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Villa Adriana as Collection. Hearst Castle and The Getty Center

*By Gregorio Froio**

This essay explores the enduring influence of the Villa Adriana on modern literature, film and architecture. Built by Emperor Hadrian near Tivoli, the villa is much more than just an ancient Roman site. Over time, it has evolved into a powerful symbol: an open, ever-changing space that continues to inspire writers, artists and architects alike. These themes also feature in films such as The Belly of an Architect (1987) and Angels in America (2003), in which the villa provides the backdrop to tales of loss, change and history. The second part of the essay looks at two modern buildings in the United States that were inspired by Villa Adriana: Hearst Castle and the Getty Center. Both were commissioned by wealthy collectors, William Randolph Hearst and John Paul Getty, who saw themselves as modern-day emperors. Designed by Julia Morgan, Hearst Castle is an eclectic mix of styles and artefacts from across Europe. It reflects Hearst's desire to collect and control history. The Getty Center, designed by Richard Meier, is a modern 'city of art' built on a hill in Los Angeles. Its design, with overlapping grids and the use of travertine stone, recalls the structure and spirit of Villa Adriana. The essay concludes by linking these contemporary spaces to the concept of the 'villa-museum': a setting that encompasses both art and memory. These museums are not just buildings. They are complex worlds that blend history, identity and imagination. The Getty Center, in particular, demonstrates how ancient concepts can be reimagined in contemporary forms. In this way, Villa Adriana continues to inspire new stories and spaces, acting as a timeless link between the past and the present.

Introduction

Villa Adriana is more than just a late-imperial Roman villa. The villa of an emperor has over time become an open text capable of regenerating itself and taking on ever-new forms, as many as the impressions it has inspired in artists, writers and architects.

The author has recently conducted a series of studies on this theme, which have culminated in a monographic work[1]. The compositional nature of the villa has also been addressed in other recent scholarly publications.[2]

This essay explores a specific literary dimension, taking a similar approach to recent research on the composition of the Villa[3]. This literary dimension is

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1. G. Froio. *Attualità di Villa Adriana. Nuove ricerche*. (Soveria Mannelli: Rubbettino, 2025).

2. 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 (2025) *Archaeology and modern architecture: A comparative reading*. || Athens Journal of Architecture 11(2): 181-200.

examined within a broader framework that seeks to identify narrative and cinematic references related to the Hadrianic theme from the twentieth century, revealing new and hidden meanings.[4]

This study addresses the following question: Have specific formal outcomes in subsequent architecture resulted from the Hadrianeum model as a major cultural artefact? If so, in what terms?

The primary objective of this research is to emphasise the dual cultural and artistic significance of Hadrian's architectural project at his villa in Tivoli. We aim to establish a connection between the literary associations of this iconic villa and the formal outcomes of modern architectural projects.

A secondary objective, closely related to the primary objective, is to determine Emperor Hadrian's intentions or desires, as evidenced in the relevant literary references (both contemporary and modern). We will also explore whether subsequent authors have adopted these intentions and, if so, how they have realised them.

In a second part, we will mention two contemporary examples of villas. Their design was inspired by the ancient world through specific iconic references: the Getty Center and Hearst Castle. The founders of these villas, Jean Paul Getty and William Randolph Hearst respectively, can be seen as mirrored figures of Emperor Hadrian, who wanted to recreate the topological and spatial geographies of the world he had travelled in the ancient villa at Tivoli, as focused in important publications. [5]

Villa Adriana has inspired many films and books. One notable example is Peter Greenaway's 1987 film *The Belly of an Architect.* The film tells the story of

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3. P. Caliari. *Tractatus logico sintattico. La forma trasparente di Villa Adriana*. (Roma: Edizioni Quasar, 2012); P. Caliari. *La composizione policentrica di Villa Adriana e il tecnigrafo post-alessandrino.* || *Ananke 84*. (2018): 67-69; P. Caliari. *Nuovi contributi sulla composizione architettonica di Villa Adriana*. Bruciati et al. *Le grandi ville romane del territorio tiburtino*. (Tivoli: Tipografia Palombi, 2021); G. E. Cinque e E. Lazzeri. *Analisi geometriche e progettuali in alcuni complessi di Villa Adriana* || *Romula 1*, 2011; G. E. Cinque, *Approcci preliminari allo studio della Villa Adriana di Tivoli*. || *Romula 9*, 2011; G. E. Cinque. *Le componenti progettuali nell'architettura della villa Adriana: il nucleo centrale*. R. Hidalgo, P. León (Eds). *Roma, Tibur, Baetica. Investigaciones Adrianeas*, Sevilla 2013; A. Viscogliosi. *L'architettura adrianea: di Adriano, per Adriano, sotto Adriano, dopo Adriano*. || *Adventus Hadriani. Investigaciones sobre arquitectura adrianea*, R. Hidalgo, G. E. Cinque, A. Pizzo, A.Viscogliosi. (eds) || «Hispania Antiqua. Serie Arquelogica» 11 (2020): 11-36; Michael R. Ytterberg. *The Hidden Order of Hadrian's Villa, and the Order of Modern Architecture*. || *Nexus 2012*: *Relationships Between Architecture*. 127-154 and Mathematics, Milan. 11-14 June 2012; M. D'Alessandro (2022). *Oswald Mathias Ungers at Belvederestrasse: Self-portrait in the studio.* || Athens Journal of Architecture 8(4): 405-438; P. Burlando, S. Grillo (2019). *Complexity vs simplicity: The contrasts of architectural language in the past and in the present.* || Athens Journal of Architecture 5(2): 127-146.

4. F. Slavazzi. *Villa Adriana nel Novecento. L'archeologia e la cultura (architettura, letteratura, cinema, teatro)* in: M. Boldacci, L. De Franceschi, M. E. Micheli. *Leggere nel Novecento. Leggere il Novecento*, Franco Angeli, Milano 2020, pp. 146-156; G. Pucci, *L'ombra lunga di Villa Adriana,* in: A. Bruciati, M. Eichberg, G. Proietti (eds), *Le Grandi Ville romane del territorio Tiburtino*, Tipografia Palombi e Lanci, Tivoli 2021: 245-250.

5. Victoria Kastner. *Julia Morgan. An Intimate Biography of the Traiblazing Architect*. (San Francisco: Chronicle Books, 2021); M. Costanzo, V. Giorgi, M. G. Tolomeo (eds). *Richard Meier Frank Stella*. (Milano: Electa, 1993); Richard Meier. *On the Spirit of Architecture,* || *Architectural Digest*, 1981.

an American architect working on an exhibition about Boullée in Rome. Some scenes were filmed at Villa Adriana, where the architect searches for inspiration. The film reflects on time and decay, depicting the ruins as symbols of a world that is fading away. Another example is the TV series *Angels in America* (2003), directed by Mike Nichols. Based on Tony Kushner's play, one scene features parts of Villa Adriana alongside a ruined San Francisco following the 1906 earthquake. This lends the show a poetic quality and blends ancient and modern tragedies.[6]

I will analyze below two contemporary literary works, as different as they are evocative: *Notizie dagli scavi* by Franco Lucentini (1964) and the more recent *L'Enigma di Boussois. I Misteri di Villa Adriana* by Pier Federico Caliari (2022). Although stylistically distinct, both novels revolve around the mysterious ruins of the Villa at Tivoli as their narrative core. They are part of a rich body of contemporary Hadrianic literature, whose most eminent literary figure is Marguerite Yourcenar. The Belgian-French writer revived, in her *Memoirs of Hadrian*, a new and at the same time unprecedented portrayal of Emperor Hadrian: a literary invention and evocative philological reconstruction of his human story. [7]

Cinema and Literature Background

Franco Lucentini's 1964 novel *Notizie dagli scavi* tells the story of a porter in a shady Roman guesthouse, known as 'the professor'. Following a series of strange events, he finds himself wandering through the ruins of Villa Adriana. He follows the usual tourist routes, such as the Muro del Pecile and the Accademia. He reads from a guidebook which explains the uncertain history of places such as the *Cento Camerelle*. His thoughts become jumbled, much like the confusing landscape. He wonders, for example, whether the tower was built before or after the farmhouse to which it is attached. This sense of uncertainty persists as he visits the *Teatro Marittimo* (Figure 1), where the reflections on the water make the ruins seem even more mysterious. Lucentini uses these scenes to explore the concept of time and how ruins can make us feel caught between the past and the present. The villa appears both real and dreamlike, unfinished and outside of time. [8]

Lucentini also explores these concepts in his short philosophical work, 'Epigrafia e metafisica'. He argues that ruins are the true shape of our world — everything is merely fragments left behind by time. He suggests that if time didn't exist, nothing would happen and not even ruins would exist. To him, matter itself is already a kind of ruin.

These themes also appear in cinema. In Rossellini's 1954 film Journey to Italy, a British couple visit Pompeii. The ancient ruins provide the backdrop to a personal crisis, demonstrating the ongoing influence of the past on our lives.

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6. M. Giori, Villa Adriana come Paradiso "favoloso". || "LANX" 7 (2010): 198-216.

7. M. Yourcenar. *Mémoires d'Hadrien*. (Paris: Librairie Plon, 1951); M. Yourcenar. *Opere/1. Romanzi e racconti*. (Milano: Classici Bompiani, 1986); M. Yourcenar, *Opere. saggi e memorie*. (Milano: Classici Bompiani, 1992; M. Yourcenar, *Les Yeux Ouverts*. (Paris: Editions du Centurion, 1980).

8. F. Lucentini, *Notizie dagli scavi*. (Milano: Einaudi, 1965) 39.

Pier Federico Caliari's novel, *L'Enigma di Boussois*, begins in 1911 and continues beyond 1924. It is set during Mussolini's rise to power in Italy. Once again, the main setting is Villa Adriana. The protagonist, Charles Boussois, is based on a real person but is given a fictional second life in the novel. In 1911, he visits the villa with the architects Frank Lloyd Wright and Le Corbusier. Le Corbusier even sketches the villa during this visit.

Figure 1. *Teatro Marittimo at Villa Adriana*
Source: Froio 2025

Later, in 1924, Boussois begins investigating strange and mysterious events at the villa. He falls in love with a young woman named Marguerite Cleenewerck de Crayencour — who would become known as Marguerite Yourcenar. Together, they investigate rumours of secret rituals tied to ancient Egyptian beliefs that occur at specific times, such as solstices and equinoxes. Marguerite was fascinated by the blend of architecture, religion and mystery at the villa. She dreams of writing a book dedicated to Emperor Hadrian. The group attempts to unravel the mystery of a ritual scheduled for the summer solstice in 1924. The key to the mystery may lie with Antinous, Hadrian's young companion, who plays an important symbolic role. Boussois believes the Villa was designed with hidden meanings, using precise geometry and mathematical structures. He thinks the central part of the Villa is the Piazza d'Oro, which everything else connects to. The Villa is not just a collection of ruins—it's a sacred and symbolic space.

In her own memoir *A occhi aperti*, Yourcenar recalls how she found the draft of *Memoirs of Hadrian* in a trunk in 1948. That discovery led her to finish the book. She says the real inspiration came not from Hadrian himself, but from his Villa. She writes that Villa Adriana reminded her of Piranesi's drawings—overgrown, wild, mysterious. She felt that through the ruins, she could truly understand Hadrian.

In *Memoirs of Hadrian*, she didn't choose the format of a diary like Marcus Aurelius's *Meditations*, but instead wrote a monologue—a direct speech from Hadrian to the reader. During a public talk, the fictional version of Yourcenar in Caliari's novel says: "Hadrian and his Villa are one and the same. I got to know Hadrian through the ruins of his Villa. I love him because I love that place. The fact that it's in ruins helps me understand his mind, especially at the end of his life. Only in that place could I truly see who Hadrian was—in his human and earthly truth". [9]

Heast Castle by Julia Morgan

The figure of Emperor Hadrian, central to Yourcenar's masterpiece, is closely linked to his Villa Tiburtina. The indissoluble bond between the emperor and his villa is the essential point emphasised here. In the modern era, two figures in particular mirror this complex relationship with Hadrian: William Randolph Hearst and John Paul Getty, both of whom became symbolically and architecturally linked to the emperor. Their lives are well documented in major biographies. One of the most evocative literary descriptions of Hearst appears in *The Big Money* by John Dos Passos, the final volume of his *USA Trilogy* (preceded by *The 42nd Parallel* and *Nineteen Nineteen*). Dos Passos refers to Hearst as a 'newspaper maniac', detailing the rise and fall of his journalistic empire: "And more and more the emperor of the newspapers withdrew to his fiefdom in San Simeon on the Pacific Coast [...] he built himself an Andalusian palace and a Moorish banquet island, and spent his final years amid the flattering praise of starlets, press agents, scriptwriters, organisers and editors, and millionaire publishers".[10] The image of a 'decrepit Caesar' also serves as the narrative core of Orson Welles' Citizen Kane (Figure 2). This majestic film recounts the life of American magnate Charles Foster Kane, culminating in the haunting, Piranesian mansion of Xanadu. The film's closing scenes cast a visionary light on this labyrinthine villa, with its vast accumulations of ancient objects piled within the walls. This modern hoard of artefacts encapsulates the antiquarian, esoteric and Hadrianic ambitions of its founder — William Hearst's alter ego.

9. P. F. Caliari. *L'enigma di Boussois. I misteri di Villa Adriana*. (Torino: Robin Editori) 322.
10. J. Dos Passos, *Un mucchio di Quattrini*. (Milano: Mondadori, 2019) 904.

Figure 2. Sequence from Orson Welles's film *Citizen Kane* (1941)
Source: Public domain.

Hearst had his home, later known as Hearst Castle, built on a hill along California's coast, designed by architect Julia Morgan. Located along the Pacific Ocean, San Simeon is traversed by the arterial road Highway 1, approximately 390 km north of Los Angeles and 340 km south of San Francisco, at the point where the coastline curves into a small gulf at the base of the Rocky Mountains. The influence of Spanish colonisers is still clearly evident in this region, as in the wider Californian territory, in the names of streets and districts.

The castle is situated roughly 8 km inland and nestles in a panoramic position on the hillside. Although Hearst named the estate *La Cuesta Encantada* (The Enchanted Hill), it was commonly referred to as the Ranch by Hearst himself and others alike. Filmmaker Orson Welles famously renamed it *Xanadu* as the setting for his celebrated film *Citizen Kane* (1941). A searing social critique, the film depicts the rise and fall of media tycoon Charles Foster Kane, an unsettling alter ego of Hearst. Xanadu, relocated from California to an undefined region in Florida, becomes the most potent symbol of an alternative form of power: the pervasive and ubiquitous influence of the American press, capable of shaping public consciousness.

The extensively documented design history of Hearst Castle reveals a dynamic and continuous exchange of ideas between the client and the Californian architect Julia Morgan (1872–1957). The choice of site, the layout of the buildings, and the architectural style were consistently determined through a dense and lively epistolary dialogue.

During his numerous trips to Europe, Hearst assembled an extraordinary and eclectic art collection. The villa at the heart of California was thus conceived as a museum capable of accommodating this multifaceted assemblage of statues,

paintings, and artifacts of all kinds, initiating a continuous process of art accumulation that extended beyond Hearst's lifetime.

About San Simeon Julia Morgan wrote: "We are building for him a sort of village on a mountain-top, miles from any railway, and housing… his collections as well as his family. Having different buildings allows the use of varied treatments… So far we have received from him, to imcorporate in the new buildings, some twlve of thirteen train carloads of antiques, brought from the ends of the earth and from Prehistoric down to late Empire in period, the majority however, being of Spanish origin".[11]

Similar to other American magnates such as John Paul Getty, Hearst's collecting activities, combined with a socially philanthropic intention, reproduce a tendency already present in Europe during the Grand Tour of the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries. This cultural attitude, driven by a mania for remembrance and souvenirs, merged with American sensibilities to generate a speculative-financial form of collecting, resulting in monumental villa-collections: architectural containers became themselves repositories of memory. The contents are displayed with a conspicuous, often indulgent, sense of accumulation, an eclectic and stratified fetishism of the *objet trouvé*.

According to Salvatore Settis (2006), Hearst Castle is an example of "historicist" eclecticism, and the Californian climate stressed its anthology-like character. Architectural fragments are drawn from across Europe. Much like the Getty Villa in Malibu, Hearst Castle was built through accumulation: a visionary compendium of European art suspended between romantic nostalgia and the aesthetics of an antique shop.[12]

At Hearst's Californian estate, themes are fused together, intertwining the memory of past colonisations with the widespread influence of Spanish missions to produce a compelling contrast. Antiquarian tastes — reverence for Greek, Egyptian, Roman, Gothic and Renaissance antiquity — are combined with Baroque-inspired styles, reflecting a flamboyant colonial expression alongside the simpler local Mexican tradition. "I have thought a great deal over whether to make this whole group of building Baroc, in the Eighteenth Century style, or Renaissance. Is is quite a problem. I started out with the Baroc in mind, as nearly all the Spanish architecture in America is of that character."[13]

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11. From Julia Morgan's 1921 correspondence as reported in: V. Kastner, *Julia Morgan. An Intimate Biography of the Trailblazing Architect*. (San Francisco, California: Chronicle Book LLC, 2021) 126.

12. Another example of villa collection is The Huntington Art Gallery in San Marino, once the home of Henry E. Huntington. He collected rare books and artworks with a clear focus on English and American history, as well as 18th- and early 19th-century English and French art. The gallery, in a grand Beaux-Arts building, features works by artists like Gainsborough, Reynolds, and Turner. It became a public museum in 1927. In contrast, Hearst Castle, which opened to the public in 1958, has a more varied and mixed collection. By 1968, these two museums showed different styles—Huntington's being refined and focused, and Hearst's being broad and eclectic—but both reflected the personalities and tastes of their wealthy Californian founders. See: S. Settis. *Il Pompeianum di Getty*. || *Il sole 24 Ore*, 05/02/2006.

13. From Hearst's 1919 correspondence as reported in: T. Coffmann, *The Story of William Randolph Hearst and San Simenon*. (Santa Barbara CA: Sequoia Book, 1985) 36.

Emulating Emperor Hadrian or a modern-day Kubla Khan, Hearst/Kane adorned the interiors of his villa with ancient marbles, pristine Canova statues, Gothic tapestries, Italian Gothic and Renaissance paintings, busts of Roman emperors, 16^(th)-century maiolica and an assortment of bronze candelabras. The exteriors follow a similar theme: the Neptune Pool is adorned with groups of mythological and human statues, featuring a Greek temple pronaos and a semicircular colonnade. These elements evoke the water basins of Hadrian's Villa, particularly the Canopus, with its crocodile statues, caryatids, and slender colonnade encircling the pool (Figure 3).

Shaped by a thriving market, today's tourist guides have projected these associations onto a global stage, endowing the site with the gently fantastical quality typical of modern Disneyland-style villages. With its terraces, temple-like pools, palatial exoticism, statues and sometimes grotesque or fantastical decorations, the complex evokes the admirable layout of Villa Adriana, which was also articulated through a sequence of scenographic spatial experiences.

Figure 3. *Neptune Pool at Hearst Castle*
Source: Public domain.

The hilltop site is irregularly oval in shape and oriented along the east-west axis. Two main terraces run parallel to this axis, one to the north and one to the south. The northern entrance is marked by a grand staircase that splits symmetrically into two parallel ramps, leading to the first and most prominent terrace. This terrace is longitudinal in shape and flanked by two circular exedras that overlook the landscape.

The plan reveals a series of pavilions distributed along the slopes of the hill. The central representative building, *Casa Grande*, stands along the main east-west axis. It is composed of a central volume and two lateral wings, joined perpendicularly by a thinner volume. This building's façade forms the backdrop to the central plaza, around which the three lower pavilions (*Casa del Mar*, *Casa del Monte* and *Casa del Sol)* are arranged in a fan-like layout. In particular, Casa del Sol is slightly rotated from the principal axis, which disrupts the symmetry of the composition. The volumes of the elliptical Neptune Pool and the rectangular Indoor Pool are subject to double geometric displacement. Orthogonal in their respective orientations, they are first rotated 45 degrees from the main axis and then shifted off the symmetrical centre along the secondary north-south axis, which aligns the descending sequence of staircases.

These staircases constitute another architectural motif of the complex: a continuous sequence of terraced platforms connected by elliptical and rectangular stairways, which serve both functional and formal purposes. Conceptually "exploding" the entire complex would leave only skeletal building frames and the

solid masses of the terraced planes. The footprints of the pools and fountains would also be visible, as would the porous volume of the Indoor Pool, embedded in the northern part of the hill — a contemporary reinterpretation of Roman imperial baths.

The Getty Center by Richard Meier

In Ridley Scott's 2017 film *All the Money in the World*, we witness the peculiar story of controversial oil tycoon John Paul Getty and his heirs. Set in 1973 Rome, reminiscent of Fellini's *La Dolce Vita*, the film tells the true story of Paul Getty's kidnapping. The young man is kidnapped by a group of criminals and held hostage while they wait for the ransom money to arrive. One scene depicts a family memory: the grandfather takes his eight-year-old grandson to Rome to visit Villa Adriana, the Emperor's House. The wealthy, elderly tycoon speaks of Hadrian as his alter ego and of the villa's ruins as the ancient space he would like to claim as his own. The film's screenplay is based on John Pearson's 1995 book *Painfully Rich*[14]. According to this biography, the magnate truly believed he was the reincarnation of Emperor Hadrian. Some hypotheses suggest that this belief may have originated during an early visit to the villa, after the purchase of a neoclassical sculpture discovered there at the end of the 18-th century.[15]

In one scene of Scott's film, the snow-covered Villa Adriana appears as if in a memory, symbolising John Paul Getty's desire to recreate the ancient villa of Emperor Hadrian in America.

For Jean Paul Getty, collecting was an all-consuming passion, leading him to amass an immense collection of artistic treasures. The Getty Center in Los Angeles, designed by Richard Meier, houses part of his invaluable art collection. Described as a 'city of art'[16], it is an acropolis-like citadel perched on a hill overlooking Los Angeles towards the Santa Monica and Hollywood Hills. Like other Meier museums, the Getty Center can be described as a 'museum of light' or a 'shining mountain'. A theological space. (Purini, 1993). In Meier's work, the theme of interior as interiority is a constant.

In 1953, Paul Getty built his personal residence in Malibu, which would become the prototype for the concept of a house museum. The Malibu villa was one of the sources of inspiration for the Getty Centre. As Meier himself stated: "When I first visited this building, I was struck by the importance of the relationship between the inside and outside. Its beauty comes from this fluidity of space, from the movement between the exterior and interior". [17] The design — with its open, see-through walls and overlapping spaces — forces people to look in a very detailed and descriptive way. It doesn't let the viewer have a fixed, controlling

14. J. Pearson, *Painfully Rich*. (London: Macmillan Pub Ltd, 1995).

15. G. Pucci, *L'ombra lunga di Villa Adriana,* in: A. Bruciati, M. Eichberg, G. Proietti (eds). *Le Grandi Ville romane del territorio Tiburtino*. (Tivoli: Tipografia Palombi e Lanci, 2021): 245-250.

16. Sivio Cassarà (ed). *Richard Meier*. (Bologna: Zanichelli, 1995) 126.

17. K. Frampton. *Richard Meier*. (Milano: Electa, 2003) 191.

gaze. This challenges the traditional idea of space being neatly divided and filled with meaning, like in religious or moral systems.

Following his time at the American Academy in Rome, Meier introduced a compositional element that would feature prominently in many of his subsequent projects: the superimposition of two orthogonal grids, shifted or rotated relative to one another (Einaudi, 1993).

Among his artistic and architectural references, two modernist pioneers stand out in particular: Le Corbusier and Wright. Speaking of Wright's influence, Meier said: 'What was important to me back then, having read everything by Frank Lloyd Wright as a student, was the visual extension of interior space into the landscape — the way in which Fallingwater extends into the surrounding environment.'[18] For Meier, the most important aspect is the nature of space as a relationship, the connection between the objects that generate a space.

A significant milestone in the American architect's career began in 1973 when he became a resident architect at the American Academy in Rome. During this period, which coincided with a break from his long academic teaching career at American universities, Meier adopted a cultural attitude reminiscent of the 19th-century Grand Tour. He visited notable historical sites in Rome, followed by Villa Adriana and Pompeii. It was during this period that he began to reflect on the use of overlapping and rotated orthogonal grids, a concept that would come to characterise his future projects. But where does this shift in language come from? As Roberto Einaudi explains: "The displacement of axes and the layering and partial overlap of plans are implicit in the city of Rome... The shift of axes is common in ancient Roman houses in Pompeii and Villa Adriana, where complex compositions of orthogonal groupings meet at different angles and enrich each other". [19]

Meier himself stated how important Villa Adriana was in the genesis of the Getty Center. The layout of the Getty Center is so similar to Villa Adriana that you might mistake one for the other at first. Both have buildings that shift direction to follow the natural landscape and include complex water features. This shows a strong awareness of historical context and a deep understanding of Rome's architectural past.

In his 1993 text, 'Volumes Under the Light', Michele Costanzo provides a clear analysis of Meier's artistic journey and the evolution of his formal language throughout his long career, from his involvement with the Five Architects group in the 1960s to the present day. While designing his first villas, Meier started to define his style in terms of the spatial relationship between the elements that contain and define space. Meier is interested in space, especially how it is shaped and organized by light and by proportions that feel right for people. Another key concept in Meier's work is the constant interplay between exteriority and interiority — the relationship between outside and inside — which manifests as a fluid spatial articulation of the connective system (reminiscent of the promenade architecturale), where the path becomes a regulating sequence of space. "This itinerary, in its

18. C. Jencks. *Interview with Richard Meier*, in *Richard Meier, Building and Projects 1979–89*, London, 1990, 33.

19. Interview by Roberto Einaudi with Meier, 1993.

unfolding both inside and outside the building, is based on this dual function, seeing it as both a structure designed to fulfil specific project functions and an ideal medium of communication between the general terms of the artificial and the natural."[20]

One of the projects that marks a move away from the rigidity of orthogonal rules is the Atheneum (1975–79). Here, we sense a transition from the concept of a house to that of a public building. The museum is presented as a grand house, 'the place of memory, the house where Mnemosyne, the mother of the Muses, lives... the museum as a space of recollection and communication, an environment destined to preserve and safeguard the testimonies of origin'. The museum theme thus becomes central to Meier's work. A key milestone in this research is the unbuilt Villa Strozzi project in Florence (1973), in which Meier reflects on the historical value of the context and its contents, i.e. the relationship between the new and the old. The concept of the museum as a 'container' of spatial objects is evident in the design of the future Getty Center.

Figure 4. *Getty Center at Los Angeles*
Source: Public domain.

The formal and linguistic idea we started with — the accumulation of forms as a kind of souvenir of memories — becomes the expressive endpoint that links European Western culture and American culture, living in a symbiotic relationship with the premises and goals of founder John Paul Getty. Meier's architectural research in the museum projects of the 1980s, leading up to the Getty Center, shows the sedimentation of a series of themes that reappear in the Los Angeles project: the idea of expansion and multiplication of volumes; the relationship with the urban character; the superimposition of grids "allowing for the reconciliation

20. M. Costanzo. *Volumi sotto la luce*. In: M. Costanzo, V. Giorgi, M. G. Tolomeo (eds). *Richard Meier Frank Stella*. (Milano: Electa, 1993).

between site axes and formal organisation"; the progressive assimilation of the idea of the museum as an osmosis between outside and inside; the coexistence of order and disorder; the pure and skillful use of light (natural and artificial); the transparent visual destination of buildings; the interplay of pathways; the city in miniature — all these are progressive acquisitions in a formulation of space that converge and find synthesis in the Getty Center, Meier's most complex and demanding project (Figure 4).

However, another factor comes into play here that transcends the strictly compositional process: the cultural connection, the Hadrianic reference and the topological dimension of the site. The result is a sense of complementarity, particularly in the use of travertine. According to Costanzo, this shows a connection between the museum's location and the collection it holds. Using a 'historical' material (like stone or classical forms) creates a symbolic link, shaping how the museum is seen by giving it a meaningful, almost iconic image. The imposing use of travertine also conveys an idea of temporality that defies the passage of time, with patina being valued as a temporal layer that records the fluid passage of time itself. This effect is further enhanced by the use of split-face slabs, which are reminiscent of the Roman bugnato technique.

Conclusion

We can conclude that a very close link between literature and design is confirmed by the Hadrianic model. The concept of collecting in the time of Hadrian remains one of the interpretive keys that enables us to comprehend the modernity projects we have discussed.

Both Getty and Hearst were obsessed with amassing wealth and antiquities, a passion reflected in their monumental villa-museums. The Getty Center and the dreamlike Xanadu of Hearst are clear expressions of this obsession with collecting — a modern echo of Hadrian's encyclopaedic and imperial imagination.

The Getty Center, in particular, represents the culmination of a new reflection in Meier's language. Arising from cultural premises discussed at the beginning, it ultimately marks a departure from Le Corbusier's purism and an arrival at a broader *en plein air* vision — one that brings us once again back to the Hadrianic cultural project. Returning, then, to the literary dimension from which we started, the Getty Center represents one of the modern museums of hyperconsumption, where a specific kind of *heterotopia* is realized. Franco Purini (2002) explains that modern museums, like the Getty Museum by Richard Meier, have changed to look and function more like cities. Instead of just hinting at urban design, they now actively imitate it, using complex forms and organized layouts similar to those found in real urban environments.

Like other contemporary museums, the Getty Museum refers to an infinite idea of the contemporary metropolis, of which it is a remarkable echo: "The presence of the urban model within the typological formulation of hyperconsumption museums or the interiorization within them of the undeniable vastness of the metropolis means that museum space can never be truly governed, only partially controlled. It is an intrinsically dangerous space, because the art it houses is itself dangerous —

and not fully embraced by it. In Tim Burton's 1989 film *Batman*, where the Joker, played by Jack Nicholson, revives in a sacrilegious ritual the subversive hermeneutics of the avant-garde, art is pushed into an extreme position of risk by the museum, threatening its very survival. This risk lies not only in the art's presence but in the coexistence within the museum of different works that expose their mutual incompatibilities". [21]

The recent and dramatic catastrophe that struck Los Angeles — an apocalyptic wildfire — shifts the story from an unprecedented urban devastation to a literary sublime: the Los Angeles of *Blade Runner* or *Apocalypse Now*, with fires emerging from buildings in an eerie nocturnal view. The Getty Center fits powerfully into this scenario, having withstood the impact. The travertine protected the building.

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