

In Face of Death: Calming the Mind, Mining the Soul

We have gathered here to discuss changing attitudes toward death and their reflection in the design, care, and visit of cemeteries in the modern era, from the Enlightenment onward. Over the course of three days we are engaged by a series of focused studies that help to fill in more completely the general outlines of the great cultural and religious shift from a medieval and Baroque world of the Christian “memento mori”, replete with its burials in parish churches (fig. 1), its mass graves in adjacent or neighboring cemeteries (fig. 2), and its skulls and bones in the attics of bounding charnel houses, to a newfound horror about death and mortal decay, mixed with a fear of deadly contagion, such that the cemetery was not only banished from the city but also transformed into a peaceful landscape garden “extra muros” (fig. 4). Enlightenment and early Romantic thinkers even forgot the Greek meaning of “cemetery” as a “place of sleep” so as to propose banishing the word “cemetery” itself – so closely had it become associated with the imagined horrors of death and putrefaction – in favor of Elysium or Field of Rest.¹

One thousand years before the *Iliad*, toward 1700 BC, we find the epic *Gilgamesh*, the story of the king of Uruk, thoroughly enmeshed in the fear of death. In the “Introduction” to his new English version, Stephen Mitchell reminds readers that Rainer Maria Rilke “called *Gilgamesh* ‘the epic of the fear of death.’” I am sure that many of us here today have shared the sentiments that *Gilgamesh* expresses when he laments:

“How can I bear this sorrow
that gnaws at my belly, this fear of death...?”

Hopefully many of us also have come to the point where they can appreciate, in their own manner and according to their own religion, Mitchell’s suggestion that perhaps we were never born.² Although I suspect that Mitchell’s thought is Far Eastern in origin, there are corresponding sentiments expressed in ancient Greek epitaphs, such as in this Theban inscription from Roman imperial times:

“Father, if you long for me, I pray you put away your grief;
for this was an acknowledged loan, the daylight that I
looked upon.”

Likewise and more succinctly:

“But I paid back the loan and went my way. All this is
dust.”

Yet even such a realization, to quote another Greek epitaph, that “the breath of life [is] a loan from the sky,”³ does little to deliver us from the anguish experienced at the death of a loved one, especially a premature demise. Here the elegy penned by the British poet William Shenstone in memory of Maria Dolman, a young woman whom he had loved and who had died of smallpox at the age of twenty-one will not fail to move any listener:

“Ah Maria!
The most elegant of maidens;
Alas! Snatch’d away in
The bloom of beauty,
Farwell!
How much less pleasure there is in surviving
Than in remembering thee!”



Fig. 1 Louis-Jean Delafosse, *Funerary chapel (project)*, c. 1780



Fig. 2 Bernier, *View of the Cimetière des Saints Innocents, Paris, February 21, 1786*

Fig. 3 Courvoisier, *View of the Cimetière du Père Lachaise, Paris, c. 1817*

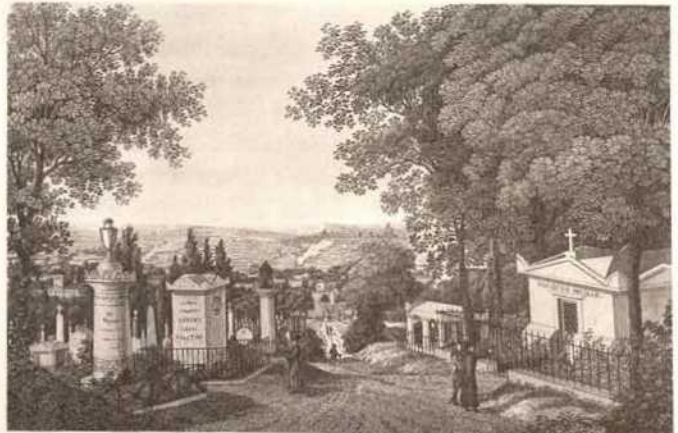




Fig. 4 J. Leconte, *Cemetery entrance by moonlight*, c. 1815

These words Shenstone had inscribed on a gilt urn, nestled among the shrubs at the end of the Lover's Walk fashioned along a slope deeply shaded by trees and accompanied by a softly bubbling rill on the poet's farm, the Leasowes, where the landscape was arranged with alternating fields and "consecrated groves", commemorative in nature. These types of landscapes, as is well known now, helped to inspire the new genre of the landscape garden cemetery, proposed by numerous voices in the 1780s and first realized in the design of the Parisian Cemetery of the East, popularly known as the Cemetery of Père Lachaise, opened in 1804 (fig. 3).

As moving as Shenstone's inscribed urn to Maria Dolman might have been, the elegiac sentiments written by unknown hands in various commemorative gardens or cemeteries have a touching quality that is difficult to explain. Perhaps the anonymity renders them the work of everyman, making a personal lament more readily a universal feeling. After Shenstone

died in 1763, the following lines were penned anonymously on a seat at the Leasowes. The invocation shows the enduring appeal of the popular ancient Greek and then Roman epitaph *SIT TIBI TERRA LEVIS*:⁴

"O Earth! To his remains indulgent be,
Who so much care and cost bestowed on thee!
Who crown'd thy barren hills with useful shade,
And cheer'd with tinkling rills each silent glade;
Here taught the day to wear a thoughtful gloom,
And there enliven'd Nature's vernal bloom.
Propitious Earth! Lie lightly on his head,
And ever on his tomb thy vernal glories spread!"

Death traditionally prompts one of two polar attitudes toward commemoration: either the grandiose or the laconic. Grandiose is Napoleon's tomb under the Dome of the Invalides: a gigantic classicizing sarcophagus of porphyry, the purple-red stone from Egypt reserved in ancient times for Roman emperors. Laconic is

Thomas Jefferson's own design for his tomb: a modest obelisk of what he termed "coarse stone" on which he wished to have inscribed "the following inscription and not a word more":⁵

"Here was buried

Thomas Jefferson

Author of the Declaration of American Independence
of the Statute of Virginia for Religious Freedom
and Father of the University of Virginia."

In this spirit, nearly a century later the 1915 competition brief for a war memorial in Baden explained: "Nicht durch prunkvolle Denkmäler, sondern schon in einfacher, schlichter und doch eindrucksvoller Weise kann die Erinnerung an die Gefallenen aus der Heimat bewahrt werden, denn nicht die Größe oder der Reichtum bestimmen den Wert, sondern allein nur die Güte und der innere Gehalt."⁶

My own preference, as you can imagine, is for the laconic, hence my admiration for the inscription on an ancient Roman tombstone unearthed in the Hungarian vineyard of Ede Tiffán in the Villány region: one word – *CARISSIMAE* – beloved. Tiffán certainly appreciated the timeless poignancy of this dedication when he named one of his prized wines in honor of the elegiac sentiment: *Cuvée Carissimae*.⁷ We find the same feeling expressed over a thousand years later on the funerary monument commissioned by Albert, Duke of Saxe-Teschen, for his wife Archduchess Maria Christina (fig. 5). Over the door is inscribed *UXORI OPTIMAE/ALBERTVS*: To the best of wives.

In all circumstances of life, whether natural or supernatural, it is the quiet voice that moves us most deeply, that penetrates most profoundly. Perhaps Antonio Canova discovered the visual equivalent to the quiet voice when he conceived and sculpted the procession of figures, dead marble seemingly alive, as they appear to walk sorrowfully past the threshold and into the space of shadows, the space of death. Hugh Honour, the eminent historian of Neoclassical art, after explaining the various levels of symbolism in this sculptural ensemble, found what he termed a "deeper level of meaning," as the procession proceeds "towards the open door which poses the eternal and unresolved question of what may lie beyond."⁸ If we turn to the funerary architecture of the French Neoclassical architect Étienne-Louis Boullée we find that dark space, created by shade or shadow, served to convey an intimate conviction about the nature of the soul, indeed, even made it palpable (fig. 6).

Boullée's funerary architecture – characterized by the triple theme of a naked architecture, a buried architecture, and an architecture of shadows – owes its origins to an extraordinary



Fig. 5 Antonio Canova, *Monument to Archduchess Maria Christina* (detail), Augustinerkirche, Vienna, 1798-1805

nighttime experience when the sight of his own shadow, conjoined with the shadows of an entire woods, gave him the impression that he was in the presence of his own shades, his alternate being, his life in death, perhaps a variation on what the ancient Romans called the *Manes*:⁹

"Finding myself in the countryside, I was walking by the light of the moon beside the edge of a wood. My shadow, produced by the nighttime illumination, excited my attention (certainly, this was not a novelty for me). Through a particular mental state, the effect of this simulacrum prompted an extreme

Fig. 6 Étienne-Louis Boullée, "Funerary Monument Characterizing the Genre of an Architecture of Shadows" (project), c. 1785

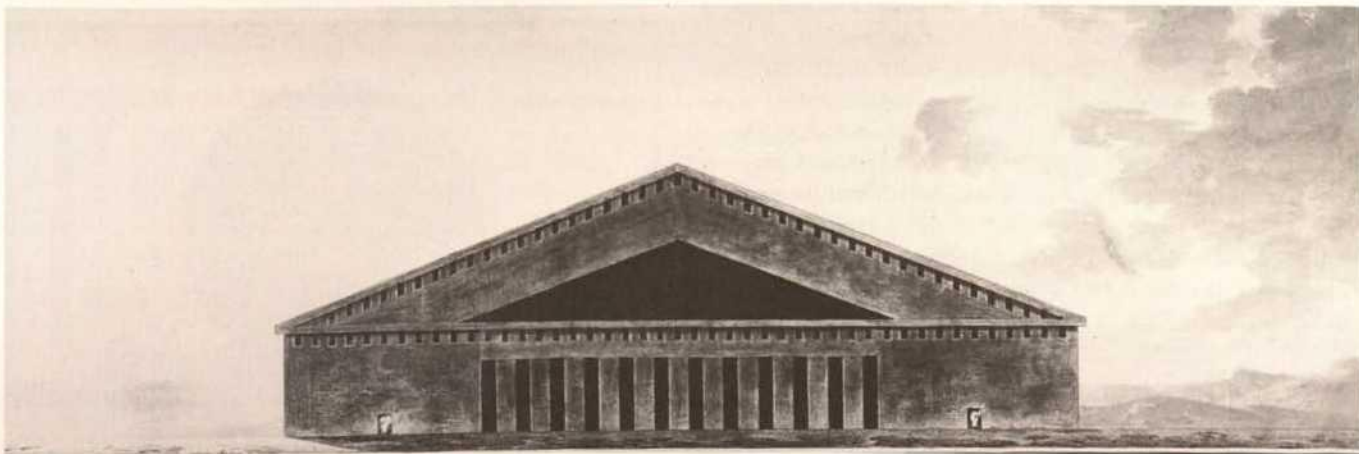




Fig. 7 Étienne-Louis Boullée, "Cenotaph in the Egyptian Genre" (project), c. 1785

sadness. The trees drawn on the ground by their shadows made the deepest impression on me. This entire scene was magnified by my imagination. I saw then all that was most somber in nature. What did I see? The mass of objects standing out as black forms against a light of an extreme paleness. Nature seemed to offer itself in mourning to my eyes. Struck by the feelings that I experienced, I applied myself, from that very moment onward, to capture these sentiments in architecture. I attempted to compose an architecture through the effect of shadows. (...) It does not seem possible to me to conceive of anything sadder than a monument with a smooth surface, nude and absent of any relief, made of a material that absorbs light, absolutely without details and whose decoration is formed by the forms of the shadows drawn by even darker shades."¹⁰

Whereas Shenstone's elegiac urn was intended to calm the mind, Boullée's funerary architecture was meant to mine the depths of the soul. Shenstone's urn was nestled within a picturesque landscape; Boullée's funerary architecture, within a landscape of the sublime. Hence, both new aesthetic categories of the Enlightenment – the picturesque and the sublime – lent themselves to two opposing mental dispositions, two opposing attitudes toward death, and two opposing landscapes of death.

The sublime, as formulated by Edmund Burke in his book of 1757, revolved around "the strongest emotion which the mind is capable of feeling." One decade before the publication of Burke's *A Philosophical Enquiry into the Origins of Our Ideas of the Sublime and Beautiful*, John Baillie's posthumous *An Essay on the Sublime* had appeared, in which the author had explained that the sublime engages our spatial sense of self: "The Sublime dilates and elevates the Soul, Fear sinks and contracts it; yet both are felt upon viewing what is great and awful."¹¹ Three decades later Johann Georg Sulzer, in his *Allgemeine Theorie der schönen Künste* (General Theory of the Fine Arts, 1771–1774), would explain that the word "aesthetics" came from the Greek "aistheses", meaning "the science of feelings," a tool for understanding the very "nature of the soul."¹²

Let us not forget that for the eighteenth century, existence was to a great extent a matter of sensation and sentiment, of experiential being. In place of Descartes's seventeenth-century dictum, "Je pense, donc je suis" (I think, therefore I am), we have Rousseau's understanding of life, which can be summarized as "Je me sens, donc je suis" (I feel myself, therefore I am). For Rousseau, the preeminent feeling is the "sentiment de l'existence," the feeling of existential being.¹³ Rousseau explains that the feeling is not that of "ces courts moments de délire et de passion." Rather, the sentiment of existence requires an absence of passion. Only then can one feel the calm which yields that "precious feeling of contentment and of peace," which is "a happiness at once sufficient, perfect and full, that

leaves in the soul no emptiness in need of being filled."¹⁴ Unfortunately for the history of aesthetics, mainstream philosophy has followed Kant on the question of space. Fortunately for us, though, Paul Schilder, writing in 1935 in his essay "Psycho-Analysis of Space," pointed to the source of Kant's error: "Space is not an independent entity (as Kant has wrongly stated) but is in close relation to our instincts, drives, emotions and actions..."¹⁵

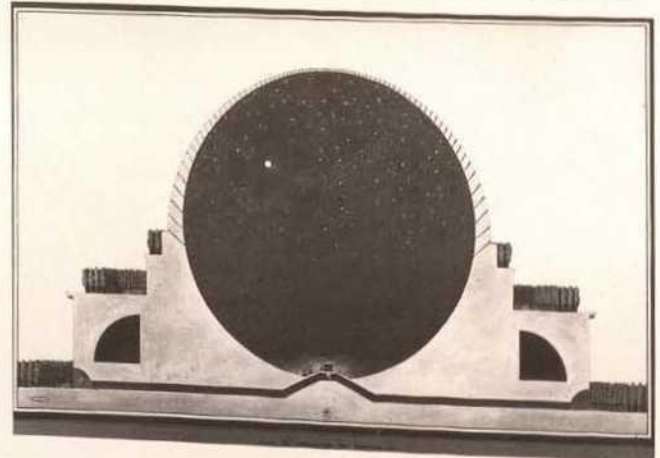
Schilder's observation came in the wake of the late nineteenth-century school of German-language philosophers of "Einfühlung", who, following in the footsteps of Sulzer, had been primarily concerned with the relationship of aesthetics to the spatial sense of self. To this end, they had developed an entire descriptive and analytical vocabulary. To emphasize vital feeling as opposed to mere sensations, they spoke of "Lebensgefühl" or "Vitalgefühl". To refer to that aspect of sentience which involves sentiment permeating the body they invoked the term "Körpergefühl". If the emphasis was on the sense of the body within a circumambient architectural space or on the feeling of space in which the bodily self is the center, then they spoke of "Raumgefühl".¹⁶ Boullée did not have access to this rich vocabulary. Yet, his main architectural projects, and notably his funerary architecture, as well as the universally admired project of 1784 for a Cenotaph to Sir Isaac Newton, relied on the entire panoply of such sentiments (fig. 8).

Here we must pause for a moment to consider Boullée's account of the first balloon flights, dating precisely from 1783–1784, the time of the architect's design of this memorial. Like Sulzer, like Rousseau, like Baillie, and like his French contemporary, the architect Nicolas Le Camus de Mézières, author of *Le Génie de l'architecture, ou l'analogie de cet art avec nos sensations* (1780), Boullée was especially concerned, perhaps even obsessed with the spatial sense of self and with its effects upon the deepest feelings of which a person is capable. No wonder that Boullée's colleague at the Académie Royale d'Architecture, Julien-David Leroy, termed this the "metaphysical" dimension of architecture.¹⁷

As Le Camus de Mézières, echoing John Baillie, had recently observed, "In effect, we are made such that, when we are happy our heart expands and loses itself in immensity."¹⁸ Yet, as Boullée cautioned, immensity was fraught with ontological dangers:

"Imagine a person far out at sea, with only sky and water all around: this scene is truly that of immensity. In this position, everything is beyond our grasp. There is no way to make comparisons. It is the same with a balloonist, who, floating in the air

Fig. 8 Étienne-Louis Boullée, *Cenotaph to Sir Isaac Newton* (project), 1784



and having lost sight of the objects on the earth, sees only sky all around him. Wandering thus in immensity, in this abyss of vast space, man is annihilated by the extraordinary spectacle of an inconceivable space."¹⁹

Balloon flights, then, placed a limit on the experiential possibilities of the sublime. And Boullée knew how to address himself to such restrictions in his two most thoroughly Pantheistic projects: the Métropole church design and the Cenotaph to Newton. The goal in both was to have the viewer experience the immensity of Nature through what Burke had termed the two mechanisms of the "artificial infinite": a forest of trees or a dome.²⁰ In the church project, the forest of trees became the vast field of free-standing columns, which serves to provide a psychological anchor to the bodily sense of self, as well as a means to experience an expansive immensity that leads to the sublime. As Boullée explains: as one moves through the temple, "it seems that [these columns] move with us and that we have given them life."²¹ The result would be a union with Divinity, the Supreme Being, such as Rousseau had recounted in the *Réveries dun promeneur solitaire* and in the "Third Letter to Malesherbes": "my heart, constrained within the limits of its frame, wanted to bound into infinity. ... [I]n my transports I cried out several times, 'O great being, o great being,' without being able to say or think anything more."²²

In the Cenotaph to Newton, honored as the genius who had risen to the level of Divine intelligence to discover the single principle that regulated the entire universe, that is, universal gravitation, the experiential encounter with the sublime walks the razor's edge between ecstasy and annihilation. The visit to Newton's tomb, where one would learn about "the expanse of his enlightenment and the sublimity of his genius,"²³ would also be a voyage into immensity. Here people would gather to have their "mind elevated to the contemplation of the Creator and to experience celestial feelings."²⁴ Boullée announced that in this cenotaph, by analogy to a balloon flight, "the spectator would find himself transported into the sky as if by enchantment and carried on the clouds into the immensity of space." As the eye embraced the vast expanse of the spherical cavity, seemingly limitless in the nighttime view, the visitor would bodily feel the immensity of Nature in a union of "Körpergefühl", "Vitalgefühl", and "Raumgefühl". With curved surfaces at every side and with the tomb as the sole point of focus, the visitor, as Boullée explains, would feel frozen at the center, unable to move:

"He is obliged, as if held by innumerable forces, to remain where he is at the center.... Isolated on all sides, his sight can



Fig. 9 Claude-Nicolas Ledoux, "Elevation of the Cemetery of the Town of Chauv", 1804

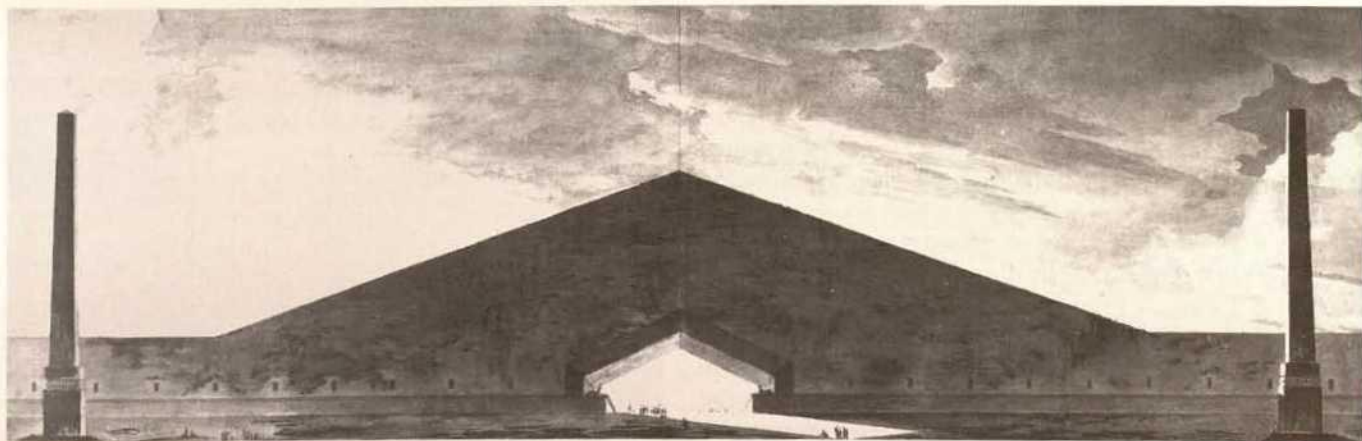
only be directed toward the immensity of the sky. The tomb is the only material object."²⁵

At the height of the experience, the spectator would become both the center and the circumference, simultaneously feeling united with the tomb and an ever-expanding immensity, in other words, at once becoming both Newton's genius and the cosmos.

In *German Romanticism and Its Institutions*, Theodore Ziolkowski observes that Northrop Frye had noted that "the metaphorical structure of Romantic poetry tends to move inside and downward instead of outside and upward." Ziolkowski himself devotes an entire chapter to the theme of the mine in German Romanticism, where he argues that this is not a technological site but rather a mine of the soul. Yet in the Neoclassical period, as we just have seen, mental space, engaged to mine the inner recesses of the soul, often follows the opposite trajectory: outwards and upwards.

If we reflect for a moment on the origins of this mental path, we would have to turn to Giovanni Battista Piranesi's *Invenzioni capricci di carceri* (c. 1745) and his subsequent *Carceri d'invenzione* (1761). These imaginary prison scenes are hardly prisons at all: indeed they seem almost devoid of incarcerated figures. Rather, they are journeys into the expansive recesses of the mind and they move upward and outward, as would Boullée's church and cenotaph. Even Boullée's funerary architecture has, as its central theme, the vast pyramid (fig. 7), which, as Jean Starobinski has noted, seems to rise in triumph from within the bosom of the earth, as a grand celebration of Nature's fecundity

Fig. 10 Étienne-Louis Boullée, Cemetery entrance by moonlight (project), c. 1785



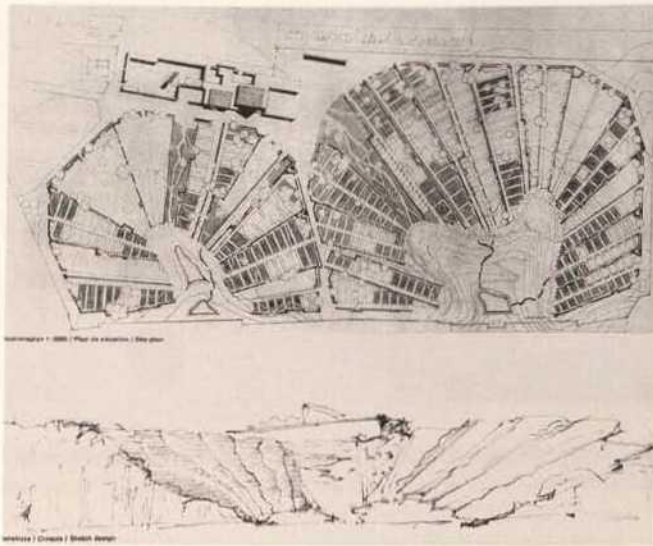


Fig. 11 Alvar Aalto, Cemetery project, Lyngby, Denmark, 1952

and of its central role in the universal cycle of life and death.²⁶ Boullée, ardent Pantheist in the manner of Rousseau, provided, through the dark space of his funerary architecture, the opportunity to plumb the depths of the soul with an experiential understanding not merely of death but also of the vast interior spaces of mind.

Boullée was not alone in the Neoclassical architecture of the age in imagining complementary worlds of life and death, expressed through architectural form, and especially where burial within the earth was equated with a union of the spirit or soul with the cosmos. Claude-Nicolas Ledoux, the other giant of the French Académie Royale d'Architecture, proposed that the open quarry pit which had furnished stone for his construction of the Royal Salt Works of Chaux in the Franche-Comté be transformed into a cemetery by regularizing the cavity into a hemisphere that also would be domed, thereby presenting a sphere half-buried within the earth. Although Ledoux published engravings of the plan and the section of this project, he furnished no architectural drawing for the elevation. Rather, he presented this view of the cosmos with the label "Elevation of the Cemetery of the Town of Chaux" (fig. 9). For both Boullée and Ledoux, the bosom of the earth and the immensity of the sky were paired faces of a primitive and universal nature most fully known not only through death but also experientially in life through a suggestive funerary architecture.

Another important component of the phenomenological approach to funerary architecture in the eighteenth century can be found in the teachings of Jacques-François Blondel, arguably the most influential French professor of architecture in this period, whose students included Boullée and Ledoux. Addressing the subject of funerary architecture, which he felt deserved its own genre, Blondel advocated lowering the level of the cemetery a few feet from that of the surrounding land, thereby engaging the powerful effects of kinesthesia to convey an intimation of the "terrible but inescapable realm which we must inhabit when we die."²⁷ Blondel's counsel echoed through the funerary projects of the Académie Royale d'Architecture, beginning with Louis-Jean Desprez's *Prix d'émulation* of 1766 for a parish cemetery, which Blondel himself praised as a successful interpretation of his prescriptions.²⁸ This was followed by Pierre Fontaine's cemetery project that won a second prize in the Grand Prix competition of 1785, where the innovative atmos-

pheric rendering of the scene, meant to evoke a thunderstorm with lightning piercing the clouds and accompanying the driving rain, cost the adventurous student the first prize, which was awarded to a less imaginative design.²⁹ Adhering to Blondel's precepts, Fontaine dug his burial ground deep into the earth. Although Fontaine forfeited the first prize, the future was clearly in his favor, as we can see from Boullée's own comparable use of atmospheric effects in conjunction with his naked architecture and architecture of shadows. As for Boullée's adherence to Blondel's teachings, we have only to consider his cemetery entrance with its sudden and precipitous descent into the earth (fig. 10).

In our own time, a descent into the ground has proved a powerful theme in cemetery design, especially when the pre-existing topography lent itself to a dramatic application of its use. The unbuilt competition design of 1952 by the Finnish architect Alvar Aalto, for the town of Lyngby, Denmark, presents a sunken amphitheater of death, an entire world removed from the space of everyday life (fig. 11). The plantings and the watercourse that were to accompany each descending path would have balanced the somber kinesthetic effects while walking down the slope. In a similar spirit we find that the widely celebrated 1996 Igualada Cemetery outside Barcelona by the late Enric Miralles and Carme Pinós (fig. 12) applied an analogous approach to a river valley, where the descent, in the words of Peter Reed,

"is lined with inward and outward sloping walls and broad sheltering eaves that echo the surrounding topographical formations carved by the river over thousands of years."³⁰

Such a cemetery brings to mind an ancient Greek epitaph:

"The fire has burned our bodies, and our bones are hidden in this fertile earth; but our souls, under the guidance of the gods, have gone down the way underground together, with one destiny for both."³¹

One of the prime reasons for the effectiveness of Maya Lin's Vietnam Veteran's Memorial (Washington, D.C., 1982), is the kinesthetic experience of the gentle descent into the V-shaped wedge of space created by the two walls of polished black marble, inscribed with the names of the dead soldiers (fig. 13). Perhaps never before has an artist rendered so effectively Bernardin

Fig. 12 Enric Miralles and Carme Pinós, Igualada Cemetery outside Barcelona (detail), 1996



de Saint-Pierre's dictum that the tomb stands on the frontier between two worlds.³² Reaching across the few inches of a seemingly impenetrable space, held in abeyance through the narrow channel dug into the ground that separates the path from the wall, the moving hand brushes across the inscribed name of the absent life, sensing a presence that can never be grasped. This is the reverse of Michelangelo's *The Creation of Adam* on the ceiling of the Sistine Chapel, for this is not a life-giving touch but rather its opposite, an evocation of a life lost, cut off in its prime, an existence sensed through the tip of a finger but impossible to retrieve across the stone barrier. The experience is even more eerie if a reflection of the blue sky with white clouds wafts over the wall at that moment.

There is, of course, an opposing and complementary tradition to the Blondel model, which utilizes an elevated field of honor. Twelve years after Desprez's prize-winning cemetery project, Léon Dufourny won a *Prix d'émulation* in 1778 with a Cenotaph to Henry IV, the beloved French king, that presents a sequential series of ascending platforms on the way to the central monument. Jean-Charles Moreau's first prize in the Grand Prix cemetery competition of 1785, in contrast to Pierre Fontaine's second prize, envisaged a more modest version of Dufourny's elevated strategy.³³ This type of commemorative architecture eventually became what might be called a staircase to heaven, as found, for example, in Frank Lloyd Wright's unexecuted "Blue-Sky Sarcophagus" or "Burial Terrace" for the Darwin D. Martin Family, dating from 1928 (fig. 14), and, in the same year, Giuseppe Terragni's World War I Memorial for the small town of Erba Incino (fig. 15), located near the architect's hometown of Como, which, in turn, was followed by Giovanni Greppi's stepped war memorial at Redipuglia dating from 1938.³⁴

Terragni conceived the long and steep stone staircase as "una scala santa," a holy stair where the arduous ascent was to be a form of homage to those who had made the ultimate sacrifice. The architecture of the sacrarium recreated the claustrophobic space of a military bunker: rough stone fashioning a shallow interior with low, flat ceiling and roof. At its center, flanked by rough columnar shafts half buried into the wall, is a shallow niche with a rough-hewn wooden cross rising from a broken cartridge of an artillery shell, a barbed-wire crown of thorns resting on its upper arms.³⁵ In his book *Fallen Soldiers*, George L. Mosse publishes a Bavarian postcard from World War I showing Christ blessing a soldier's tomb.³⁶ At Erba Incino, Terragni appropriated what undoubtedly was a popular theme and transformed it into a powerfully abstract architectural statement about sacrifice, death, and commemoration.

At Redipuglia, Giovanni Greppi availed himself of the Italian military memorial ceremony of calling the roll of the fallen soldiers, whereby at the mention of the name of each dead man, somebody would respond, "presente!" The voiceless reply was repeated in capital letters across the expanse of each terrace wall, as they climbed toward the sky.

The architect Eero Saarinen would later maintain that architecture involves placing a building between earth and sky. We have seen that since the beginning of the Enlightenment reform movement in the matter of burials, architects have made that topological challenge into an ontological response to the human condition, with descent into the earth or ascent toward the sky, or the heavens, constituting the two poles of this tradition, with the landscape garden occupying a topographically intermediate zone.

World War I, in many respects, shifted the focus in matters of death and commemoration. The context, of course, was the advent of a new type of soldier, coupled with a new level of lethal



Fig. 13 Maya Lin, *Vietnam Veteran's Memorial* (detail), Washington, D.C., 1982

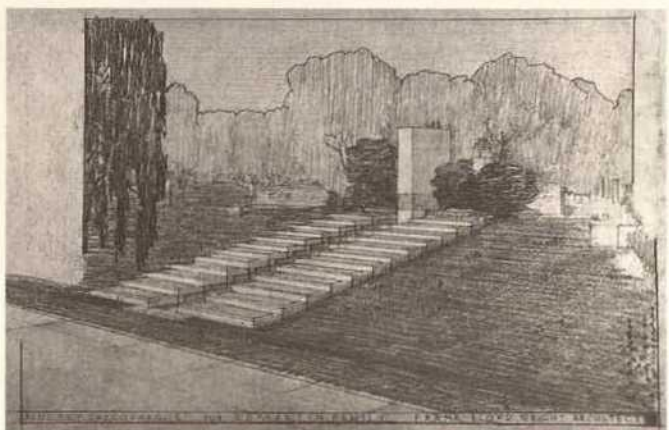


Fig. 14 Frank Lloyd Wright, "Blue-Sky Sarcophagus" or "Burial Terrace" for Darwin D. Martin Family (project), 1928

destruction. Beginning with the French Revolution, as both Meinhold Lurz and George Mosse emphasize in their respective studies, it was now a question, whether with volunteers or draftees, of citizen-soldiers, rather than the mercenaries and forced conscripts so vividly portrayed in William Thackeray's novel *The Memoirs of Barry Lyndon, Esquire*.³⁷ And the French Revolution, in turn, ushered in what was widely seen as a new political and cultural era. Gone was the age of kings, queens, and aristocrats; this was the period of the people, the masses. There is neither time nor need to address the issue of Marx and the masses or of Sorel and the crowd. Suffice it to say that the new respect for the ordinary citizen-soldier, emerging slowly over the course of the nineteenth and early twentieth centuries, was given a boost with new levels of destruction in increasingly



Fig. 15 Giuseppe Terragni's World War I Memorial, Erba Incino, 1928

more mechanized warfare. "Some thirteen million men died in the First World War," observes Mosse, "while Napoleon in the war against Russia, the bloodiest campaign before that time, lost 400,000 men – some 600,000 fewer than fell on all sides in the inconclusive battle of the Somme in 1916."³⁸

Certainly the mass destruction on such an unprecedented scale of the First World War crystallized the social consciousness of the need to honor the general military populace with an appropriate funerary architecture not limited to the village war memorial but extending to the military cemetery, where, for the first time "equal honor" was accorded to all soldiers irrespective of rank.³⁹ Of course, this practice was extended to honor the dead soldiers of World War II as well.

There is a double poignancy here: for the level of destruction increased at the same time that the rate of ordinary mortality fell dramatically. In his magisterial study of death, *La mort et l'Occident de 1300 à nos jours*, Michel Vovelle stresses "the global victory of the nineteenth century against death."⁴⁰ The period bounded by the late eighteenth century and the early twentieth century saw the relative disappearance of the extreme famines and the catastrophic epidemics that had marked earlier times, what Vovelle calls "l'ancien modèle démographique." This change was sustained and succored by the great medical advances of the 1870s and 1880s.⁴¹ As a result, the general population over the course of the nineteenth century gained twenty years of life expectancy, rising now from thirty to fifty years of age. The two World Wars then made a mockery of these advances: "Quel démenti, en effet, à la lutte patiente et victorieuse contre la maladie, que ces explosions à la fois brutales et préparées de la violence homicide!"⁴²

The sight of endless rows of grave markers in the military cemeteries prompts reflections about man's senseless slaughter of his brothers and sisters. For nearly a century now it has no longer been possible in serious literature to write of battles as had Victor Hugo in *Les Misérables*, where he momentarily abandoned his quintessentially nineteenth-century theme of the oppressed and the downtrodden to intone an encomium even to the defeated French army at Waterloo. Can you not hear his stentorian voice?

"Ils étaient trois mille cinq cent. Ils faisaient un front d'un quart de lieue. C'étaient des hommes géants sur des chevaux colosses. Ils étaient vingt-six escadrons..."⁴³

And so forth. Rather, the spirit of our age is to be found in the wry irony of Erich Maria Remarque's *Im Westen nichts Neues* (1929), or more recently, its French sequel, Sébastien

Japrisot's *Un long dimanche de fiançailles* (1993), two novels that mark the tenor of our day.

Im Westen nichts Neues is filled with multiple ironies. Everything was so extraordinarily gruesome on the Western Front that even the next horror was never out of the ordinary, hence *nichts Neues*, except, of course, the contrast of that calm day in October 1918, when after fighting on the front for four years, Paul, the protagonist, falls one month before the war's end: "Er fiel im Oktober 1918, an einem Tage, der so ruhig und still war an der ganzen Front, dass der Heeresbericht sich nur auf den Satz beschränkte, im Westen sei nichts Neues zu melden."⁴⁴ In this novel the soldier's uniform appears as a thin veneer that barely covers the basic humanity and vulnerable mortality of a civilian everyman thrust into a mass slaughter that makes one question our complacent confidence of occupying the pinnacle of the evolutionary ladder.

Then, with the Holocaust, it was no longer a question of honoring the dead soldier, now that an entire segment of the human race, because of its allegedly lesser and nefarious humanity, had become the object of purposeful degradation, suffering, and mass murder on an industrial scale and with the cooperation of vast bureaucracies and industrial enterprises. Western society has been wrestling with the staggering challenge of constructing memorials adequate to this unprecedented form of man's inhumanity to man. Andy Goldsworthy's recent Holocaust Memorial in New York City addresses the phenomenon of mass and anonymous extermination with its procession of stones highly evocative of dehumanization in Nazi concentration and extermination camps.⁴⁵ There is, of course, an irony in Goldsworthy's choice of large granite boulders for this Holocaust memorial, since the large rock or boulder was sometimes preferred for German war memorials after the First World War, much appreciated by the Germans for its "Urkraft,"⁴⁶ the sense of a primordial life force that Goldsworthy also would sense in such stones.

The Goldsworthy Holocaust Memorial is Janus-like in its aspect: at once an image of despair and an image of hope. The stones evoke the spiritless souls, the empty stares of the prisoners in the camps who rapidly lost the spark of life, *Der Funke Leben*,⁴⁷ and yet also are large, pregnant seeds, about to sponsor new life. Each stone appears miraculously to give birth to a small tree that seemingly draws its sustenance from the solid stone itself, whereas in actuality each stone has been hollowed out and filled with a nourishing soil. The shadow of these miniature beings, flitting across the surface of the rough boulder, in this uncanny juxtaposition of scales, this unlikely reversal of sizes, with a tiny tree emerging from a giant stone, places us once again in the realm of spirit, where dark space becomes the visible form of life, never-ending life.

The Holocaust memorial most often cited and reproduced is at the Treblinka extermination camp. In one section, a seemingly endless row of concrete railroad ties (fig. 17) recalls with its implacable and irrevocable repetition the Nazi train tracks that led to the gas chambers. In an uncanny manner, the railroad exerts a powerful hold over the human psyche; it is the mechanism par excellence for conveying an almost physical sensation of being torn away from a loved one. The psychiatrist and phenomenologist Dr. Eugène Minkowski had noted this in his 1936 essay "L'Espace primitif,"⁴⁸ just as Luigi Pirandello previously had utilized this phenomenon to great effect in his 1893 novel *L'esclusa*. In a scene with three sobbing women, the two who remain behind on the platform cling to each other, while the departing Marta reaches back with outstretched arms that slowly drop as the train pulls away, as all eyes remain riveted together.

The effect of being torn asunder is virtually palpable as they wave their handkerchiefs: “e da cui ancora fin laggiù, fin laggiù, si agitavano in saluto i fazzoletti... – Addio ... Addio ... – mormorava quasi a se stessa, agitando il suo, l’abbandonata.”⁴⁹ So consider how much more powerful the evocation of the absent railroad becomes at Treblinka where the train itself was an instrument of torment and death and where the Nazis, in this “Vernichtungslager”, murdered over 800,000 Jews.

In another part of the Treblinka memorial 17,000 broken granite shards, evocative of broken bodies, shattered lives, and vandalized tombstones seem to gather around the central monument to swirl in an endless circle, wandering souls with no chance of rest or comfort. Several stones are inscribed with the names of the countries of these victims; more bear the names of the villages whose Jewish population was decimated here. Only one carries the name of a person, that of Janusz Korczak, “who turned down the opportunity to escape from the Warsaw Ghetto” in favor of accompanying the more than 200 children of the orphanage that he directed.⁵⁰ Once again we encounter the laconic: JANUSZ KORCZAK I DZIECI: Janusz Korczak and the children.

This laconic inscription tells us more about the Nazi Weltanschauung than any learned dissertation. Perhaps it answers the question that Primo Levi raises at the end of the following scene in a Nazi official’s office, as recounted in his 1947 memoir *Se questo è un uomo* (If This Be a Man), the tale of his year in Buna-Monowitz, also called Auschwitz III:

“We came into the room. There was only Dr. Pannwitz. Alex, with beret in hand, spoke to him quietly: ... an Italian, in the camp only for three months, already half kaputt ... Er sagt er is Chimiker... – but Alex appears doubtful. (...) Pannwitz is tall, svelte, and blond: he has the eyes, hair, and nose expected of all Germans, and he sits imposingly behind a massive desk. I, prisoner 174517, am standing, standing in his office, where all is order and glistening cleanliness, such that it seems to me that I would leave a dirty spot wherever I might lay my hand. When he had finished writing, he raised his eyes and looked at me.

From that day onward, I have thought of Dr. Pannwitz many times and in many ways. I have asked myself what was his inner nature as a man; how did he fill his time outside of his work in chemistry and outside of his Indo-Germanic consciousness; especially when once again I was a free man, I wanted to meet him, not out of vengeance but



Fig. 17 Treblinka memorial

rather to satisfy my curiosity as a human being.

Because that look did not pass between two human beings; and if I knew how to explain fully the nature of that look, exchanged as if through the glass wall of an aquarium between two beings that live [and breathe] through different mechanisms, I would also have explained the essence of the great insanity of the Third Reich.”⁵¹

This leitmotif of the inability of fanatics to recognize the humanity of their numberless and anonymous victims became the legacy of Stalin, Mao, Pol Pot, and so forth, and will continue through the foreseeable future, as a function of today’s terrorism, which, in the aftermath of the suicide attacks in the United States on September 11, 2001, is rapidly becoming global in scope, from Madrid to London to Egypt to Iraq to Bali. And let us not even begin to anticipate the effects of warfare in the age of widespread nuclear weapons. In retrospect, the funerary architecture and commemorative memorials that marked the successive periods of the Enlightenment and the Romantic era, which calmed the mind and mined the depths of the soul, may very well represent a bygone day. First the twentieth and then the twenty-first centuries seem destined to address the unfathomably sad phenomenon of the mass slaughter of innocents. The elegiac note of the ancient Roman tombstone inscribed CARIS-SIMAE, which opened the modern era in its Enlightenment reincarnations, has been supplanted by the genie of Goya’s *The Sleep of Reason* and has given new meaning to Louis-Jean Desprez’s *The Kingdom of Death* (fig. 16), in ways that even Voltaire’s ingenuous narrator of *Candide* could not have anticipated.

Fig. 16 Louis-Jean Desprez, *The Kingdom of Death*, c. 1777-1784



It is my pleasure to thank Dr. Claudia Denk and Dr. John Ziesemer both for organizing the rich and varied assemblage of speakers and topics for this symposium and for inviting me to assume the role of evening speaker. I am deeply moved by this honor. I wish also to express my gratitude to Dr. Michael Petzet, President of ICOMOS, and to Dr. Renate Eikelmann, Director of the Bayerisches Nationalmuseum, and, of course, to the sponsors of the symposium, the Beauftragte der Bundesregierung für Kultur und Medien and the Gerda Henkel-Stiftung. I also thank Catherine Chakola, Ronit Eisenbach, and Thomas L. Schumacher for each providing me with an illustration to accompany my text.

- 1 The references for most historical information in this essay not given in the notes can be found in ETLIN, *Architecture*, 1984.
- 2 MITCHELL, "Introduction," *Gilgamesh*, 2004, p. 47.
- 3 LATTIMORE, *Themes*, 1962, p. 170 (with minor change in wording).
- 4 *Ibid.*, pp. 19, 65–70, 130.
- 5 NICHOLS and BEAR, *Monticello*, 1967, p. 69 (fig. 44).
- 6 As quoted in LURZ, *Kriegerdenkmäler*, 1985, Band 3, p. 19.
- 7 BÁRÁNY, *Wines*, n.d., n.p.
- 8 HONOUR, *Neo-Classicism*, 1977, p. 158. In *La Mort*, 2000, VOVELLE expresses a similar thought: "Mais il reste l'inquiétant mystère de cette porte ouverte et sombre vers laquelle se dirige le cortège..." (his ellipsis, p. 502).
- 9 LATTIMORE, *Themes*, 1962, pp. 90–91.
- 10 BOULLÉE, *Architecture*, 1968, pp. 136–137 (fols. 126–126 verso): "Me trouvant à la campagne, j'y côtoyais un bois au clair de lune. Mon effigie produite par la lumière excita mon attention (assurément, ce n'était pas une nouveauté pour moi.) Par une disposition d'esprit particulière, l'effet de ce simulacre me parut d'une tristesse extrême. Les arbres dessinés sur la terre par leurs ombres me firent la plus profonde impression. Ce tableau s'agrandissait par mon imagination. J'aperçus alors tout ce qu'il y a de plus sombre dans la nature. Qu'y voyais-je? La masse des objets se détachant en noir sur une lumière d'une pâleur extrême. La nature semblait s'offrir, en deuil, à mes regards. Frappé des sentiments que j'éprouvais, je m'occupai, dès ce moment, d'en faire une application particulière à l'architecture. J'essayai de trouver un ensemble composé par l'effet des ombres. (...) Il ne me paraît pas possible de concevoir rien de plus triste qu'un monument composé par une surface plane, nue et dépouillée, d'une matière absorbant la lumière, absolument dénouée de détails et dont la décoration est formée par un tableau d'ombres dessinés par des ombres encore plus sombres."
- 11 BAILLIE, *Essay*, 1967, p. 32.
- 12 SULZER, *General Theory of the Fine Arts*, in: *Aesthetics*, 1995, pp. 25–26.
- 13 See BURGELIN, *Philosophie*, 1973, p. 123ff.; see also, POULET, *Métamorphoses*, 1961, p. 105ff.
- 14 ROUSSEAU, *Rêveries*, 1960, pp. 69–71: "Le sentiment de l'existence dépourvu de toute autre affection est par lui-même un sentiment précieux de contentement et de paix." – "un bonheur suffisant, parfait et plein, qui ne laisse dans l'âme aucun vide qu'elle sente le besoin de remplir."
- 15 Paul SCHILDER, *Psycho-Analysis of Space*, 1935, p. 295, subsequently incorporated into SCHILDER's posthumous *Mind*, 1942.
- 16 MALLGRAVE and IKONOMOU, *Empathy*, 1994, pp. 47, 154, 186 n. 5, 186 n. 6, 287, with quotations from the works of Heinrich Wölfflin, Johannes Volkelt, and August Schmarsow.
- 17 LEROY, *Histoire*, 1764, p. 71: "cette partie Métaphysique, et très-intéressante de l'Architecture".
- 18 LE CAMUS DE MÉZIÈRES, *Le Génie*, 1780, p. 65: "En effet, nous sommes constitués tels, que dans la joie notre coeur se dilate et se perd dans l'étendue."
- 19 BOULLÉE, *Architecture*, 1968, p. 85 (fol. 91): "Que l'on nous peigne l'homme au milieu des mers, ne voyant que le ciel et l'eau: ce spectacle donné à l'homme est vraiment celui de l'immensité. Dans cette position, tout est hors de notre portée. Il n'y a nul moyen de faire des comparaisons. Il en est de même d'un aérostat, qui, planant dans les airs et ayant perdu de vue les objets de la terre, n'aperçoit que le ciel dans toute la nature. Errant ainsi dans l'immensité, dans cet abîme d'étendue, l'homme est anéanti par le spectacle extraordinaire d'un espace inconcevable."
- 20 BURKE, *A Philosophical Enquiry*, 1958, pp. 74–76, 139.
- 21 BOULLÉE, *Architecture*, 1968, p. 83 (fol. 90): "Enfin, par un heureux prestige qui est causé par l'effet de nos mouvements et que nous attribuons aux objets, il semble que ceux-ci marchent avec nous et que nous leur ayons communiqué la vie."
- 22 ROUSSEAU, *Troisième Lettre à Malesherbes*, in: *Oeuvres complètes*, 1959, vol. 1, p. 1141: "J'aimois à me perdre en imagination dans l'espace, mon coeur resserré dans les bornes des etres s'y trouvoit trop à l'étroit, j'étouffois dans l'univers, j'aurois voulu m'élancer dans l'infini. ... l'agitation de mes transports me faisoit écrier quelquefois: Ô grand être! ô grand être, sans pouvoir dire ni penser rien de plus."
- 23 BOULLÉE, *Architecture*, 1968, p. 137 (fol. 127): "l'étendue de tes lumières et la sublimité de ton génie."
- 24 *Ibid.*, p. 156 (fol. 138): "c'est par elle que notre esprit s'élève à la contemplation du Créateur et que nous éprouvons l'annonce des sensations célestes..."
- 25 *Ibid.*, pp. 138–139 (fol. 127 verso): "On verra un monument dans lequel le spectateur se trouverait, comme par enchantement, transporté dans les airs et porté sur des vapeurs de nuages dans l'immensité de l'espace. (...) Il est obligé, comme par cent forces majeures, de se tenir à la place qui lui est assigné et qui, occupant le centre.... Isolé de toutes parts, ses regards ne peuvent se porter que sur l'immensité du ciel. La tombe est le seul objet matériel."
- 26 STAROBINSKI, *L'Invention*, 1964, p. 202.
- 27 BLONDEL, *Cours*, 1771, vol. 2, pp. 340–341: "On prendroit soin de tenir le sol du préau de deux ou trois pieds au-dessous de celui des charniers, et celui d'environ trois marches, moins élevé que le niveau des rues qui y donneroit entrée; cette inégalité de sol contribuerait, en quelque sorte, à donner à ces monuments un caractère distinctif, capable de retracer aux vivants l'image du séjour terrible, mais inévitable, que nous devons habiter après la mort."
- 28 BLONDEL, *Cours*, 1771, vol. 2, p. 342. See also ETLIN, *Architecture*, 1984, p. 49.
- 29 ETLIN, *Architecture*, 1984, pp. 44–45 (figs. 20–22), 101–103 (figs. 70–72).
- 30 REED, *Groundswell*, 2005, p. 110.
- 31 LATTIMORE, *Themes*, 1962, p. 51.
- 32 BERNARDIN DE SAINT-PIERRE, *Études de la nature*, in: *Oeuvres complètes*, 1826, vol. V, p. 83: "Un tombeau est un monument placé sur les limites des deux mondes."
- 33 For illustrations, see ETLIN, *Architecture*, 1984, pp. 52–53, 105.
- 34 For illustrations of the memorial at Redipuglia, see KIDDER SMITH, *Italy Builds*, 1956, pp. 172–173.
- 35 For more illustrations, see ETLIN, *Symbolic Space*, 1994, p. 188.
- 36 MOSSE, *Fallen Soldiers*, 1990, p. 76 [fig. 6].
- 37 *Ibid.*, p. 16; LURZ, *Kriegerdenkmäler*, vol. 3, pp. 19–20.
- 38 MOSSE, *Fallen Soldiers*, 1990, pp. 3–4.
- 39 *Ibid.*, p. 49.
- 40 VOVELLE, *La Mort*, 2000, p. 524: "La victoire globale du XIXe contre la mort."
- 41 *Ibid.*, p. 513.
- 42 *Ibid.*, pp. 673–675.
- 43 HUGO, *Les Misérables*, 1973, vol. 2, pp. 430–431.
- 44 REMARQUE, *Im Westen*, 1984, p. 241.
- 45 For illustrations, see GOLDSWORTHY, *Passage*, 2004, pp. 62–73.
- 46 MOSSE, *Fallen Soldiers*, 1990, p. 88.
- 47 This is the title of Erich Maria Remarque's novel about a Nazi concentration camp: *Der Funke Leben* (1952). On this subject, see SCHNEIDER and WESTPHALEN, "Reue ist undeutsch", 1992.
- 48 MINKOWSKI, *Vers une Cosmologie*, 1967, p. 70.
- 49 PIRANDELLO, *L'esclusa*, 1992, p. 108.
- 50 <http://www.scrapbookpages.com/Poland/Treblinka/Treblinka06.html>; <http://korcak.com/englich.html>. See also YOUNG, *The Texture of Memory*, 1993, pp. 186–192.
- 51 LEVI, *Se questo è un uomo*, 1989, pp. 94–95: "Siamo entrati. C'è solo il Doktor Pannwitz. Alex, col beretto in mano, gli parla a mezza voce: – ... un italiano, in Lager da tre mesi solo, già mezzo kaputt ... Er sagt er is Chimiker ... – ma lui Alex sembra su questo faccia le sue riserve. (...) Pannwitz à alto, magro, biondo: ha gli occhi, i capelli e il naso come tutti i tedeschi devono averli, e siede formidabilmente dietro una complicata scrivania. Io, Häfling 174517, sto in piedi nel suo studio, lucido pulito e ordinato, e mi pare che lascerai una macchia sporca dovunque dovessi toccare. Quando ebbe finito di scrivere, alzò gli occhi e mi guardò. Da quel giorno, io ho pensato al Doktor Pannwitz molte volte e in molti modi. Mi sono domandato quale fosse il suo intimo funzionamento di uomo; come riempisse il suo tempo, all'infuori della Polimerizzazione e della coscienza indogermanica; soprattutto, quando io sono stato di

nuovo un uomo libero, ho desiderato di incontrarlo ancora, e non già per vendetta, ma solo per una mia curiosità dell'anima umana. Perché quello sguardo non corse fra due uomini; e si io sapessi spiegare a fondo la natura di quello sguardo, scambiato come attraverso la parete di vetro di un acquario tra due essere che abitano mezzi diversi, avrei anche spiegato l'essenza della grande follia della terza Germania."

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