

## **Archaeology and Modern Architecture: A Comparative Reading**

*By Gregorio Froio\**

*This essay explores the relationship between archaeology and modern architecture, moving beyond the conventional examination of modern archaeology to examine the role of archaeology in a modern context. It traces the influence of archaeology from the Renaissance to the early 20th century, through the Modern Movement and Italian Rationalism, arguing that historical context is essential to architectural knowledge. The essay criticises the contemporary neglect of historical consciousness and promotes the past as a key contributor to shaping the present. It debates the nature of archaeology, suggesting that it fuses a scientific discipline with antiquarian elements such as excavation and esotericism. The narrative reflects on how archaeology has been perceived through the ages, incorporating both scientific and initiatory perspectives. Through a series of images, the text reveals a hidden archaeology in various artistic expressions, from Roman frescoes to literary works such as *Hypnerotomachia Poliphili*. It highlights Giovanni Battista Piranesi's engravings for their conceptual importance. Arguing for a unified vision of Roman and Greek antiquity, the essay uses the Villa Adriana as a case study to discuss the continuing relevance and evocative power of ancient architecture in modern contexts, demonstrating the enduring value of archaeology in contemporary architectural discourse.*

### **Introduction**

The study is part of a research conducted by the author within the doctoral programme in Architectural and Urban Composition at the Department of Dastec, Mediterranean University of Reggio Calabria (Italy). A broader research on the relationship between archaeology and architecture subsequently culminated in a monographic volume and a series of other publications in specialised journals.<sup>1</sup>

The essay proposes an iconographic study of archaeology and its relationship with modern architecture. Its purpose is not simply to deal with the archaeology of the modern age, a subject that has already been extensively studied, but rather to deal with the idea of archaeology in the modern context. The aim, therefore, is to analyse the presence of archaeology, particularly as it is understood in relation to antiquity, from the Renaissance to the first half of the twentieth century, including the Modern Movement and Italian Rationalism.

It emphasises the importance of considering history as an integral part of architectural knowledge, opposing the contemporary idea of architecture without

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1. G. Froio, *La componente archeologica nel progetto moderno*. (Soveria Mannelli: Rubbettino, 2013); G. Froio. *Fragment and composition. Hadrian's dispositio in the modern architecture*. || *FAMagazine* 32 (2015): 49-56; G. Froio. *Architectural Bodies in the Flowing Time. Ruins and zero degree of architecture*. || *Urban Corporis. To the bones*, (2023): 16-23.

historical roots. The work explores the relationship between archaeology and modern architecture through an analysis of the influences of ancient Rome and Greece. For example, it highlights a duality in the interpretation of these two concepts: on the one hand, Le Corbusier shows a preference for ancient Greece, as evidenced by his sketches of the Parthenon and the Acropolis; on the other hand, he also acknowledges Roman architecture, with illustrious examples such as aqueducts, baths and Hadrian's Villa.

The reference literature on the subject is vast and complex. On the subject of the relationship between historical evocation and modernity, the theoretical contribution of Manfredo Tafuri<sup>2</sup> is fundamental. On the subject of memory, particularly from a philosophical perspective, references include Bergson (1959) and Benjamin, as well as literary works such as Proust's "Remembrance of Things Past". Studies on the relationship between time and memory, focusing on the artistic movements of the early twentieth century, by Elena Pontigia,<sup>3</sup> Stefano Gallo and Guido Zucconi,<sup>4</sup> as well as the direct contributions of Giorgio de Chirico (1919) and his brother Savinio,<sup>5</sup> are also significant. There is a rich literature on the concept of the fragment as an artistic expression which offer an updated vision, especially in the Italian context.<sup>6</sup>

The research focuses on the important literary filter offered by odeporic literature, in particular the Grand Tour, on which important studies and international conferences have been held in recent years.<sup>7</sup>

The theme of travel as a collection of memories allows for an interesting comparison between texts from different periods, but of paramount importance: Goethe's "Italian Journey" and Le Corbusier's "Journey to the East".

The ancient is then reinterpreted in some literary works of the humanist period, highlighting the contribution of authors such as Francesco Colonna, who anticipates Freudian themes in his relationship between ruin and psychological discomfort. In the modern era, the eighteenth-century period is fundamental in bringing the archaeological discipline to a theoretical and practical operational level. The ancient thus becomes a kind of figurative constant, a particularly fertile cultural unconscious: figures such as Pirro Ligorio, Giovanni Battista Piranesi, Schinkel, leading up to the twentieth century with figures such as Mies van der Rohe and Adolf Loos, with surprising and provocative architectural projects.

Finally, there is a focus on Hadrian's Villa as an exemplum of late antique architecture, on which important conferences have been held in recent years, demonstrating its absolute originality and relevance.<sup>8</sup>

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2. M. Tafuri. *Teoria e storia dell'architettura*. (Roma Bari: Laterza, 1973).

3. E. Pontigia. *Il ritorno all'ordine*. (Milano: Abscondita, 2005).

4. S. Gallo, G. Zucconi. *Arte del novecento. 1900-1944*. (Milano: Mondadori, 2002).

5. P. Vivarelli. *Savinio*. || *Art dossier 185*, (2003). Milano: Giunti Editore.

6. F. Purini. Dal progetto. *Scritti teorici di Franco Purini 1966-1991*. (Roma: Kappa, 1992); F. Purini. *Comporre l'architettura*. (Roma-Bari: Laterza, 2000); F. Purini. *Discorso sull'architettura. Cinque itinerari nell'arte del costruire*. (Venezia: Marsilio, 2022).

7. M. Formica. *Roma e la Campagna romana nel Grand Tour*. (Roma-Bari: Laterza, 2009).

8. P. Caliarì. *Tractatus logico sintattico. La forma trasparente di Villa Adriana*. (Roma: Edizioni Quasar, 2012); P. Caliarì. *La composizione policentrica di Villa Adriana e il tecnigrafo post-alessandrino*. || *Ananke 84*. (2018): 67-69; P. Caliarì. *Nuovi contributi sulla composizione architettonica*

The methodology is conceived as an iconographic reading of selected images, reasoned and extrapolated from the world of art, cinema and architecture, without following a strict chronological continuity. Another comparative criterion, based on Robert Venturi (1966) and Colin Rowe (1971), associates two or more images, noting formal analogies and differences.

### Time and Memory

The work shows how modernity draws on its past in a complex way. Filippo Brunelleschi and Leon Battista Alberti are two key figures: while Brunelleschi subjectively interprets the ancient to construct his modernity, Alberti remains ambiguous, oscillating between the desire to convey classical idealism and the seduction of linguistic pluralism. This tension manifests itself in the sixteenth century, when Raphael's school explores the grotesque and more extreme currents that distort classicism. The dialectic between historicist experimentation and rigorous abstraction intensified in the Baroque, epitomised by figures such as Francesco Borromini. The Enlightenment saw a split between historical-archaeological design and anti-historicism, culminating in the crisis of historicism highlighted by Giovanni Battista Piranesi.<sup>9</sup>

The complex relationship between classical and anti-classical codes in modern and contemporary architecture reveals a continuous interaction between past and present. This interaction is manifested in a series of conflicts and oscillations between innovation and tradition, futurism and metaphysics, exemplified by various artistic and architectural trends. Twentieth century Italian architects such as Saverio Muratori, Bruno Zevi, Ludovico Quaroni and Mario Ridolfi address this duality with different approaches, ranging from the reinterpretation of classicism to Wright's organic renewal, from the integration of the Italian vernacular tradition with contemporary themes to the importance of utopia as a tool for urban planning.<sup>10</sup> Archaeology is emerging as an influential discipline that informs design thinking, as evidenced by Muratori's project for the headquarters of the Christian Democratic Party at the EUR, which integrates archaeological studies into the spatial and compositional organisation of the building (Figure 1).

Memory is a central theme that has been addressed from different philosophical perspectives throughout history. At a basic level, memory is seen as the preservation of past events, with examples ranging from Aristotle to Hume. However, beyond simple recollection, memory is also seen as a human ability to classify past experiences, as emphasised by Plato and other medieval and modern philosophers. Memory also has a complex psychological dimension, as emphasised by Freud (1929), who linked it to trauma and unconscious associations. Bergson and Proust, on the other hand, describe memory as a vital force that manifests itself through involuntary associations and sudden recollections. Walter Benjamin adds a further

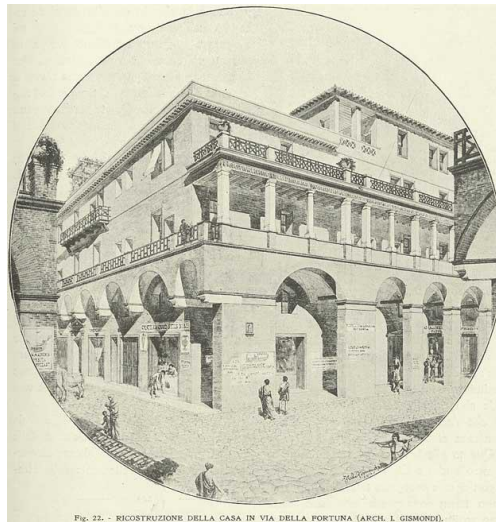
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*di Villa Adriana*. || Bruciati et al. *Le grandi ville romane del territorio tiburtino*, (Tivoli: Tipografia Palombi, 2021).

9. M. Tafuri. *Progetto e utopia*. (Roma-Bari: Laterza, 1973).

10. F. Purini. *La misura italiana dell'architettura*. (Roma-Bari: Laterza, 2008).

dimension to memory, linking it to tradition and to awakening as a moment of reconnection with the past.



**Figure 1.** *Saverio Muratori's Palace for the Central Office of the Christian Democracy (left) Compared with Italo Gismondi's Reconstructions of the Insulae of Ostia Antica (right)*

Source: Benedetti 2013 (1) - Public domain (2).

The “Return to Order” artistic movement, which emerged in Europe at the beginning of the twentieth century, focuses on expressing a return to the roots of art, with a profound reflection on time, memory and remembrance. Coined by Jean Cocteau, this movement represents an art governed by rules and order, in contrast to futurist tendencies that challenge the past. The central idea is that of an eternal contemporaneity of the ancient, reflected in works of art through the use of ancient elements such as clothing, objects and places from the past. This desire to suspend time in eternity evokes a sense of melancholy and reflection, as in the works of Picasso, which depict huge, primordial female figures immersed in painful meditation. In these works, the ancient becomes an unattainable mirage, but also an enigmatic experience that reflects the uncertainties and precariousness of the modern world.

In Italy, between 1918 and 1922, artists such as Carlo Carrà, Giorgio de Chirico and Alberto Savinio gathered around the art journal “Valori Plastici”. This group of artists aimed to redefine the role and language of Italian art after World War I. De Chirico, in particular, explored the concept of time in his metaphysical painting. In his paintings, such as “The Riddle of the Hour” from 1911, space is defined around architectural models inspired by 15th-century Florentine art. The image of the clock suggests a motionless atmosphere, and time becomes a metaphysical hour, a petrified enigma. The architecture, which features prominently in the painting, helps to describe this sense of immobility. The human figures present, such as the philosopher-poet-artist and other mysterious figures, add another layer of meaning to the composition, suggesting a sense of the unconscious and mystery. In “The Virgin of Time” (1919), de Chirico presents an imposing female figure, the guardian of time, symbolised by the hourglass, suggesting a reversal of time and a return to

origin. In the Self-Portrait of 1920, de Chirico adopts a Northern Renaissance style, highlighting a new pictorial approach. In the writings of “Valori Plastici” (1919), de Chirico emphasises the importance of drawing and presents himself as an artist of tradition, defining himself as classical. In works such as “Mannequins on the Seashore” (1926), changes in metaphysical language are noticeable, with a revival of the pictorial past. Alberto Savinio, de Chirico’s contemporary, explored similar themes, as in “The City of Promises” (1928), which represents a prehistoric age through the accumulation of figures in a kind of surreal and fairytale collection, with colourful geometric structures suggesting a labyrinthine and enchanted city.

### Grand Tour, Souvenir

The Grand Tour, a forerunner of modern mass tourism, was a cultural initiation ritual undertaken by young people from all over Europe, with Rome as its unmissable destination. Artists, poets and writers completed their cultural education through this journey. Vedutism, a popular artistic genre in the late sixteenth century, conveyed the image of Roman ruins, exalting the fascination of the past and the specificity of the place visited. The ruins were not just relics of the past, but an integral part of the landscape, a source of aesthetic inspiration. The Roman landscape, with its ruins and surrounding countryside, represented an ideal desired by travellers, who encountered this ideal physically by touching and experiencing the majesty of the ruins. The Grand Tour was animated by a cosmopolitan spirit, with Rome as a fundamental meeting place between the sacred and the profane, the past and the present. Visiting the Roman countryside, with its variety of landscapes and memories, enriched the traveller’s experience.<sup>11</sup>

From the sixteenth century onwards, travel became a process of knowledge acquisition. Odeporic literature became a form of narration of the travel experience: ‘The link that odeporic maintains with the concepts of spatiality and representation of the territory, besides constituting a source for the possible description of the “images” that constitute a given place (to offer possible “readings” of the latter, intending the text as an example of the construction of a spatial image), can also reveal the cultural modalities through which the observation of the new landscapes observed along the travel route shapes the literary description’.<sup>12</sup>

From the second half of the 18th century, the view of Rome underwent a profound change, as a new concept of antiquity emerged. There was a selective approach to historical periods, privileging antiquity and adopting an eclectic approach to art and architecture. The validity of classical experience for the present became central, leading to the idea of neoclassical art theory. Artists such as Piranesi systematically explored Roman ruins, influencing European painters and architects who adopted a freer treatment of the landscape and drew inspiration from classical models. The discovery of the ruins of Herculaneum and Pompeii in 1748 and 1764 respectively

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11. M. Formica. *Roma e la Campagna romana nel Grand Tour*. Op. cit. IX.

12. G. Trecchio. *Lo sguardo del viaggiatore: la letteratura odeporica e l'osservazione del mondo*. || Treccani on line (2019).

revolutionised the artistic imagination, bringing to light fragments of ancient life and inspiring a new artistic taste, even in the applied arts.<sup>13</sup>

The Grand Tour represents an interweaving of modernity and the past, with the past becoming available and ready to be staged since the Enlightenment. This vast “treasure trove”<sup>14</sup> transforms the past into a repertoire of scenes ready for use, losing its compactness and disintegrating into different styles. History becomes a sequence of dated scenes that coexist in the various rooms of the house of modernity. This concept fuels Baudelaire’s idea of modernity, which feeds on the chaotic fusion of this repertoire, in a continuous process of contamination. In the nineteenth century, antiquarianism takes on a new value, becoming an analytical system of images in museums and also influencing the souvenir industry in Rome, with workshops of craftsmen and artists dedicated to antiquity.<sup>15</sup>



**Figure 2.** *Andy Warhol’s Reinterpretation of Goethe’s Portrait in the Roman Countryside, Compared with Le Corbusier’s Photographs of his Visit to the Parthenon*  
Source: Public domain.

In his “Journey to Italy” (1816-1829), Goethe expresses his ideal of classicism by finding a source of inspiration in the ruins, buildings and people of Italy. Tischbein’s portrait of Goethe in the Roman countryside becomes a symbol of his aesthetic experience and journey. The construction of the image as a montage allows for a deconstruction that Andy Warhol would later popularise, introducing Goethe’s image into the global circulation as an empty and perpetuated icon (Figure 2). The journey to Italy is a classic model for exploring the country, reflecting the allure of ancient ruins and the atmosphere of the Roman countryside. This journey has been evoked in works such as Roberto Rossellini’s film “Journey to Italy” (1954), which follows an English couple travelling through Naples and Pompeii. The film captures the dual face of Campania, with its bourgeoisie in search of identity and the daily rituals of the local population. Archaeology emerges as the secret theme of the film itself, serving as both background and contrast to the narrative.

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13. C.M. Sicca. *Lo scavo e la rovina*, in *Europa 1700-1992: storia di un’identità. La disgregazione dell’Ancien Régime*. (Milano: Electa, 1987), 229.

14. R. Calasso. *La Folie Baudelaire*. (Milano: Adelphi, 2008).

15. A. Pinelli. *Souvenir. L’industria dell’antico e il Grand Tour a Roma*. (Roma-Bari: Laterza, 2010).

“The Voyage d'Orient” (1911) by Charles-Édouard Jeanneret, later known as Le Corbusier, tells of his journey through Eastern Europe. The journey is marked by contrasting impressions and a fear of life and experience. Le Corbusier discovers the appeal of places like Istanbul and Athens, rediscovers the ancient in its contemporary manifestations, and feels the modern urgency to start anew. Athens was the climax of his journey, particularly the encounter with the Parthenon, which evoked intense and complex emotions. The descriptions of the Parthenon reveal the author's psychological unease, with suggestions of death and destruction alternating with scattered remains on the Acropolis. Le Corbusier seems to want to distance himself from the monument, to exorcise it and recognise the need to create something new. The ancient thus becomes an ambiguous enigma, revealed only through its fragmentation and distance from us, but which will forever weigh as a regret.<sup>16</sup>

### Archaeology and the Ancient

The relationship between archaeology and antiquity is deep and symbolic. Archaeology etymologically means ‘discourse on the ancient’, and its meaning has expanded over time, evolving from the scientific study of ancient civilisations to *ars antiquaria*, collecting associated with the Greco-Roman world. In the humanist era, archaeology includes an iconic and descriptive dimension, privileging the *auctoritas antiqua* (Pallottino, 1968). This concept transcends conventional temporal limits and transforms the ancient into a myth, an aesthetic and poetic dimension that transcends historical time. The myth of the Iliad, the fall of Troy and the destruction of the Temple of Solomon are examples of how the ancient is associated with images of destruction and catastrophe, but also of creation and origin. The ancient therefore lives in a dreamlike and disturbing dimension, reflecting the deepest fears and desires of mankind. Franco Purini assimilates the ancient to an ‘unconscious depth’ that provokes temporal vertigo.<sup>17</sup>

There is archaeology as a scientific discipline that studies the remains of the past, and archaeology as an iconic concept of the ancient, representing an insurmountable frontier and a mythical source of inspiration for art and architecture. Finally, there is an archaeological aspect of antiquity that we could define as ‘the antique within the antique’, where classical Roman frescoes and bucolic representations of Pompeii represent a fusion of archaeology and mystery cults, with secret rites and initiation scenes taking place in suggestive architectural contexts.<sup>18</sup>

The “Hypnerotomachia Poliphili”, published in Venice in 1499 by Aldus Manutius, is a work characterised by a fairy-tale and dreamlike tone, full of vivid sensuality and visionary imagery. In the narrative, antiquity represents the true goal of the journey of the protagonist, Poliphilo, and provides a mythical backdrop that combines archaeological references and imaginative creations. Structured like

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16. C. E. Jeanneret (Le Corbusier). *Il Viaggio d'Oriente (Le Voyage d'Orient)*. (Faenza: Faenza ed., 1974).

17. F. Purini. *Tre forme dell'antico*. || *Metamorfosi* 1-2 (1985).

18. E. Gombrich. *The story of art*. (London: Phaidon Press Limited, 1950).

a dream within a dream, the narrative reflects a mixture of Neoplatonic philosophy, Christianity, esotericism and magic typical of the Renaissance. Through a dreamlike diary rich in antiquarian inventions, Poliphilo explores different dream levels that reflect his inner moods, using architectural structures as graphic symbols of these states. The work is dense with hermetic and alchemical symbolism, intertwined with the theme of love and initiation into the mysteries of Venus. The novel presents itself as an initiatory journey in which the protagonist encounters alchemical figures and cosmic symbols, exploring the creation and origin of the world. This narrative synthesis is nourished by a complex network of symbols and contrasts, contributing to the creation of an enigmatic and fascinating work that continues to challenge interpretation.<sup>19</sup>



**Figure 3.** Drawings from Francesco Colonna's *Text* (left) Compared with Scenes from Andrea Mantegna's *Triumphs of Caesar* (right)  
Source: Public domain.

The iconography of the emblems in the *Hypnerotomachia Poliphili* has interesting parallels with the cycle of paintings of the “Triumphs of Caesar” by Andrea Mantegna. These paintings, painted between 1485 and 1505, are associated with the literary and figurative experiences of Francesco Colonna. According to Giovanni Romano,<sup>20</sup> Colonna's hieroglyphic language and exuberant inventiveness reflect the metaphorical-descriptive process present in Mantegna's works. In particular, the theme of “The Triumph of love”, present in the *Hypnerotomachia*, finds a powerful visualisation in Mantegna's paintings, laden with suggestion and mystery (Figure 3). This connection highlights a possible mutual influence between Colonna's works and Mantegna's paintings, both representative of the artistic and cultural fervour of the Italian Renaissance.<sup>21</sup>

Andrea Palladio's drawings of the Roman Baths mark a crucial moment in the reflection on antiquity, characterised by the loss of its mystical value and the transition to a scientific and rational approach. These drawings represent a meticulous analysis of the ancient world, using surveying as a measuring tool to understand the proportions of monuments. Palladio recorded measurements and dimensions in

19. M. Calvesi. *Il sogno di Poliphilo Prenestino*, (Roma: Officina edizioni, 1980); F. Colonna. *Hypnerotomachia Poliphili*, ed. M. Gabriele and M. Ariani (Milano: Adelphi, 2004).

20. G. Romano, *Verso la maniera moderna: da Mantegna a Raffaello*, in *Memoria dell'antico nell'arte italiana, III. Dalla tradizione all'archeologia*, ed S. Settis (Torino: Einaudi, 1986) 16.

21. A. Martindale. *I Trionfi di Cesare, nella collezione della regina d'Inghilterra ad Hamph Court*. (Milano: Rusconi, 1980).



plan and elevation, analysing lights, volumes and masses with extraordinary precision.<sup>22</sup> In his drawings he reproduced lost architectural details, offering a modern and systematic view of interiors and structures. Although he mistakenly confused the Pantheon with the Baths of Agrippa, his drawings reveal the grandeur and spatiality of ancient monuments and in many ways anticipate the modern approach to restoration and conservation.

Pirro Ligorio's 1561 engraving "Antiquae Urbis imago" offers a powerful representation of ancient Rome, combining antiquarian erudition with modern archaeological knowledge. Ligorio reconstructs the monuments according to literary models, using an axonometric view that gives scientific precision to details and overall views. In the Vatican area, for example, Nero's Circus, the Obelisk and the Pyramid are reproduced with archaeological sensitivity. This vision presents a harmonious fusion of order and chaos, with monuments superimposed and listed to recreate the ancient city. According to Marcello Fagiolo, Ligorio's work synthesises the multiple contradictions of the city, combining scientific investigation, criticism and compositional inventiveness, both as a memory of the past and a prophecy for the future.<sup>23</sup>

In the eighteenth century, archaeology became crucial to the development of a modern architectural language. The discoveries at Herculaneum and Pompeii aroused great interest throughout Europe, leading to a proliferation of treatises on architecture and a reinterpretation of classical orders. Louis-Gérard de Cordemoy challenged the Vitruvian conception of architecture, while Marc Antoine Laugier introduced the concept of the primitive hut as the origin of architectural order. Jean Nicolas Louis Durand (1819) introduced the concept of composition, simplifying architectural elements to create building typologies. As neoclassical architecture consolidated, Jean-Baptiste Rondelet and Auguste Choisy developed classicist ideas with a new archaeological rigour.

Manfredo Tafuri points out that during the Enlightenment, architecture began to dissolve into the uniformity of predetermined typologies. Giovanni Battista Piranesi represents the culmination of this dissolution, with his engravings mixing rationality and irrationality, challenging traditional notions of antiquity and architecture. Piranesi reduced antiquity to distorted fragments, questioning the very concept of architectural form and the city. His work highlights the internal contradictions of Enlightenment rationalism and marks a crisis in the formal idea of architecture and the city. In Campo Marzio, Piranesi intensifies this crisis by pushing axonometric representation beyond the limits of the absurd, evoking the past in its scientific objectivity and denying it at the same time.<sup>24</sup>

The antiquarian and archaeological taste of the 18th and 19th centuries is reflected in the watercolours of Joseph Michael Gandy, particularly those for John Soane (1813). Influenced by Piranesi and others, these works combine architectural styles and languages in an esoteric and funereal atmosphere. The design for the Lincoln's Inn Fields residence, now the Soane Museum, depicts a cavernous space

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22. G. Zorzi. *I disegni dell'antichità di Andrea Palladio*. (Venezia: Neri Pozza ed., 1959).

23. M. Fagiolo. *La scena tragica di Roma antica secondo Piranesi: autopsia, radiografia, rigenerazione*, in *Le Arti di Piranesi*, (Venezia: Marsilio, 2010).

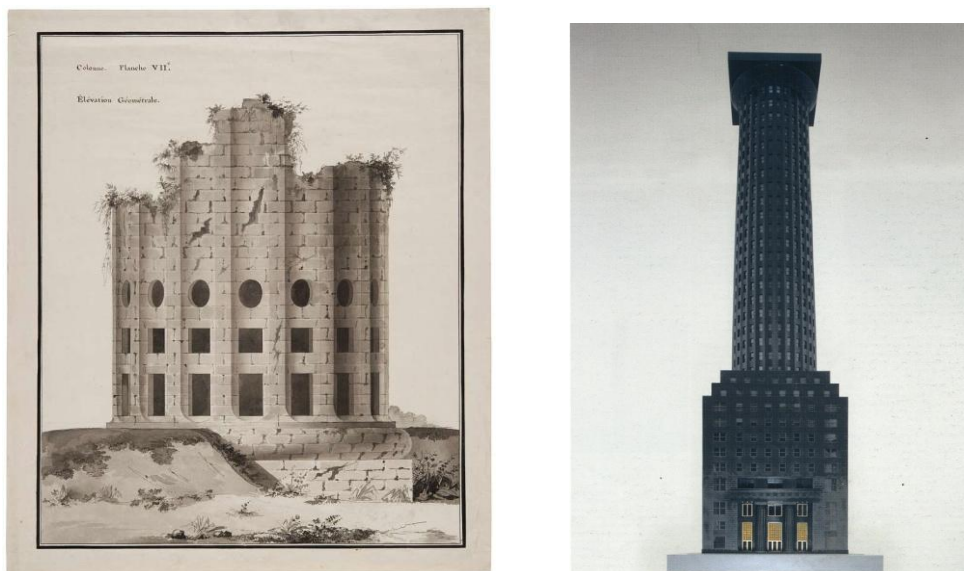
24. M. Tafuri. *Progetto e utopia*. (Roma-Bari: Laterza, 1973).

with fragments of ancient ruins and cinerary urns. Gandy powerfully captures the evocative atmosphere of this space, creating nocturnal effects and a sense of mystery. Soane's museum, described as 'a union of the arts',<sup>25</sup> brings together fragments from an ancient Greek-Roman, Egyptian, Neo-Romanesque and Neo-Gothic world.

### The Ancient as the Unconscious of an Architecture

The ancient is a recurring theme in modern architectural culture. Since Pirro Ligorio, we must ask why it has aroused so much interest, to the point of being considered a permanent element (at the critical moment of the Enlightenment) of architectural languages. In authors such as Karl Friedrich Schinkel (1781-1841) and the revolutionary architects Étienne-Louis Boullée (1728-1799) and Claude-Nicolas Ledoux (1736-1806), the antique is interpreted through a series of themes that would be revisited as archetypes in twentieth-century architecture.

In this sense, Adolf Loos's (1870-1933) proposal for the Chicago Tribune competition is emblematic and deliberately provocative: the short circuit between ancient and modern is condensed into the monumental and solemn icon of the towering Doric column. The international competition announced in 1922 by Chicago's major newspaper, the Tribune, called for the design of a new headquarters in the Loop area of Chicago. The editors wanted an office building that would express the prestige of the newspaper through its monumentality. Architects from around the world responded to the competition, including Walter Gropius with Adolf Meyer, Bruno Taut, Eliel Saarinen and Marcello Piacentini. The Tribune Factory, clad entirely in black granite, would reach a height of 120 metres.



**Figure 4.** *Drawing from Desert de Retz, House in the Shape of a Ruined Doric Column (left) Compared with Adolf Loos' Project for the Chicago Tribune (right)*  
Source: Public domain.

25. J. Summerson. *Union of the arts. Sir John Soane's museum-house*, || *Lotus International* 35, (1982): 64-74.

The base, a cube that serves as both base and building, is simply articulated with regular openings along the nine floors and the levels of the two upper staircases. At the bottom of the façade, the entrance is marked by a pair of two-storey Doric columns. The central element, the fluted column, has twenty-eight flutes: each one is occupied by a row of windows arranged from one end to the other. The supporting structure is concentrated in the corners. The interior spaces are arranged around a central core formed by the lift shaft: a square shaft, the true structural core of the skyscraper. By analogy with the Doric order, the building has an entasis, an upward tapering. The crown of the building is in the form of a capital of the Greek Doric order, composed of an echinus and an abacus. Adolf Loos intended to place a statue of a seated tribune at the top of the column to emphasise the monumentality of the whole.

Among the various interpretations, the column alludes to the column of a newspaper; according to Loos, the idea of the isolated column of gigantic proportions was an archetype going back to the origins of architecture, as one of the seven wonders of the world. According to Bruno Zevi (1950), the project has a sarcastic tone: 'Loos preferred the architecture of ancient Rome, but not its rhetorical accents, its military poses, its oratory, its imperial magniloquence; the Rome that inspired him was that filtered through the exegetics of the Viennese School of Art History, the prosaic city of the building continuum'.<sup>26</sup> The column, defined as 'hyperbolic, grotesque', is perhaps, for Zevi, an insult to Sullivan's America.

According to Tafuri, it is a veiled hypothesis of irony, but also a polemic against the contemporary metropolis. In the land of 'timeless forms', the Viennese architect 'moves masterfully in a precarious balance between kitsch and renunciation: the space that separates the two concepts is that of the desperate loneliness of the alienated object, of formal alienation, of the metropolitan disillusionment to which Loos refers'.<sup>27</sup> Joseph Rykwert has highlighted the symbolic value attached to the choice of column.<sup>28</sup> Renato de Fusco defines it as 'the most rigorous iconoclastic case',<sup>29</sup> attributing to its gesture, on the one hand, a Dadaist-Surrealist vein shared with other American architects, and, on the other, a postmodern ambivalence, since it represents an instance of eclectic inspiration filtered through ancient models and references. With reference to some writings by Franco Purini, Loos's column recalls the metamorphic value of architectural elements, their transformation as in a mysterious alchemy from one dimensional order to another.<sup>30</sup>

Adolf Loos's project can be compared with the Desert de Retz project (1774-1784) by François Racine de Monville: the obvious formal analogy in plan and elevations (base and shaft), however, reveals a difference in the idea of the picturesque with an effect of incompleteness: in Monville's project, the idea of ruin in this case assumes a provocative and visionary evocative value, and is also part of the widespread practice in the neoclassical period of inserting fake ruins in the design of historical gardens between the 17th and 18th centuries (Figure 4).

26. B. Zevi. *Storia dell'architettura moderna*. (Torino: Einaudi, 1950) 91.

27. M. Tafuri, F. Dal Co. *Architettura contemporanea*. (Milano: Electa, 1976) 191.

28. J. Rykwert. *The Dancing column. On order in architecture*. (Cambridge: The MIT Press, 1996).

29. R. De Fusco. *Storia dell'architettura contemporanea*. (Roma-Bari: Laterza, 2007).

30. F. Purini. *Comporre l'architettura*. (Roma-Bari: Laterza, 2000).

### Hadrian's Villa

The Emperor Hadrian, who was born in Rome in 76 AD and died in Baiae in 138 AD, was a man of many facets: cultured, passionate about the arts, a skilled military leader and perhaps even an architect. Hadrian's Villa, which he commissioned, reflects his complex personality and the experiences of his travels. As Marguerite Yourcenar wrote in her "Memoirs of Hadrian",<sup>31</sup> the villa was an artistic refuge and a synthesis of his interests, with names such as Canopus and the Valley of Tempe evoking both a poetic atmosphere and an architectural narrative.

Hadrian's Villa is a unique architectural complex. It is more than just a villa: it is a miniature city that recalls the places the emperor loved and visited most during his lifetime. This monument of memory, as defined by Oswald Mathias Ungers<sup>32</sup> (1979), is an open-air museum that combines elements of history, art and science. Situated in a vast area to the south-west of Tivoli, the villa has an unconventional urban layout, characterised by multiple polarities and units rather than a regular chessboard layout. The presence of a complex road system, both above and below ground, suggests a detailed and coherent planning.<sup>33</sup> However, the lack of a defined distributive organisational chart has led to debates about the nature of the project and its evolution over time.<sup>34</sup>

The Hadrian's complex (figure 5) was built around the remains of an ancient Republican villa, restored and incorporated into the new layout by Emperor Hadrian. The Palace, one of the two imperial areas, stands out for its architectural complexity, use of precious materials and security measures. The Academy, the other imperial area, served as a separate residence for Empress Sabina. In addition to the imperial residences, there are buildings for the collective housing of different social classes, such as the *Hospitalia* for members of the court and the Hundred Chambers for the service staff. The differences in status are also reflected in the thermal baths, with the Small Baths for the court and the Large Baths for the staff.

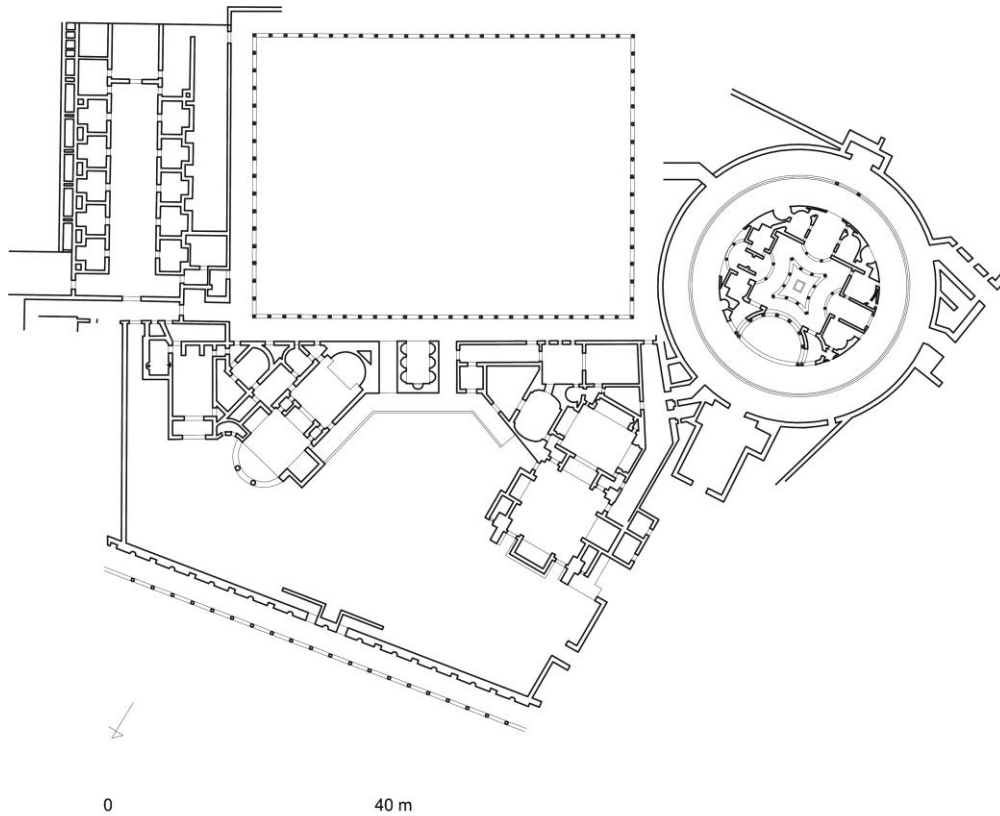
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31. M. Yourcenar. *Mémoires d'Hadrien*. (Paris: Édition Gallimard, 1974).

32. O. M. Ungers, *Architecture of the collective memory*. || *Lotus international* 24 (1979): 5-7.

33. E Salsa Prina Ricotti. *Villa Adriana: il sogno di un imperatore*. (Roma: L'Erma di Bretschneider, 2001).

34. P. Caliarì. *Tractatus logico sintattico. La forma trasparente di Villa Adriana*. (Roma: Edizioni Quasar, 2012); P. Caliarì. *La composizione policentrica di Villa Adriana e il tecnografo post-alessandrino*. || *Ananke* 84. (2018): 67-69; P. Caliarì. *Nuovi contributi sulla composizione architettonica di Villa Adriana*. || Bruciati et al. *Le grandi ville romane del territorio tiburtino*, (Tivoli: Tipografia Palombi, 2021), A. Viscogliosi. *Adriano e la sua Villa*. In Bruciati et al. (ed): *Le grandi ville romane del territorio Tiburtino*. (2021): 163-170; A. Viscogliosi. *L'architettura Adrianea: di Adriano, per Adriano, sotto Adriano, dopo Adriano*, in *Hispania Antigua. Arqueologica* (2020):11; Bozzoni C. et al. *L'architettura del mondo antico*. (Roma-Bari: Laterza, 2006).



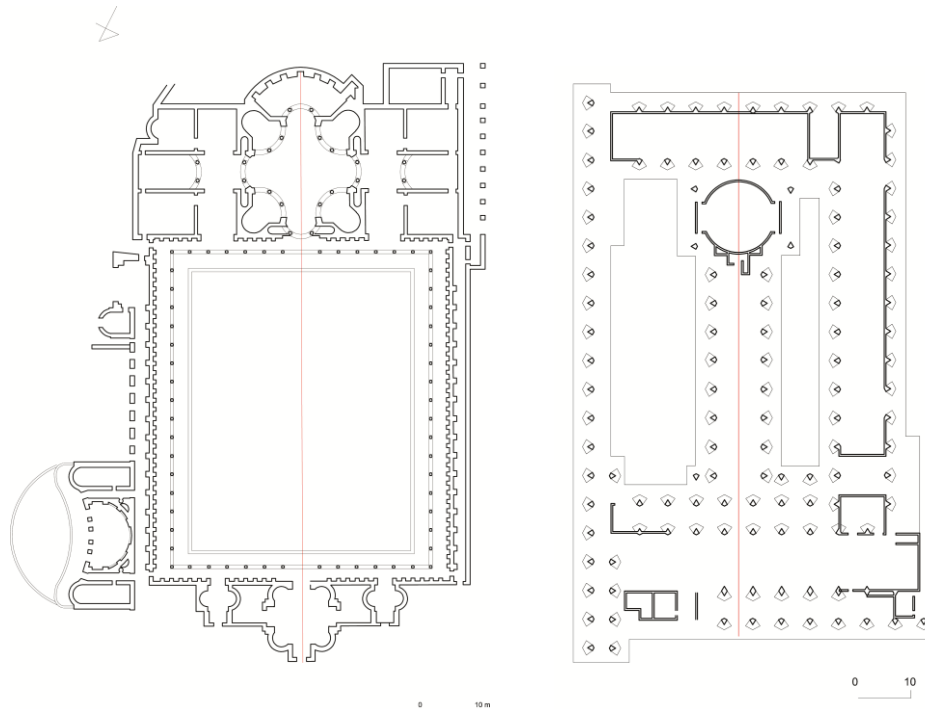
**Figure 5.** Part of the Ground Plan of Hadrian's Villa

Source: Froio 2013.

The architectural structure of Hadrian's Villa is organised around four main nuclei, each with specific characteristics. The first is the Imperial Palace, which includes the Throne Room, the Upper Gardens and other areas, as well as the *Hospitalia*. The second nucleus includes the *Pecile* and the Winter Palace, with the *Nymphaeum Stadium* and other elements. The third is centred around the Great Vestibule, with the Small and Great Baths and the Hundred Chambers. Finally, the fourth axis concerns the Academy and the Fortress of Bruna. This organisation reflects the different functions and spaces within the villa.<sup>35</sup>

In Hadrian's Villa, each architectural element has an internal formal coherence, accentuated by the orthogonality of the walls. The compositional approach involves the juxtaposition of rotated and translated volumes, creating formal tension at the points of contact. The Maritime Theatre, a cylindrical volume, acts as a compositional node, linking and contrasting the different parts of the villa. This architectural element brings together the spaces of the Library Courtyard, the Hall of the Seven Philosophers and the *Eliocaminus Baths*. The eclectic architecture of the island shows the influence of Mediterranean residences and palatial derivations.

35. G. Froio. *La componente archeologica nel progetto moderno*. (Soveria Mannelli: Rubbettino, 2013) 177-183.



**Figure 6.** *The Golden Square of Hadrian's Villa (left) Compared with the Seminar Building of Florida Southern College (right)*

Source: Froio 2013.

Hadrian's idea was to create a miniature villa, a prototype of the entire complex, so that a number of different places could be visited and collected.<sup>36</sup>

The distinctive quality lies in its complex planimetric composition, characterised by intricate vaulted spaces that translate into a series of interconnected forms. This arrangement presents a tight rhythm, with a concatenation of spaces that develop in a coherent yet seemingly disordered manner. Bruno Zevi emphasises that this villa is an extreme example of late imperial architecture, in which the spherical interior of the Pantheon is used for a narrative of disjointed spatial pieces, but orchestrated coherently within the landscape.

The peculiarity of Hadrian's Villa lies not only in the arrangement of its architectures or in their singularity, but rather in the ability to integrate different architectural episodes and to resolve the contrast between them into a coherent order of forms. This complex order manifests itself as a three-dimensional parataxis or as a theatrical narrative in which the buildings are placed in a scene reminiscent of a montage of characters. The architecture of the villa not only selects buildings, but also reveals a process of appropriation and juxtaposition of figures, transforming

36. Kahn draws inspiration from the complex form of Hadrian's Villa in the Salk Institute for Biological Studies by manipulating and reinterpreting historical elements to create a new aesthetic. The residences, arranged along a terraced path, evoke the image of a Mediterranean village. The complex is characterised by a search for order based on a rhythmic succession of solids and voids, integrating dissonant elements to create a sense of depth and complexity. See: V. Scully. *Louis I. Kahn*. (Milano: Il Saggiatore, 1963); M. Tafuri. *Storicità di Louis Kahn*. || *Comunità*, 17 (1964); W.L. MacDonald, J. A. Pinto. *Villa Adriana. La costruzione e il mito da Adriano a Louis Kahn*. (Milano: Electa, 2002).

their original meaning and finding its full meaning only in the overall narrative of the villa.

Hadrian's Villa is an example of late Roman architecture. It is a highly fertile compositional model that has inspired various modern and contemporary architectural projects. The pavilion system is one of the most convincing compositional interpretations. Emil Kaufmann gives a clear definition of it, referring to the forms of Baroque architecture and its progressive loss of centre: 'The living integration of the parts is over, the new complexes have the character of decentralisation. To remove a part from a Baroque complex would be to destroy the whole. (...) In the pavilion system, the hierarchical division into parts is essentially no longer recognised; it is nothing more than a collection of independent elements'.<sup>37</sup>

The loss of unity in the case of Hadrian's Villa is expressed in the dissonant relationship between the different architectural bodies. The formal relationship between Villa Adriana and the Baroque landscape has been highlighted, especially in the gardens of Versailles.<sup>38</sup> In particular, the landscape dimension is what the Adriana complex shares with Frank Lloyd Wright's Florida Southern College<sup>39</sup> or the more recent Getty Center by Richard Meier.<sup>40</sup>

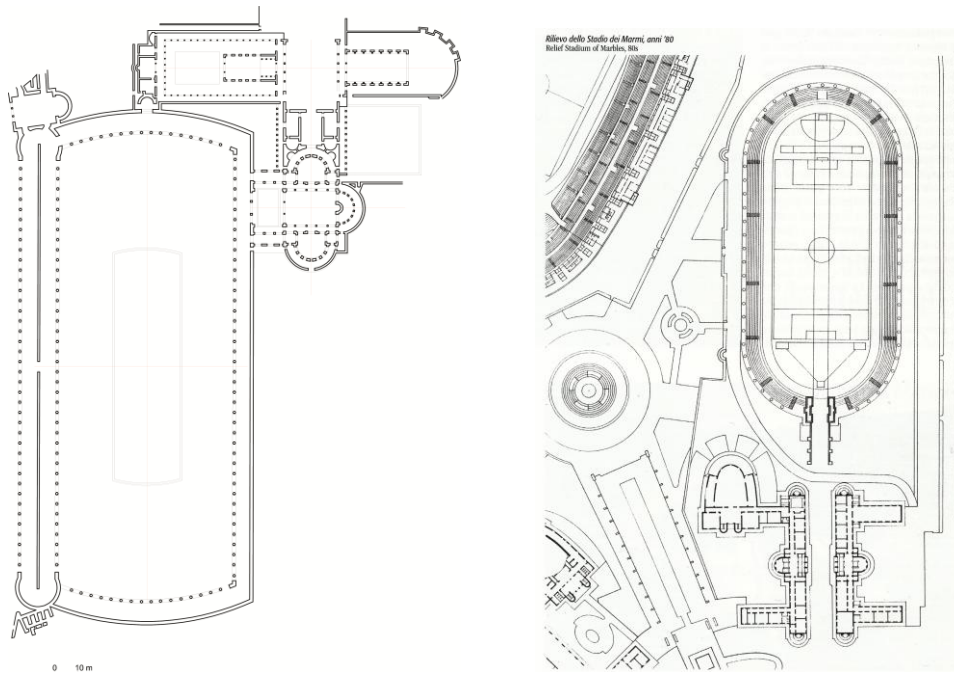
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37. E. Kauffmann, *Von Ledoux bis Le Corbusier. Ursprung und Entwicklung der Autonomen Architektur* (Wien: Verlag Dr. Rolf Passer Leipzig, 1933).

38. J. Jacobus, *Twentieth Century architecture. The middle years: 1940-1965* (London: Times and Hudson, 1966).

39. The Florida Southern College, designed by Frank Lloyd Wright between 1938 and 1957, is one of his lesser known but highly innovative works. Located in Lakeland, Florida, the campus blends harmoniously with its surroundings, with buildings nestled among citrus trees on a hillside overlooking Lake Hollingsworth. Wright designed the campus as a living organism, with architecture that blends into the landscape and fosters a subtle dialogue between buildings and nature. This approach eschews the solemnity and repetition of traditional university buildings and instead offers a dynamic identity open to future development. The layout of the campus has been compared to that of the Hadrian's Villa in Tivoli, suggesting an organisation reminiscent of the emperor's memories of his travel. See: V. Scully. *Frank Lloyd Wright*. (Milano: Il Saggiatore, 1960); L. Zevi, *Una miniatura della città-territorio wrightiana*. || *L'Architettura: cronache e storia*. (1991): XXXVII; M. Argenti. *Il Florida Southern College di Frank Lloyd Wright, progetto di un organismo aperto*. || *Palladio* (2020): 141-152.

40. The Getty Center, designed by Richard Meier and completed between 1984 and 1997, is a cultural and museum complex located on a hill north of Los Angeles. Described as a "city in miniature", the Getty Center houses a major museum with permanent collections of painting and sculpture, as well as the Center for Art History. The complex is characterised by cubic buildings and opaque volumes arranged around the converging edges of two ridges separated by a canyon. Access is via the Propylaea at the foot of the hill, from where visitors can ascend by funicular railway or a winding road to reach the 'Acropolis'. The surrounding landscape is an integral part of the design, with a central park linking architecture and nature. The buildings are organised according to two overlapping grids and include spaces for exhibitions, offices, libraries and public areas. The design reflects the concept of a museum villa, combining ancient traditions of rest and contemplation with a modern vision of architecture and culture. See: Costanzo M, et. al. *Richard Meier Frank Stella*. (Milano: Electa. 1993); K. Frampton, *Richard Meier*. (Milano: Electa, 2003).



**Figure 7.** Part of the Ground Plan of Hadrian's Villa (left) compared with the Stadio dei Marmi at the Foro Italico (right)

Source: Froio 2013.

But the same relationship with the landscape can also be reinterpreted in one of the most famous complexes of Italian rationalism, in the architectures of the Foro Italico by Del Debbio and Luigi Moretti.<sup>41</sup>

The formal analogies of the layout of the Roman villa, when compared with these modern projects, show more specific similarities in detail. For example, if we analyse the layout of the "Piazza D'Oro" we can make a compositional comparison with the Industrial Art Building (1942) of Florida Southern College (Figure 6): in both cases there is a defined geometric axis that runs longitudinally through the two buildings. In Wright's building, the central axis traverses the refectory and, as a focal point, reaches the circular space of the small amphitheatre through the central series of columns of the pavilion. In the "Piazza D'Oro" the presence of an axis is in turn defined by the series of spaces that cross it: the vestibule, the double portico, the expanse of the Water Mirror, and finally the Imperial Triclinium with its bold structural forms that, together with the lateral triclinia, form a single complex vaulted building. The almost perfect symmetry of the Piazza d'Oro becomes an asymmetrical sequence in Wright's building. In the Industrial Art Building, the

41. The Foro Italico, also known as the Mussolini Forum, is a celebratory architectural complex of Fascist power in Rome, designed as the northern entrance to the city. Based on historical axes such as the Via Flaminia and the Via Cassia, the Foro Italico includes several buildings and sports facilities distributed along a main axis perpendicular to the Tiber River. The original project by Enrico Del Debbio in 1928 has undergone various modifications and additions over the years, including works such as the Stadio dei Marmi and the Casa delle Armi by Luigi Moretti. Despite the stylistic differences between the two architects, the overall design reflects the original intention to create a monumental and sports centre, incorporating elements of Italian rationalism and archaeological references. See: M.L. Neri, *Enrico Del Debbio Architetto*. (Roma: Idea Books, 2007).



two courtyards, parallel to the axis of the pavilion, are doubled in section. The more compressed courtyard is balanced by the presence of laboratories.

A second example is the comparison between the layout of the “Pecile” in Hadrian’s Villa and the “Stadio dei Marmi” in the Foro Italico (Figure 7). The Pecile is defined by a longitudinal axis that culminates in the atrium of the cross-shaped Nymphaeum Stadium. This, in turn, is connected to the external longitudinal side of the Pecile with the addition of the Building with Three Exedras. In the case of the Foro Italico, the two end buildings designed by Del Debbio, although not perfectly symmetrical, form a kind of propylaea of the entire complex: they define an axial direction that channels and crosses the Stadio dei Marmi.

### Conclusion

The themes discussed here - memory, the presence of the ancient as an unconscious entity in the modern, travel as memory, and the theme of the pavilion system in Hadrian’s Villa - resonate in other examples, leaving this conclusion open-ended.

Memory is a particularly important theme in Italian architectural culture. For Aldo Rossi, for example, in the project of the Scientific Theatre, the concept of memory is intertwined with the idea of recollection, of analogical association, a form of involuntary memory that recalls other architectures: ‘It was a box with a tympanum that reminded me, as I have written, of the theatre of Roussel, the theatres of the Po Valley, the white theatre of childhood. The beauty of the scientific theatre is its atmosphere, what I called the prestige of the theatre’.<sup>42</sup> For Rossi, memory is the sentimental construction of a chain of images, architectures of memory, which in turn become other architectures.

On the theme of architecture as a collection of memories, the souvenir we discussed earlier, of which Hadrian’s Villa remains the historical reference example, we can cite Philip Johnson’s buildings in Connecticut, in New Canaan. In this example, the composition of buildings scattered in the landscape as a modern and deconstructed pavilion system is evident. In one of these buildings, the Pavilion, Hadrian’s citation of the ancient returns in the form of a dimensional distortion defined as neo-mannerist. As Lina Malfona argues: ‘The pavilion is a kind of small sculpture that you look at when you are inside the house (...). The small pavilion on the lake is a folly, a whim, a device that creates a surprise effect, but it is also a reflection on the dissolution of human measures and the uselessness of conventional canons’.<sup>43</sup>

Finally, regarding the relationship between the past and the modern, or rather the presence of the ancient in the modern, other scholars have highlighted the key figure of Ludwig Mies van der Rohe. In particular, Antonio Monestiroli wrote: ‘Mies is the architect who most refers to the principles of ancient architecture and who furthest departs from its forms. (...). Mies’s form is never captivating, it never stands out for its particularity, which is reminiscent of Albertian mediocrity. (...).

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42. A. Rossi. *A Scientific Autobiography*. (Cambridge: The MIT Press, 1981).

43. L. Malfona. *La condizione manierista*. (Siracusa: LetteraVentidue, 2021) 131-132.

Mies's forms are forgotten, they do not remain in memory, but reappear as necessary forms whenever one is confronted with them'<sup>44</sup>. In Mies's architecture, the temple-like dimension that refers to the classical world is present, even if it is not explicit. Think, for example, of the Barcelona Pavilion and the way Mies constructs the proportions of the internal partitions with a refined and delayed use of the golden section. Finally, we think of the New National Gallery in Berlin (Figure 8) and the way in which Mies, for example, establishes a deferred comparison between the image of the Parthenon on the Acropolis in Athens and a perfect, building in steel and glass that is at the same time modern and ancient.



**Figure 8.** *The New National Gallery by Mies van der Rohe*

Source: Froio 2024.

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44. A. Monestiroli. *La metopa e il triglifo. Nove lezioni di architettura*. (Roma-Bari: Laterza) 62-63.

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