

CALL FOR PAPERS

San Rocco 15: Muerte

San Rocco is interested in gathering together the widest possible variety of contributions. *San Rocco* believes that architecture is a collective knowledge, and that collective knowledge is the product of a multitude. External contributions to *San Rocco* might take different forms. Essays, illustrations, designs, comic strips and even novels are all equally suitable for publication in *San Rocco*. In principle, there are no limits – either minimum or maximum – imposed on the length of contributions. Minor contributions (a few lines of text, a small drawing, a photo, a postcard) are by no means uninteresting to *San Rocco*. For each issue, *San Rocco* will put out a “call for papers” comprised of an editorial note and of a list of cases, each followed by a short comment. As such, the “call for papers” is a preview of the magazine. The “call for papers” defines the field of interest of a given issue and produces a context in which to situate contributions.

SUBMISSION GUIDELINES

A External contributors can either accept the proposed interpretative point of view or react with new interpretations of the case studies. **B** Additional cases might be suggested by external contributors, following the approach defined in the “call for papers”. New cases might be accepted, depending on their evaluation by the editorial board. **C** Proposed contributions will be evaluated on the basis of a 500-word abstract containing information about the proposed submission’s content and length, as well as a list of the number and type of photographs, illustrations and/or drawings it includes. The abstract must be submitted as a PDF file that begins with the author’s name and the title of the proposal and includes reproductions of all images intended for publication. The PDF should be named using this format: SUR-NAME_TITLE.PDF. The editorial team of *San Rocco* will not review abstracts that fail to follow these guidelines. **D** Contributions to *San Rocco* must be written in English. *San Rocco* does not translate texts. **E** All texts (including footnotes, image credits, etc.) should be submitted digitally in .rtf format and edited according to the Oxford Style Manual. **F** All illustrations and drawings should be submitted digitally (in .tif or .eps format). Please include a numbered list of all illustrations and provide the following information for each: illustration source, name of photographer or artist, name of copyright holder, or “no copyright”, and caption, if needed. **G** *San Rocco* does not buy intellectual property rights for the material appearing in the magazine. *San Rocco* suggests that external contributors publish their work under Creative Commons licences. **H** Contributors whose work is selected for publication in *San Rocco* will be informed and will then start collaborating with *San Rocco*’s editorial board in order to complete the preparation of the issue.

Proposals for contributions to *San Rocco* 15 must be submitted electronically to mail@sanrocco.info by 10 February 2018.

We ought to die at 75. It's more than enough. We ought to be polite enough to leave the world to others.

Anyway, this is not what's happening. In western countries we just go on and on. We even think it's good to *live as long as possible*. We (westerners born in the 1970s) become adults at 40, make kids at 50, expect our flesh to be amenable to blowjobs until 90, anticipate dying at 120. People born in 1975 can reasonably expect to make it to 2100, if they are wealthy enough. Medical research is investing heavily in us. And with good reason, as we are doubtless far more precious to a pharma company than a nine-year-old Bolivian girl. This extension of the lifespan of the wealthy (a political decision that has never been discussed as such) has major consequences. If we imagine that rich Swiss or Californians could soon live to be 150 (as a rule these people are extremely healthy: they don't drink, mostly eat vegan shit, take drugs under medical control, run and swim and go to yoga every morning), this means that the current elite could easily be in power from 30 to 120, so for 90 whole years! 75 more than Napoleon, 70 more than Mussolini, 60 more than Stalin, 35 more than Queen Victoria, 20 more than Louis XIV. Just consider how long people who emerged with May '68 have been on the scene (and they're still not leaving!). Our generation will be even worse (in the sense that we will last longer in medical terms – worse in political terms is simply not possible). And if you want an example of a country ruled by the same people for too long, just think of contemporary Italy. The egotism of the contemporary rich is not just the usual egotism against others who happen to be alive at the same time, but also egotism against others who are not yet born (whose existence will be, at best, postponed, if not simply erased). Alive people desperately want to stay alive. They all believe they deserve it. Soon the rich will all freeze themselves (a bizarre idea, given that it ultimately relies on the hope that the rich of the future will be generous enough to unfreeze them). So, while the world's population is increasing, the pressure on the new-born is growing. We blame babies the same way we blame migrants (*they take our jobs!*) and support birth control with the unwavering enthusiasm we

are not allowed to show for radical anti-immigration policies. We never discuss our desperate refusal to die. Can it really be good for our society? Or even for us as individuals? Over the last 20 years we have seen pensions and social welfare debated on a daily basis. The population is ageing and we need to work longer, we are told. Fine, but why is the population ageing? Can we have this discussion without ever referring to its biological and anthropological presuppositions? Is it really possible to talk about pensions without once mentioning death?

The problem with death is that it does not sell, death depresses the market. Death removes customers from the market and most importantly saddens other customers, so death – even the name – had to be banned from the modern capitalistic city. The surge of capitalism corresponds to the progressive removal of death from the city: no mourning, no funerals anymore. Traffic cannot stop, shops cannot close. No Lent, no Muharram. Always Christmas, always Mardi Gras. While the infrastructure of death was being hidden away, architecture unlearned everything it once knew about monuments and memory. Functionalism was pretty much an anti-death movement. Indeed, in functional terms, no discussion of death is really possible. What is a tomb for? A mausoleum? So, since functionalism, architecture has been incapable of making monuments. It lost both the naivety of believing that something deserves to be remembered, and the maturity of establishing explicit hierarchies in the city. It lost its fear and – consequently – its courage. In an archaic society there was some ritual associated with death more or less every day (just go to India and see how death is still everywhere). People slowly got acquainted with death, they followed its protocols, they *learned* death, to a certain extent. Now we are completely unprepared for death, as if we don't even know it will one day happen to us. Our death-illiteracy is complete: just go to any non-religious funeral and squirm as it degenerates into the most embarrassing, degrading sloppiness (like when you discover you're expected to make one of those horrible "authentic" mini-speeches in which you always end up telling the most irrelevant

possible anecdotes in praise of your dead friend: John loved barbecue, Steffi was such a fan of Radiohead, I remember the *first time we went to Amsterdam*). Never in all this miserable informality is there a moment of dignity, and you go home feeling that your friend lived the life of a dog and wondering why it was not possible to get a damn priest to do the thing with a grain of decency.

There is something definitive about death, and this is possibly what establishes a link between death and form. Death is formal. Its rules are explicit and somehow classical (for instance: death comes only once). Maybe this is the reason for the undeniable link between cemeteries and neoclassicism.

Or, conversely, one of the reasons for form is that it seems to be one of the few things that is able to withstand death (if not in the sense of defeating or even surviving it, then at least in confronting it).

How to think of a contemporary city where people also die? How to make architecture for *mortal* beings?

• The experience of death •

One of the main issues with death is that you don't even die anymore. Before you reach that point you've become so demented with Alzheimer's that you never realize you are dying. So *you will not experience death*.

And yet, to die is one of the few certain privileges we acquired when we were born, and we should not be too keen on giving it up. By not dying, we are actually defrauded of one the biggest spectacles associated with our life.

(By the way, this *loss of death* is something that should worry priests, imams and shamans far more than they are now worrying about euthanasia.)

• 75 is enough •

If nowadays in Western Europe you die at 90 plus, you normally die of Alzheimer's or something like it. You die after two to five years of dementia, leaving your family with such horrible immediate memories that no one is able to salvage their memories of your earlier self. You die as a retard and an asshole and people cannot help but remember you as a retard and an asshole. You consume your entire dowry of future memories just to survive miserably for two or three more years. Is it worth it? Are we really so attached to life *per se*?

We ought to die at 75. It's more than enough. Work until you're 70 (the only thing on which neo-liberalism is right). Then play golf and go to the Bahamas a few times and then die. No more than five years of retirement.

Which leaves the problem of how to randomly decrease the age of the population. Maybe just stop investing in medical research, stop supporting charities that finance hospitals. Give all public money to schools. Forbid sport. Step up alcohol and substance abuse. Or better still, ask your spouse to dispatch you at the right moment, in one last act of love. But then what about singles? And then widows?

• Dress Sexy at My Funeral My Good Wife •

Imagine you did not want to leave your parents in the hands of a bureaucracy specializing in death. Imagine taking responsibility for their departure from life. Imagine this becomes a kind of private ritual, in which you meet your mother or father (or wife or husband) for

the last time before killing them. Imagine these actions need places to happen. What would these places look like?

A temple to kill the one(s) you love.

• **Dictionnaire de la mort** •

In 1967 Robert Sabatier published a thorough compendium related to death, from remarkable testaments to weird burials, from iconography to decorations, from curses to poems from all times and places. An all-you-can-eat death buffet.

• **A Thousand Balls** •

In autumn 1854 Roger Fenton went to Crimea to document the war. His camera equipment was very cumbersome, so he could only take posed pictures. For war reportage, the results were entirely unsensational. Instead of *Full Metal Jacket*, what Fenton produced was a quiet horror. And that's where the extreme beauty and also the deep sadness of these images lies. The pictures are all staged and also, to a certain extent, fake. Fenton is said to have asked soldiers to bring into the little valley the cannonballs that appear in the picture now known as *The Valley of the Shadow of Death*.

• **Unglücklich das Land, das Denkmäler nötig hat.** •

Architecture immortalizes and glorifies something. Hence there can be no architecture where there is nothing to glorify.

(Ludwig Wittgenstein, *Vermischte Bemerkungen*, 1977)

Contemporary architecture is incapable of producing monuments.

No matter how conservative and picturesque it has become in recent years, contemporary architecture still suffers from the modernist anti-monumental taboo. Why? Aren't we still in the unhappy lands that need monuments? Don't we need to glorify something (no matter what)?

• **Castrum Doloris** •

Castrum doloris, or *Trauerburg*, or *castle of sorrow*, is the name for the structure (generally a pyramid with candles and coats of arms) below and around the coffin of a deceased VIP. Very common in Germany and

Eastern Europe up to the beginning of the twentieth century, the castrum doloris – as well as other forms of temporary architecture – provided occasions to experiment with temporary monuments.

There is a very beautiful castrum doloris by Fischer von Erlach for Kaiser Joseph I.

Not to mention, there is a Norwegian Black Metal band called *Castrum Doloris*.

Names of ten metal bands preceding *Castrum Doloris* in alphabetical order according to www.metal-archives.com: Castoreum (Germany), Castos (Poland), Castrado Cadaver (Singapore), Castrated Senile Bastards (France), Castration Party (Australia), Castrator (USA), Castrensis (Denmark), Castrofate (USA), Castrum (Ukraine), Castrum (Croatia).

• **Victor Hugo's Funeral** •

Hugo famously wrote *ceçi tuera cela*. *Cela* meaning architecture.

When Hugo died on 22 May 1885 at 84, he became the subject of a singular conflict, revolving around the stages at which his body should be put on show. According to his will, Hugo wanted to be buried at the Père Lachaise cemetery, but the Third Republic insisted on a state funeral. After being displayed on a tall, ornately decorated bier that filled most of the arch of the Arc de Triomphe, his casket was taken to the Panthéon in a procession watched by two million people. Place and size and scene probably still mattered.

• **1, 2, 3 Lenin** •

Lenin's mausoleum has been made three times. Always in the same spot, and all three versions very similar. A relatively small stepped pyramid, made twice in timber, once – the last time – in stone. While the form of the building remained more or less constant through the different versions, the cultural context in which it was produced underwent a radical transformation. The mausoleum navigated the seas of constructivism and socialist realism by remaining somehow alien to both and the same time exposing a place where the two could meet, a sort of primitive realism.

▪ Tadao Ando's Buddha ▪

Honestly we don't know how it happened that Tadao Ando built this amazing dome around the ugly, gigantic Buddha in the Sapporo cemetery. However it came about, it is one of the most convincing projects of recent years. Well done Tadao! And lucky you, finding ugly, gigantic Buddha in your search for architectural redemption...

▪ Ottokar Uhl's little chapel in Burgenland ▪

In 1964 Ottokar Uhl built a small chapel commemorating the Battle of Saint Gotthard. There is a large cross and a small, white cubic volume, with incredibly simple buttresses.

▪ Le *cimetière marin* ▪

The cemetery at Sori is the true *cimetière marin*, far more striking than the one at Sète that inspired Valéry.

▪ Wadi-us-Salaam ▪

Wadi-us-Salaam, or *Valley of Peace*, is the world's largest cemetery, covering six square kilometres. The cemetery is close to the shrine of Imam Ali and so it is holy to Shia Muslims. It contains around five million bodies, and around half a million more are buried there every year. Corpses arrive from all over the world. A family grave costs around €3,000.

▪ Laurel Hill ▪

Laurel Hill is a 30-hectare cemetery along the Schuylkill river. On the opposite riverbank is the Schuylkill Expressway. Heading into downtown Philadelphia from the north, you drive for a few minutes along the river and the cemetery. You see the line of neo-gothic, neoclassical tombs unfold among the trees and the river and melt into the traffic jam. People arriving in Rome along the Via Appia had a similar experience. The city is approached through its dead citizens. Frank Furness is buried at Laurel Hill.

▪ 88 Chats ▪

Chats are stepped terraces leading to the river Ganges. In Varanasi there are 88 ghats. They used to be the stage for funerary ceremonies including cremation and the

dispersal of ashes into the river. Such ceremonies are now less and less common as the river got more and more polluted.

▪ Very Cool Piece of Design ▪

Simple box in cypress wood with a cross and a capital M, trapezoidal in plan, slightly higher at one end, producing a slope of c. 5 degrees, dovetailed joints at the four vertical edges. Made to contain the dead body of Pope John Paul II, probably used only for the funeral and later emptied and substituted with other caskets for the series of displacements that followed the process of canonization.

▪ Caskets for Obese Booming ▪

With 34 per cent of Americans obese, large caskets have become good business. In the USA, caskets are now industrially produced in widths up to 52 inches (c. 132cm, around the size of a double bed). These caskets can withstand a weight of 1000 pounds (c. 453kg). They can only be moved with machines.

▪ Drive-thru Viewing ▪

There are a few places in the United States where you can actually pay your final respects at a drive-thru window. You stop, press a button and a register book pops out from a metal box. You sign, take a look at the casket from a window and leave. In the time you saved you can eat more shit, not to mention post more Facebook shit.

▪ L E S ▪

The *Life Extension Society* was founded in 1964 by Evan Cooper, author of *Immortality: Physically, Scientifically, Now* (you can imagine what it is about). Cooper stopped his cryonics activities by 1970. According to his former wife, Mildred (quoted in Wikipedia), "he turned away from cryonics because of overload, burn-out, and a general sense that it was not going to be a viable option in his lifetime", and possibly also because there was little or no actual scientific support for its methods. The remainder of his life he spent sailing, until he was lost at sea in 1983.

• **Cocoon** •

Montpellier Metropole, Sun City (Arizona), the Village (Florida). Just three of an increasing number of gated communities for the elderly. Get tanned and play golf, shop and pray. And to hell with the youngsters.

• **A House for the Non-Born** •

In his amazing fable/treatise *Hilarotragedia* (1964), Giorgio Manganelli tells the story of the non-born (pp. 110–21). Present at the wedding of his parents, the non-born was furnished with a decent soul and a body in apparently good working order but then somehow, because of an embarrassing mistake in the operation of the universe, he wasn't born. His absence in the world creates all sorts of mismatches: the mother who did not deliver him becomes neurotic and obsessed with sex and finally a slut, the lover that the non-born should have married becomes a beggar and is raped by an alcoholic who is then promptly killed in a car accident orchestrated by the same celestial powers that had failed so miserably in organizing the birth of the non-born. Please could you design a house for the non-born? (And please, be kind, do not design a non-house.)

• **The Anti-Dead** •

In the same book Manganelli speaks of the *anti-dead*, a sect that considered death impolite – a cowardly retreat from the human consortium – and so persecuted the dead by desecrating tombs and vandalizing cemeteries. Then their leader died and the sect disbanded.

• **Fabulous Deaths of Architects** •

Accidents: Giuseppe Mengoni falls from the scaffolding of the Galleria

Car accidents: Antoni Gaudi crashing against a tram, Aldo Rossi, James Stirling

Heart attacks: Louis Kahn in the public toilets at Penn Station, Le Corbusier drowned at Cap Martin

Murder: Apollodorus first exiled and later murdered by Emperor Hadrian, Stanford White killed by the husband of a former lover

Overwork: Karl Friedrich Schinkel

Suicides: Mario Ridolfi, Simon Ungers, Takis Zenetos

Failed suicides resulting in sickness and ultimately death: Francesco Borromini's sort of harakiri

• **Just in Case You're Wondering** •

We do not accept entries about Modena cemetery.

Next page:
Giovanna Silva, *Varanasi*,
2010

