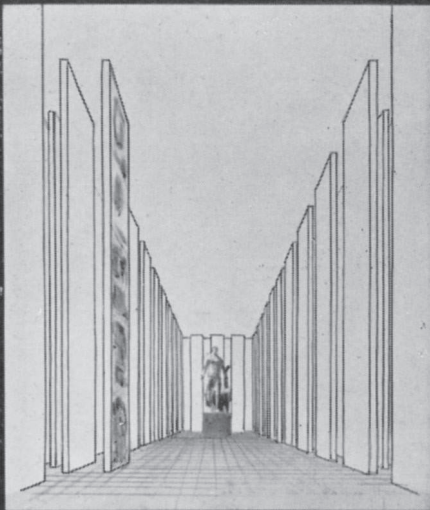
This is true for Persico's work, to whom a great capacity for architectural abstraction is fully attributed, but also to many other Rationalist works in which sculptor and architect design one for the other; just consider the historical painter-architect pairs such as Fontana-Persico or Sironi-Terragni. In the highest era of the so-called "synthesis of the arts," frame architecture metaphorically became the frame of architecture in which to experiment also in the field of interior architecture and exhibition design. In these cases, the sculptural material in the form of tubulars is directly shaped by the architect who makes it his own material (for construction) in a poetic-sculptural sense. The Hall of Gold Medals (and in general many works of the Italian Aeronautics Exhibition of 1934), or the Parker Shop also by Persico, are the antecedents to the Postwar BBPR Monument, already identified as architectural sculpture.

«Lyrical visions of building,» as Giovanni Luca Ferreri reminds us, quoting Giulia Veronesi, «which continue the investigation of the city and its changes (...) attributable to the itinerary of pictorial research» (Ferreri 2020, p. 45).

After all, was it not Persico himself, commenting on Gardella's theater in Busto Arsizio (Persico 1935), who wrote the equation that connects Metaphysics to New Architecture?

«An example of how much a concrete experience of European painting is worth in architects, which is the basis of Le Corbusier's work with Cubism, or that of Gropius with Neoplasticism. It seems that today in Italy, at least with some avant-garde artists, architecture aspires to annex itself to the taste of metaphysical painting: this direction is, perhaps, destined to constitute the most original motif of 'Italian' architecture in Europe.»

Therefore, having defined the original architectural sculpture as that of the season that goes from Rationalism to the immediate postwar period (up to the mid-1950s), we can identify a second phase that can be defined as "return architectural sculpture" in which it seems that architecture itself becomes a "synthesis among the arts." In other words, the parataxis of the origin becomes complete syntax.

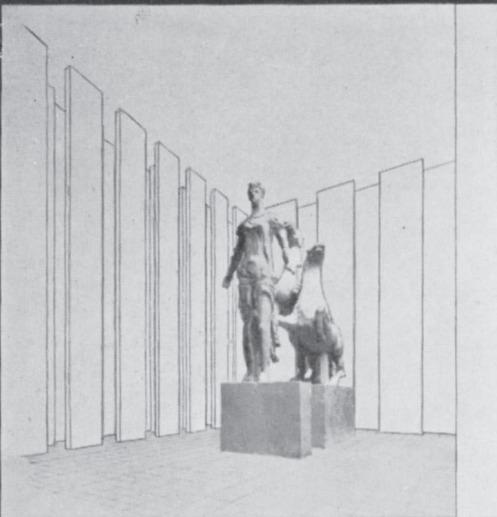


**CONCORSO PER LA DECORAZIONE DEL SALONE D'ONORE ALLA VI TRIENNALE DI MILANO**

PROGETTO  
 PITTORE MARCELLO NIZZOLI  
 ARCHITETTO GIACCARO PALAZZI  
 CON LA COLLABORAZIONE DI  
 EDUARDO PERISCO  
 SCULTORE DI  
 LUIGI PORTIARI

**IV**

NEL PROGETTO LA SCULTURA E LE OPERE MUSIVE NON SONO PENSATE COME "DECORAZIONE", O COMUNQUE COME PARTI AGGIUNTE ALL'ARCHITETTURA, MA NE COSTITUISCONO QUASI L'ARGOMENTO PER LA LORO STEREOMETRIA E PER L'INTIMA ADERENZA STILISTICA

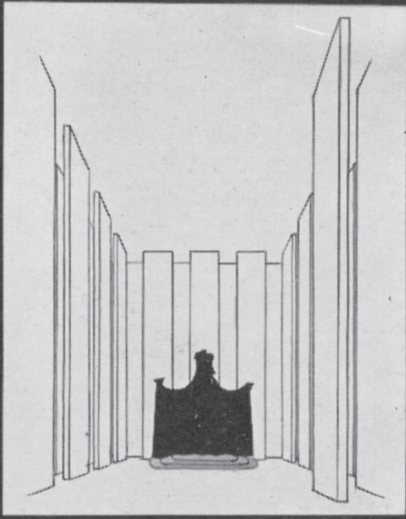


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**V**

LA PARTICOLARE DISPOSIZIONE DEI DIAPRAMMI VERTICALI CONSENTE UN GIOCO DI CHIARI E DI SCURI ED UN RAPPORTO DI PIENI E DI VUOTI, CONDOTTI QUASI ALL'ESPRESSIONE DI UNA LOGICA PURA. È COSÌ CHE L'ANTICO ASPETTO DEI COLONNATI ASSUME, NEL PROGETTO, UN VALORE FIGURATIVO ATTUALE



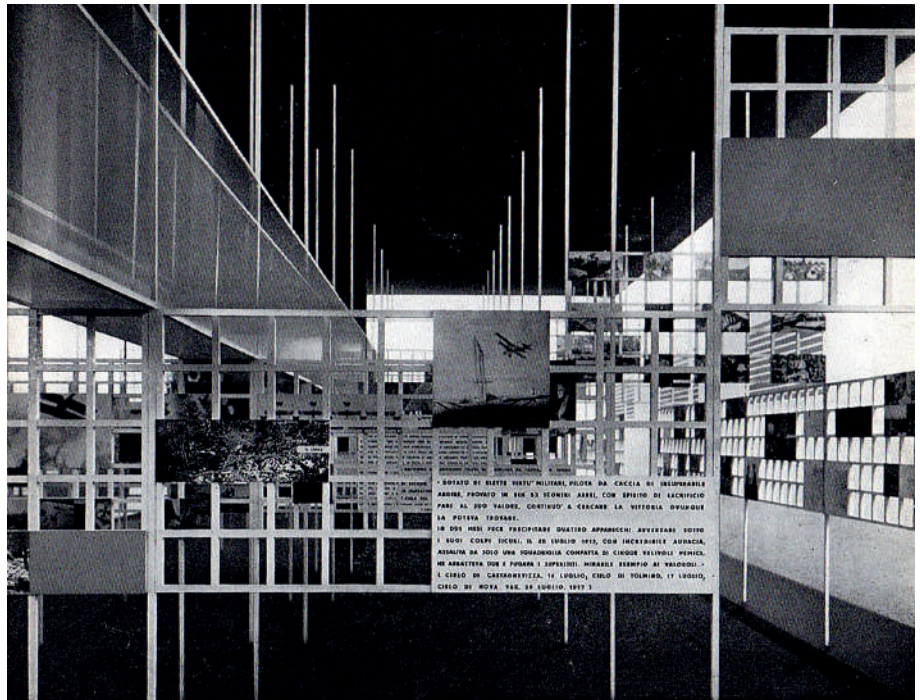
**CONCORSO PER LA DECORAZIONE DEL SALONE D'ONORE ALLA VI TRIENNALE DI MILANO**

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**VI**

NELLA PARETE DI FRONTE ALLA SCULTURA PUÒ ESSERE COLLOCATO IL TRONO. PER LO STILE DEL TRONO SI PREVEDE DI MANTENERE QUELLO CONSACRATO DALLA TRADIZIONE ARALDICA COME IL PIÙ RAPPRESENTATIVO DELL'AUTORITÀ DEL RE

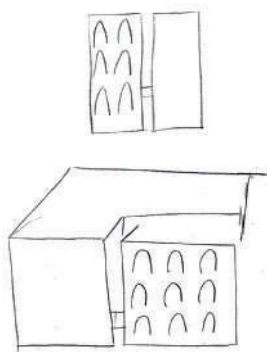
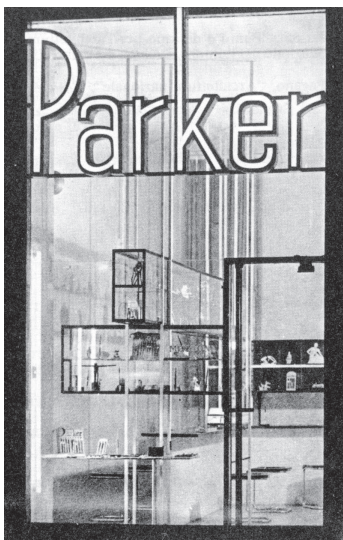


**Figg. 22-24**

Edoardo Persico, Marcello Nizzoli, Sala delle Medaglie d'Oro, Mostra dell'Aeronautica Italiana, Triennale, Milan, 1934.

Edoardo Persico, Marcello Nizzoli, Negozio Parker, Milan, 1934.

Edoardo Persico, Progetto di stand per la Fiera, Milan, 1935.



Therefore, understanding the origin of this trend, let us return to analyzing the interpretations of architectural sculpture in architecture.

One architect who makes extensive use of architectural sculpture is Carlo Aymonino. Aymonino's architectural sculpture is the son of Roman architecture (classical and modern) and consequently his way of composing in the open spaces of the city derives from the great and ever-present "lesson of Rome." As in Corbusier's homonymous "Leçon de Rome" by Vers all'Architecture, the worldly city relives in Aymonino's interpretation, becoming contemporary architecture and art itself.

Aymonino not only demonstrates architectural sculpture - for example in the use of architectural backdrops, in the skillful use of solid excavated material, that is, Michelangelo molded "by way of removing," etc. - but often demonstrates the direct presence of classical sculpture (especially of the beloved Antonio Canova who, like Aymonino, moved between Rome and Venice) and evokes (or re-evokes) a dialogue between the arts which, although allusive, is always significant.

Furthermore, with Aymonino Sculpture is placed at the center of his interests, as evidenced by the numerous drawings and studio sketches, some of which were selected for a book on Architecture and Sculpture in the early 1990s that should have been published by Marsilio (Aymonino 2000, p. 133). The main sign of the ideal completion of St. Mark's basin - strictly in Istrian stone - is constituted by a Venus (among the many possible, Canova has the best - that of Hope) emerging from the water of the Marciano basin and communicating with the other signs of the project: the Teatro del Mondo, the lanterns of Punto Franco, and the tower defined by Carlo Aymonino.



Furthermore, Aymonino uses a theatrical device in his architectural sculpture consisting of backdrops that generate continuity. The distinct parts and volumes that often characterize Aymonino's architectural composition must be related to a unity of the project. The wonderful Aymoninian perspectives are needed for this use, in order to verify the unity of the project which is otherwise difficult to understand as a whole.

There is very little distance between Aymonino and Rossi.

If Rossi's architectural drawings feature the hand of San Carlo, Aymonino's architectural drawings feature the statue, the sculptural group, which intervenes as an "object a reaction poetique."

Aldo Rossi's hand of San Carlo Borromeo is an exact match to the sculptural group of Aymonino. Rossi's hand admonishes, while Aymonino's statue brings us back to a classical harmony.

It only takes a few urban projects to exemplify these concepts, such as the Theater of Avellino (1987-89), the Ex Mulino Andrisani complex in Matera, (1988-91), and the project for Tre Piazze in Terni (1985).

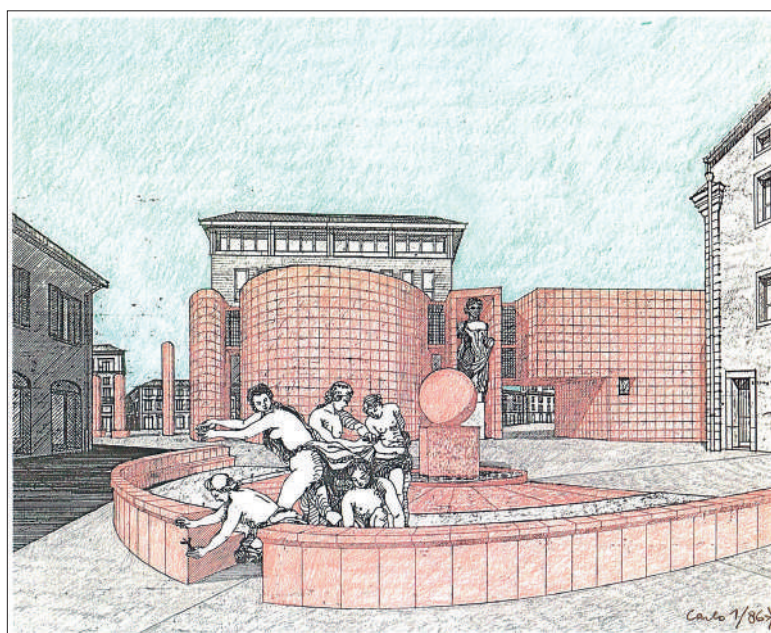
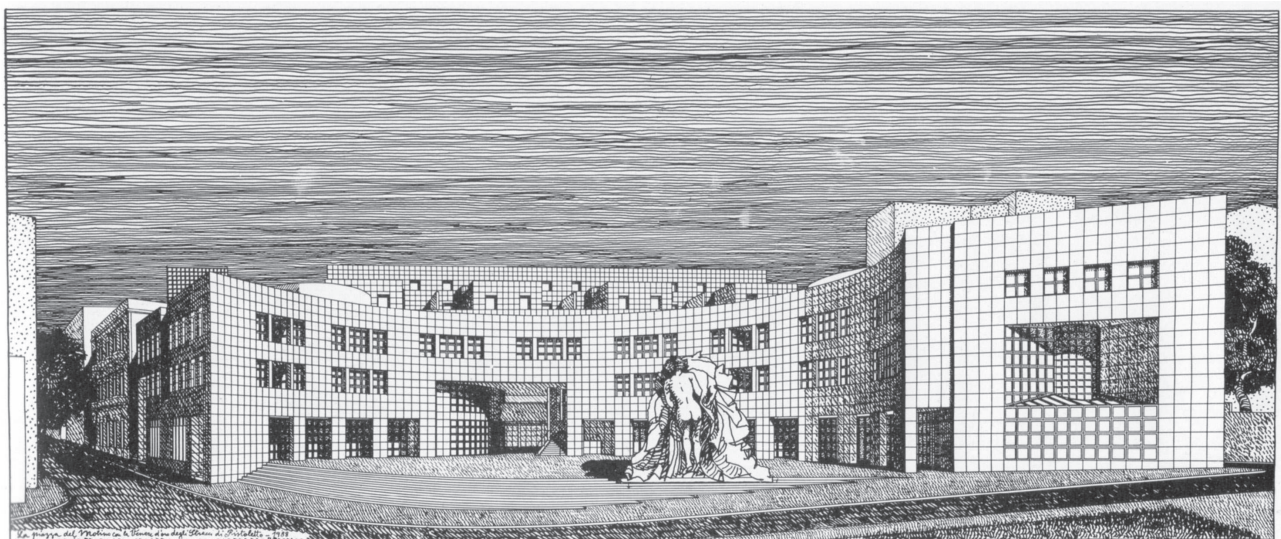
We can see how Aymonino uses the architectural backdrop in association with the sculpture, that is, an element of architecture that acquires further meaning starting from the protagonist of the scene, namely sculpture. Sculpture often dominates its "squares of Italy" mostly as an added element to the representative perspectives of the various projects as well as an introductory cartouche, for example the San Donà di Piave Bella project: desired objects – obelisks, sculptures, sculptural groups – which to my knowledge were only in the project for Salerno and in the form of a sculpture by Kounellis were an integral part of the project.

In the Theater of Avellino, one of Aymonino's most interesting projects, it is important to detect the device of the fifth curve towards the entrance to Piazza Castello through which "the Theater is 'noticed' on the Piazza del Castello" [Zodiac, 1988, p. 118]. An apparently secondary element, but of extreme importance in constituting that "homogeneous facade" that a project divided into different parts and volumes would not have allowed.



**Figg. 25-26**

Carlo Aymonino, Gabriella Barbini, Progetto per il completamento del bacino di San Marco, Terza Mostra Internazionale di Architettura, Biennale di Venezia, 1985.

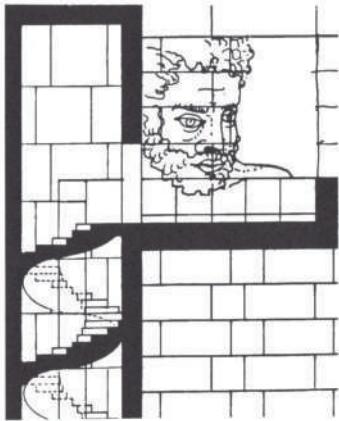
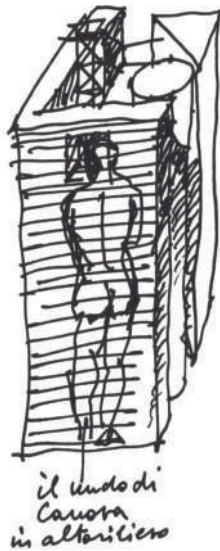


**Figg. 27-29**

Carlo Aymonino ed altri, Teatro di Avellino, 1987-89.

Carlo Aymonino ed altri, Sistemazione dell'area cx Mulino Andrisani, Matera, 1988.

Carlo Aymonino ed altri, Progetto di tre piazze, Terni, 1985.



**Figg. 30-31**

Carlo Aymonino ed altri, Studi per Il Colosso, Roma 1982-1984

So that, in the perspective drawn with a thick line, the backdrop-wing and the sculptural group reinforce each other.

Aymonino solves the project of the square in the Ex Mulino Andrisani in Matera with the same formal artifice but with a different architectural element (a portico). In this case, there is a significant cylindrical subtraction from the volume of the urban block, onto which a curved portico is superimposed. Similarly to Avellino, the perspective of Matera also shows a sculptural group consisting of the Venus of the Rags by Pistoletto.

If until now architectural sculpture was part of the composition, as an interface between the public space and the functional rest of the building, Aymonino addresses the theme of the configuration of a tripartite space with little or no character with the Tre Piazze project in Terni. Once again the choice falls on the construction of a backdrop made up of «four architectural 'objects' in stone (whether true or false)» [Aymonino 1988, p. 109] of which one consists of a large niche containing a statue.

Up to, in the case of Aymonino, the architectural sculpture par excellence constituted by the Colossus in Rome. An idea arose in the 1980s to erect a building on the recovered area of the foundations of the Colossus, a square of 15 x 15 m; the structure would become an element of visual connection and volumetric completion between the Colosseum, the Temple of Venus, and Rome, the same role that the Colossus had played in ancient times. In a first project hypothesis Aymonino designed a marble monolith with a square base of the same size as the excavation and 36 m high – an angle with a 45 degree cut from a narrow passage containing a staircase carved inside the marble and leading to an upper viewpoint from which it would be possible to admire the Forums, the proximity of the Colosseum, the ruins of Oppio hill – in addition to sculpturally subtracting the volume on two opposing sides. While the next project sees the shape of the colossus in bas-relief characterize an entire whole side. In this project Aymonino composes an architecture, albeit monumental and strongly allegorical with the sculptural technique of Michelangelo: starting from a single volume, he subtracts material until it becomes the desired shape.

We have confirmation of this compositional attitude: when Aymonino was asked, “What would you like to achieve?”, he replied, “A house carved out of a single block of marble” [Quintelli, 1997].

A further variation of architectural sculpture is constituted by so-called ephemeral architecture in its 20th-century revival: a parable that starting from the exhibition architectures, first of all the frame ones of the various Triennali rather than the metal advertising construction in the Galleria Vittorio Emanuele in Milan by Persico, passes through the ephemeral structures of Nicolini’s Roman Summer, of the political summer festivals (in this regard, we recall Cesare Leonardi’s commitment in setting up the Unity Festivals in Modena) and then flows into the structures of the various Biennials, especially of Rossi, passing through the postmodern experiment of the Strada Novissima. In these provisional and temporary architectures, machines, and devices, the ephemeral represents the attempt to combine the provisional with the eternal.

In fact the limited duration, together with the character of reversibility, guide its construction through flexible and inexpensive materials such as wood and iron, especially in its version of the “Innocenti” pipe-joint.

Unlike the poor constructive aspect, these structures (for all intents and purposes sculptural and architectural) had a great wealth of symbolic mea-

ning. Thus they become machines for representation, theatrical devices as well as elements that characterize (albeit for a limited time) the places they contribute to create.

We have already mentioned how Persico's metal advertising construction in the Galleria Vittorio Emanuele in Milan is prodromal to the subsequent developments of the frame in architecture: in two years, in fact, it will be widely used by Persico himself – but also by others such as Albini for example – as part of the VI Triennale of 1936 and subsequently made a stately monument by the BBPR in the Milanese Cemetery.

The same principle will then be used in the construction of many of ephemeral structures: access portals, stages, backdrops for cinema screens, walkways, up to the highest example constituted by the Teatro del Mondo by Aldo Rossi, the only example in which, paraphrasing Tafuri, the ephemeral has become eternal (Tafuri 1980, 7-11).

But let us proceed in order.

If we have already said in the first part of this essay about architectural sculpture constituted by frame architecture, meaning by this the use of grid structures from Rationalism to the immediate postwar period, during the 20th century this idea evolved up to unconsciously become the identifying character of an architectural cultural season, defined by its own inventor Renato Nicolini, as an urban marvel (Nicolini, 1980, p. 75-88). We are obviously talking about the Roman Summer, that "ephemeral nine years long" (from 1976 to 1985) and all those scenographic apparatuses (stages, portals, backdrops, theaters, etc.) as essential in language as they are powerful in the symbolic re-enactment of an artistic-cultural action in the place.

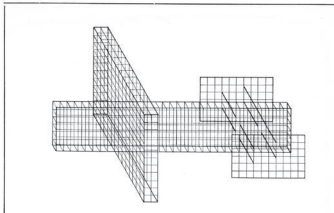
This aspect is inevitably interrelated with theatrical action, with representation, with art, and with the ritual of the festival.

At the base of the idea of Renato Nicolini – architect, but in this case as Councilor for Culture of the Roman council chaired by Giulio Carlo Argan – for a cultural program for the summer season in Rome, there was the revitalization (today we would call it regeneration) of different places – central and peripheral – to be involved in a program full of artistic and cultural events: music, cinema, theater, poetry, etc. (Nicolini, 1991).

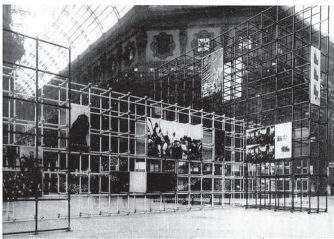
In an earlier inclusive perspective, the invitation was above all addressed to the "people of the suburbs" to regain possession of the central places of the city of Rome, already in a crisis split between tourism and dolce vita.

A composite system of places which, starting from the Basilica of Maxentius, the place for projections and film marathons, unfold in the most extreme periphery. By far the most interesting staging for our purposes is that of the Roman Summer of 1979. Consisting of the Central Park, it included a system of four places opposite four axes of the city, just outside the walls: Via Sabotino, Parco di Villa Torlonia, Circus Maximus and the Mattatoio of Monte Testaccio. The staging entrusted to Purini, Thermes, Colombari, De Boni, and Staderini provided for two enclosures along Via Sabotino in one of which the «scientific theater was conceived, a small experimental space in which the observation between actor and spectator (interchangeable in the relationship with space) is re-proposed within a crudely analytical and perhaps antagonistic relationship, inspired by the model of the Elizabethan theater (i.e., the courtyard)» (Nicolini, 1980, p. 82-85).

At Parco di Villa Torlonia, a bar and an elevated walkway were provided for "videogames" and televisions that broadcast the shows of the other locations of the Roman Summer.



Costruzione metallica pubblicitaria nella Galleria Vittorio Emanuele a Milano, 1934.



**Fig. 32**

Edoardo Persico, Marcello Nizzoli, Struttura per il plebiscito del 25 Marzo '34, Galleria Vittorio Emanuele, Milano, 1934.

**Figg. 33-38**

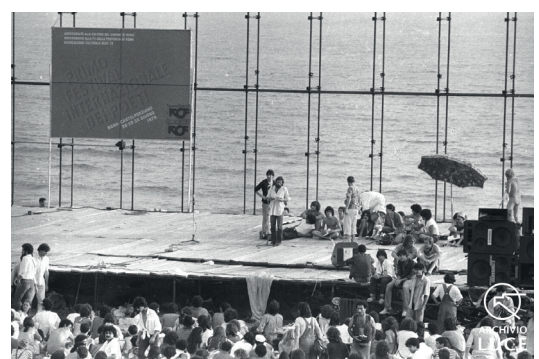
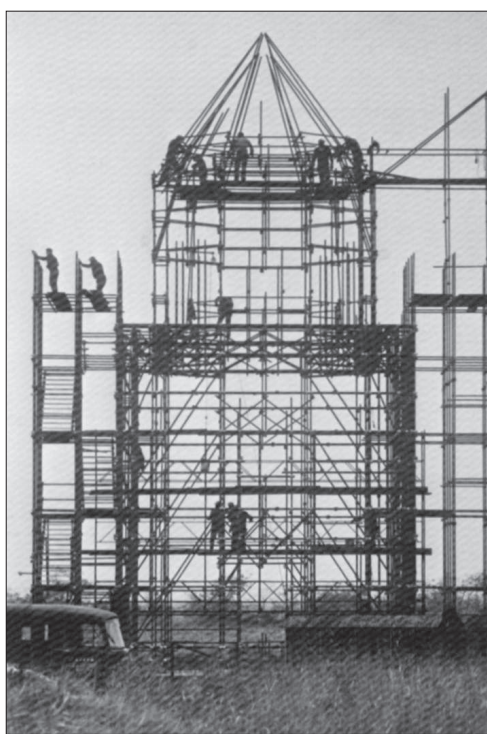
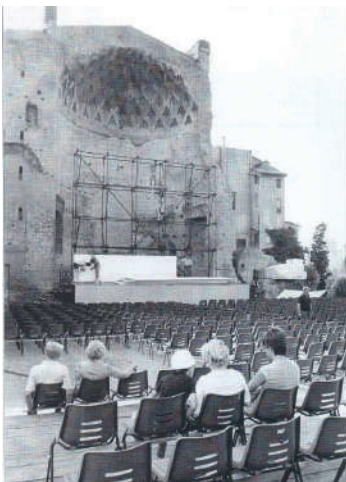
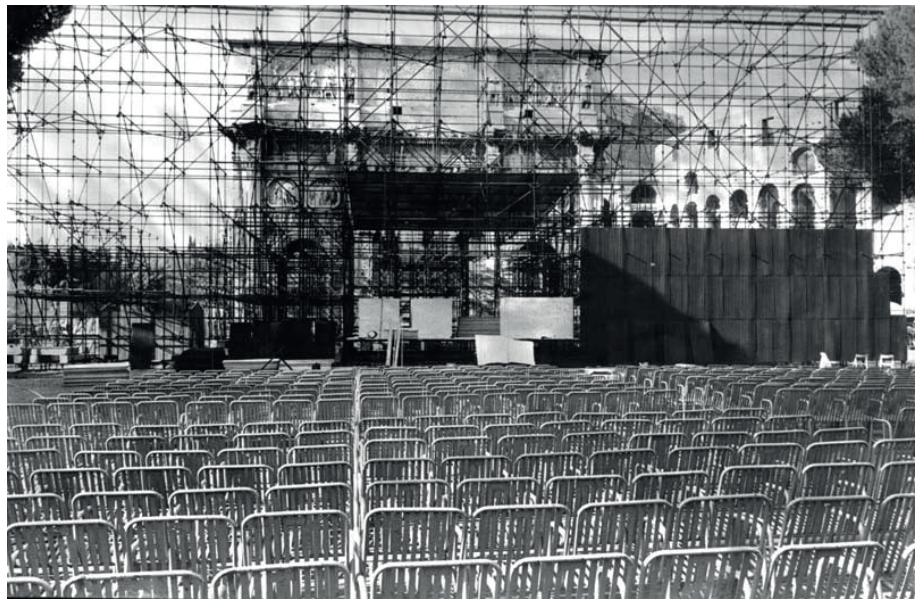
Ugo Colombari, Giuseppe De Boni, Franco Purini, Duccio Staderini e Laura Thermes, Teatrino scientifico nell'area di Via Sabotino, Roma, 1979;

Il palco e lo schermo cinematografico allestiti all'interno della Basilica di Massenzio e davanti all'Arco di Costantino, Estate romana 1981.

Aldo Rossi, Teatro del Mondo, Venezia, 1979.

Il palco allestito in spiaggia per il Festival dei Poeti di Castelporziano, Estate romana 1979.

Il portale di ingresso alla Festa dell'Unità di Pisa, 1982.



A comet-shaped dance floor was built at Circus Maximus with the finds of Cinecittà, while at the Mattatoio of Testaccio, designed as an arena for music, a large stage, entrance wings, projection booths, and service towers were built.

In addition to the Central Park where the four cities were located (city of television and listening, city of theater, city of rock music, and city of dance), the program was completed by the Maxentius event (cinema in the archaeological area of the Basilica of Maxentius), the Circus in Piazza (in Piazza Farnese), Dancing... and more (at Villa Ada) and the Festival of Poets on the beach of Castelporziano.

Ultimately the architectural elements that characterized those places were all structures that recall the staging of places for popular festivals.

Perhaps it is no coincidence that Nicolini's Roman Summer is closely linked to the Unity Festivals: Nicolini himself recalls how one of the first cultural actions was precisely the organization on his part and the section of the PCI of which he was Secretary (that of Campo Marzio) to organize a Unity Festival in Piazza Navona after it had not been held for many years. Nicolini himself spoke of the Festival project, designed by the architect Mario Renzi: «Thus was born our Festival, according to an elegant modular design: plastic Innocenti pipes, more to protect the paintings of the painting exhibition from humidity than the rain, and many red flags» (Nicolini, 1991, p. 28).

The history of the Festivals' staging is another page entirely still to be written, as demonstrated by the project for the National Unity Festival in Modena at Parco Amendola by the recently deceased architect Cesare Leonardi.

There is very little separating the scientific theater of Purini and friends from Rossi's Teatro del Mondo: both were temporary structures and both had a soul in Innocenti pipes and light wooden cladding, white for Purini, yellow and blue for Rossi.

The latter also has its roots in the same historical imaginary, in this case consisting of the apparatuses for the festivals of 16th-century Venice. Unlike the Roman theater itself, destined to be dismantled without greatly affecting the history of Roman (and Italian) architecture, the Teatro del Mondo was kept for two years, made to travel to different places before being consigned to memory forever. Later, Aldo Rossi will keep track of the ephemeral in the portal of the Venice Biennale of 1985 and in some subsequent projects, with the most representative after the Teatro del Mondo certainly being the Lighthouse Theater of Toronto.

## Notes

<sup>1</sup> «... very young, I was struck by the Ferrara 'interiors' of Visconti's first film 'Ossessione'. These 'interiors', as cinema lovers well know, are full, in a pictorial sense, of Clara Clamai's shiny black silk petticoat, beautiful and veiled by a Ferrara summer sweat that made her even paler; then there were objects such as lamps and coffee pots and food such as soups made with reluctance and glasses of wine». (Rossi, 1984, p. 11).

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Enrico Prandi (Mantua, 1969), architect, graduated with honors from the Faculty of Architecture in Milan. He is PhD in Architectural and Urban Composition at the IUAV in Venice, earning his title in 2003. Currently is Associate Professor in architectural and urban Design at the Department of Engineering and Architecture of the University of Parma. He director of the Festival dell'Architettura of Parma and founder-director of the online scientific journal *FAMagazine. Ricerche e Progetti sull'architettura e la città* <www.famagazine.it>. He is scientific manager for the Parma unit of the ARCHEA - Architectural European Medium-Sized City Arrangement project <https://site.unibo.it/archea>. He is author of numerous publications, including the books *Il progetto del Polo per l'Infanzia. Sperimentazioni architettoniche tra didattica e ricerca* (Aión, Florence 2018); *L'architettura della città lineare* (FrancoAngeli, Milan 2016); “The architectural project in European schools” (in *European City Architecture*, FAEdizioni, Parma 2012); *Mantova. Saggio sull'architettura* (FAEdizioni, Parma 2005).