

Paolo Giordano

The restoration and architectural reconfiguration of the Cemetery of the 366 Fosse and the Colerici Burial Ground.

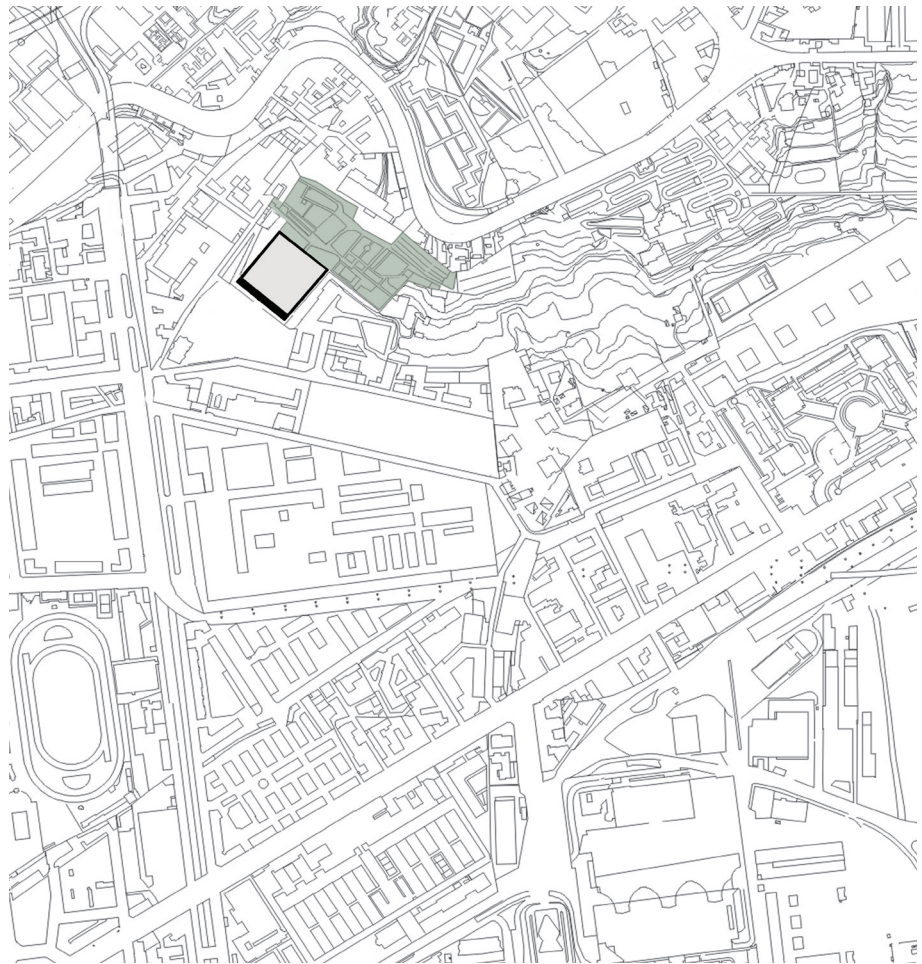
Abstract

The 366 Fosse Cemetery and the Colerici Burial Ground represent, in different forms, two of the most important monumental complexes in the city of Naples. The necessity to carry out the restoration stems from the desire to bring to light the original singularity - architectural and symbolic - that these monuments established with the place of settlement. Two singular works, whose peculiarities appear today obscured by degradation and superfetations that poorly tell the original spatial configurations that have marked this part of the city. The re-signification of the spatial qualities inherent in this place are therefore to be understood as an opportunity to return, to the city and the community, a historic gateway to the cemetery park of the hill of Poggioreale.

Keywords

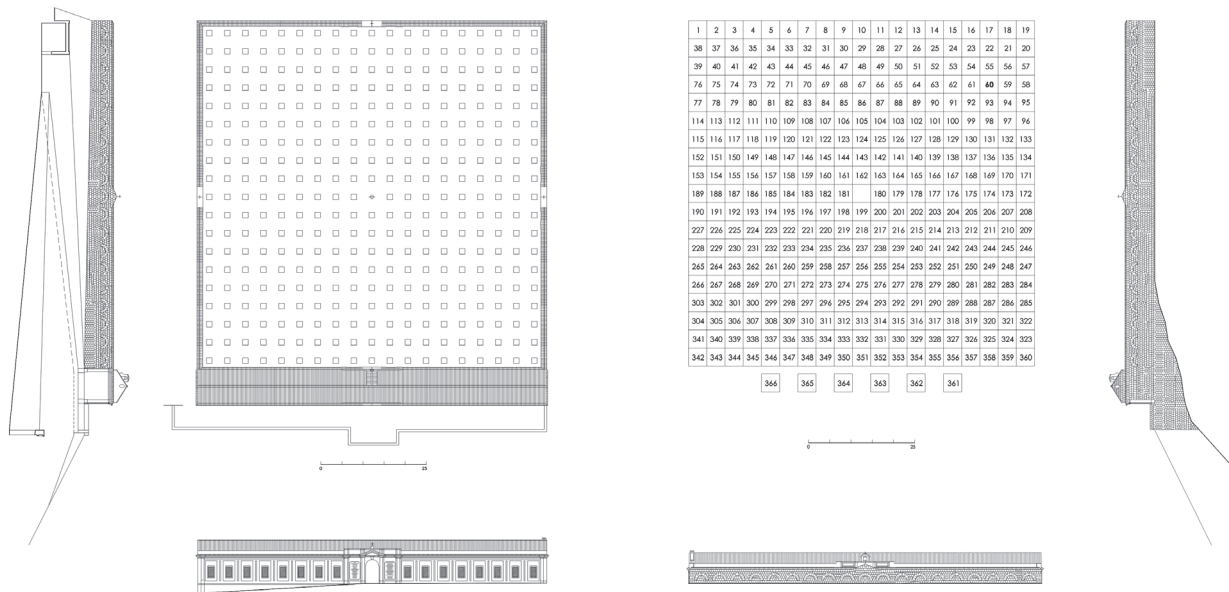
Ferdinando Fuga — Leonardo Laghezza — Restoration — Radura — Monument

The Cemetery of the 366 Fosse and the Colerici burial ground are each the architectural alter ego of the other: the first one is an eighteenth-century cemetery with an inner courtyard, square in shape and paved with lava stone, in which there are no name, date or face depicted, but only numbers from 1 to 366. The latter relate as many common tombs to the individual days of the year, including leap days; the second one, on the other hand, is a 19th-century funeral park, irregular in shape and dotted with tall trees, in whose enclosure various types of tombs are scattered and enriched with names, dates, epigraphs and, sometimes, depictions of faces and symbolic decorations sculpted in bas-relief or high relief. The Cemetery of the 366 Fosse is a rationalist architecture whose cyclic and perpetual mechanism of common burial refers to an idea of funeral homologation based on a rigorous anonymity incapable of recalling stories of lived life: Ferdinando Fuga's cemetery is therefore a powerful symbolic metaphor, through architecture, of human transience; of an ordinary humanity which does not yet want to recognise the value and dignity of its earthly experience. The Colerici burial ground realized by Leonardo Laghezza, on the other hand, is a romantic park which, through the presence of centuries-old trees and individual monumental tombs, proposes a double symbolic metaphor, an interweaving of life and death: on the one hand, the dense vegetation which, through its periodic seasonal withering and flowering, represents the cyclical nature of life; on the other hand, the presence of individual tombs which, through the various commemorative inscriptions dedicated to the deceased, ensures the immortality of man, at least on the level of remembrance and memory. In this sense, the two cemeteries, located on the hill of Poggioreale and bordering each other, well express the different

**Fig. 1**

Paolo Giordano, Cemetery of the 366 Fosse and the Colerici Burial Ground. Plan.

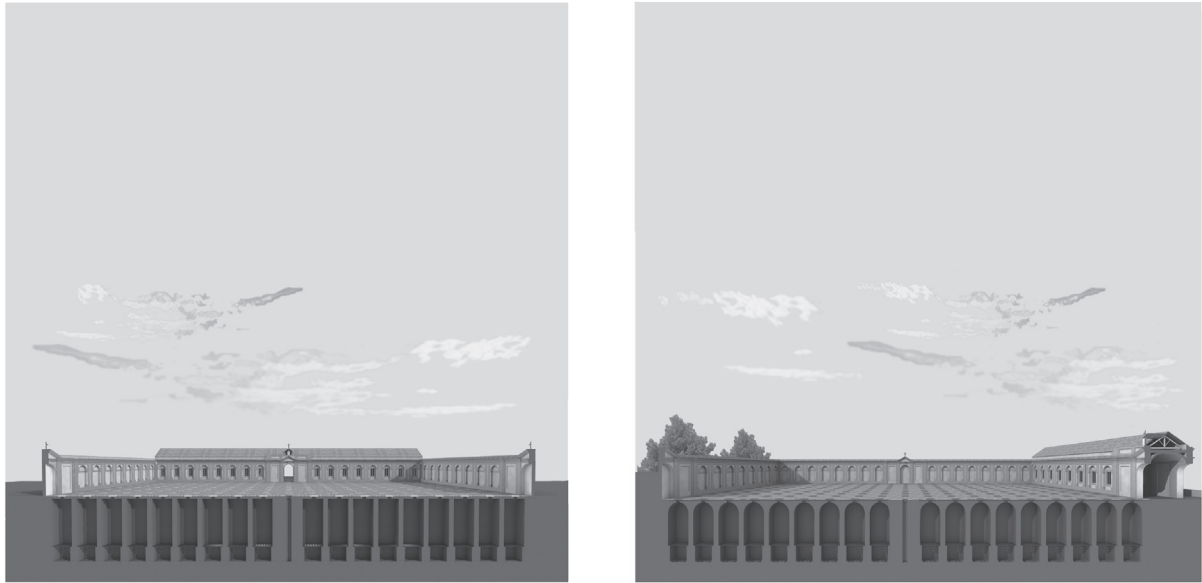
attitudes towards death and burial in the pre-Revolutionary monarchical society of the 18th century and in the post-Revolutionary bourgeois society of the 19th century. In spite of their clear cultural matrices of adoption, the two cemeteries are currently unable to fully represent their original architectural features, both because of the widespread environmental degradation that surrounds them and because of the considerable transformations that have been made to them, especially in recent decades. Specifically, the Cemetery of the 366 Fosse has undergone several transformations over the centuries that, although bold, have not distorted its original layout. These include, in addition to the hypogeum extension underneath the main body of the building, carried out in 1871, the placement of monumental tombs similar to those in the neighbouring Colerici burial ground inside the window compartments of the wall separating the inner space of the aforementioned building from the square courtyard. The construction of these funerary monuments between the end of the 19th century and the beginning of the 20th century represents, from an architectural point of view, a contamination of romantic character and style within a rational structure which, due to their high decorative and typological quality, is not to be considered invasive to the compositional balance of Ferdinando Fuga's cemetery. On the other hand, the structural and functional interventions carried out below the churchyard entrance to the cemetery and within its square courtyard in the 1960s are to be considered of a completely different order. These concerned, in particular, the removal of the rural slope with the relative construction of a reinforced concrete retaining wall concealing a new cemetery hypogeum and the systematic use of the decorative niches located on the internal western, northern and eastern facades of the funeral

**Fig. 2 a-b**

Paolo Giordano, Cemetery of the 366 Fosse and the Colerici Burial Ground. Plan and sections.

enclosure for the construction of new burial niches: invasive interventions, the latter strongly compromising the compositional clarity expressed by Ferdinando Fuga's original project.

In addition, inside the courtyard, a thick vegetation, both spontaneous and not, compromised with its roots the delicate statics of the intrados and extrados of the underground system of 360 tombs. This hybrid vegetation has recently been completely eliminated in order to restore to the courtyard of the 366 Fosse the original appearance of a square plaza paved with volcanic stone, which makes it very different from the tree-lined, irregular funerary enclosure behind the Colerici burial ground. This abandoned cemetery enclosure is the guardian of tragic funeral memories that marked the social history of the Neapolitan city from 1836 to 1913. The inexplicable abandonment of the Colerici burial ground has thus caused twofold damage: first of all to the original vegetation, which has not been cared for and has been overgrown by spontaneous vegetation, and secondly to the various types of burial ground, which have been attacked by atmospheric agents and outraged by repeated looting and vandalism, jeopardising the testimony of an important architectural and scenic environment. This recent damage, in addition to past transformations, has compromised the original design of the pedestrian paths and burial grounds designed by Leonardo Laghezza in 1837 within the first funeral enclosure of the Colerici burial ground. In this way, what could represent the monumental western end of the Poggioreale cemetery hill – the gateway to the cemeteries of Santa Maria del Pianto, the future burial ground at Fondo Zevola, the Monumentale, the Pietà and the Nuovissimo – risks approaching that fateful point of no return beyond which two of the most important burial sites in European cemetery history would be permanently compromised. In this sense, it is clear that the area enclosed by Corso Malta, Via Nuova Poggioreale and Via Don Bosco above represents an orographic and architectural ensemble of great landscape value. An important historic cemetery park in which it is possible to read the genesis and development of 18th and 19th-century Neapolitan cemetery culture, which, by virtue of this architectural and environmental characteristic, deserves a major reconfiguration project capable of re-evaluating both Ferdinando Fuga's cemetery and the Colerici burial ground at the same time. An intervention that, albeit by

**Figg. 3 a-b**

Paolo Giordano, Cemetery of the 366 Fosse. Comparing perspective sections.

different routes, has finally been implemented. Specifically, after removing the vegetation inside the courtyard, the restoration of the original ground plan for the Cemetery of the 366 fosse should restore the original ground plan, i.e. the 366 tombstones and the basic paving laid transversally to them; it should also restore the main body of the cemetery and turn it into a museum and documentation centre for the Poggioreale cemetery hill; and finally, it should free the decorative niches in the inner facades of the perimeter wall of the inner courtyard from the recently created niches. While the latter operation is of fundamental importance in restoring Ferdinando Fuga's cemetery to its original architectural setting, it also requires a great sense of respect and caution because of the obvious problems associated with the transfer of the remains there. On the other hand, as far as the Colerici burial ground is concerned, the restoration work involves the restoration of the small church designed by Leonardo Laghezza, located near the entrance to the 19th-century cemetery; the reconfiguration of the paths and burial grounds in the first sector, the one dating back to 1837, and in the third sector, the one dating back to the 1884 enlargement, as well as a series of small interventions to modify the ground plan by introducing, at specific points, new paving, new stairs, kerbs and small ramps to overcome the various differences in level within the burial grounds. The restoration of most of the sepulchres scattered around the Colerici funerary enclosure, currently lying in situ and in a very poor state of preservation, would complete the framework of the interventions necessary for the revalorisation of the sites. The restoration operations listed above, separately for the Cemetery of the 366 Fosse and for the Colerici burial ground, while meeting the specific recovery needs of the two funerary monuments, would not capture the real potential of a broader general reconfiguration capable, not only of resolving the critical points described above, but also, and above all, capable of proposing an innovative architectural-landscape scenario for the Poggioreale hill.

These considerations are based on an analysis of the drawing of the survey of the Colerici burial ground carried out by the technical offices of the Municipality of Naples in 1837 and on a passage from Chiarini's description of it in his *NOTIZIE DEL BELLO DELL'ANTICO E DEL CURIOSO DELLA CITTÀ DI NAPOLI. Divided by the author into ten days for the guidance and convenience of travellers, with additions of the most notable later improvements up to the present day, extracted from the history of monuments and from the memoirs of learned Neapolitan writers, edited by Cavaliere Giovanni Battista Chiarini*, as a result of the epidemic of 1836, due to the very high number of cholera victims, the burials in the Camposanto Vecchio, or Ferdinando Fuga's Cemetery, were suspended because the pits had been filled in, and the subsequent burials of about eighteen thousand bodies were carried out in an open space behind the latter. The 1837 survey shows that the main transversal route of the Colerici burial ground, which follows the north-south axis, had (and still has today), despite the modifications made to the original routes, an additional segment that reaches as far as the perimeter wall of the Cemetery of the 366 in correspondence with the triangular pediment that crowns the central decorative niche behind the internal façade of the square courtyard. The latter, among other things, is currently the only niche that, without niches, has a red brick wall at its back that differs from the rest of the wall structure of the funeral enclosure, made entirely of yellow tuff stone, thus testifying to tampering with the wall structure in question. From these two circumstances derives the supposition that, for a short period between 1836 and 1837, the Cemetery of the 366 Fosse and the Colerici burial ground, in spite of the different elevation of the two different ground levels, were connected to each other through an opening in the central niche of the northern elevation of the funerary enclosure designed by Ferdinando Fuga. This functional precedent and cognitive presupposition are fundamental in order to hypothesise an overall reconfiguration capable of connecting, once again and directly, the two cemeteries while at the same time satisfying all the requirements deriving from the need for a meticulous and impracticable restoration of the two funeral enclosures. In this sense, if, as noted in the past, between the two cemeteries there has already been an interrelationship not only functional, but also architectural – such as the “romantic” contamination of the Cemetery of the 366 Fosse occurred through the construction of individual tombs – it is possible to assume, at present, a restoration and reconfiguration based on a new relational connection and a new contamination, this time of “rational” setting, of the Colerici Burial Ground. A contamination that proposes, therefore, in the romantic enclosure of the Colerici burial ground, the construction of new tombs – for burial and inhumation – characterised by a strongly rigorous, clear and essential typological, morphological and decorative definition. In this perspective, the reason capable of supporting such a project draws its legitimacy from at least three strongly interconnected motivations: first of all, the need for a common restoration of the two cemeteries; secondly, the need to locate new burial niches in the immediate vicinity of the 366 Fosse Cemetery in order to free its inner perimeter fence from the corpses wrongly placed there in recent decades; finally, the need to identify one or more areas within the Colerici burial ground for a limited number of new tumulations and inhumations capable of triggering a new process of ordinary maintenance for a cemetery structure that would otherwise be destined to oblivion, abandonment and therefore irretrievable degradation.



Figg. 4 a-b-c-d-e-f

Paolo Giordano, Cemetery of the 366 Fosse and the Colerici Burial Ground. Plan and perspective views.

The proposal of a modification drawing aware of these needs, as well as of the past events and configurational realities that have marked the history of the funeral of the Cemetery of the 366 Fosse and of the Colerici burial ground, represents a methodological response that has its cultural roots in a work hypothesis that assumes restoration as a discipline able to govern the cognitive and propositional processes that underlie the modification of the territory: especially of those portions of the territory on which time has deposited the signs and architectural traces of its multiple and past contemporaries. The restoration and reconfiguration project proposed for the western monumental head of the Poggioreale Cemetery Park specifically provides, in addition to the direct connection between the Cemetery of the 366 Fosse and the Colerici Burial Ground, the construction of three new burial structures to be built within the perimeter of the latter: the Court of the 366 Tombs, the Glade of the 36 Tombs and the Hill of the 6 Tombs. The 366 Tombs Court represents the architectural fulcrum of the connection between the 18th-century cemetery of Ferdinando Fuga and the 19th-century funeral park of Leonardo Laghezza. It is a semi-hypogeum courtyard building, located inside the Colerici burial ground, at the same height as the Cemetery of the 366 Fosse and connected to the latter by an underground corridor. Since the floor of Ferdinando Fuga's cemetery is four metres lower than that of the Colerici burial ground, the new 366 Tombs Court is buried below the latter, thus not altering its continuity of perception. The connection between the new funeral court and the overlying Colerici burial ground is ensured by a sloping driveway, with two ramps and a hairpin bend, developed to the west of the new cemetery structure. From a typological point of view, the 366 Tombs Court consists of a "C"-shaped building opening towards the underground corridor that connects it to the Cemetery of the 366 Fosse court. The "C"-shaped underground body is composed of a tripartite system structured on a central corridor 2.60 m wide that disengages, on the right and on the left, the niches intended to accommodate only the bodies transferred from the decorative niches of the perimeter fence of the cemetery of Ferdinando Fuga. This latter operation could thus be carried out without the use of lorries and without going outside the eighteenth-century cemetery structure, with a transfer on the shoulders, in a procession, according to the ancient ceremonies of funeral rituals.

**Fig. 5**

Paolo Giordano, Cemetery of the 366 Fosse and the Colerici Burial Ground. Project.

Claude-Nicolas Ledoux, *Élevation du Cimetière de la ville de Chaux*. In *L'architecture considérée sous le rapport de l'art, des mœurs et de la législation*. Tome 1, 1804. Source Gallica. BnF.Fr / BnF.

Three hundred and sixty-five niches are organised in a sequence of five vertical units for each of the seventy-three modules that give concrete form to the architectural rhythm of the hypogeum. This distributional organisation is numerically similar to that which was forcibly created in the central courtyard of the Cemetery of the 366 Fosse around the 1960s. This underground structure is illuminated by a continuous slot in the ceiling of the central corridor of the C-shaped building. The extrados of the “C” shaped building, which is lower than the height of the surrounding areas, is covered by a lawn system that camouflages its presence with respect to the bordering flowerbeds. The three hundred and sixty-sixth loculus, on the other hand, is located inside the open-air courtyard that opens below the ground level of the Colerici cemetery park. The courtyard, which is bordered by the stone-clad wall of the semi-hypogeum “C” shaped building, is mute and silent, or simply inhabited by a tall steel cross placed in the north-eastern corner of the courtyard and by some old gravestones of the Colerici burial ground almost floating on a veil of water covering its entire surface. The courtyard of the 366 Tombs is not passable, but simply perceptible from the corridor connecting it to the eighteenth-century cemetery and from the Colerici burial ground above.

The same need for architectural mimesis that characterises the Court of the 366 Tombs also defines the other two new funeral facilities located in the Colerici burial ground: the Radura of the 36 Tombs and the Hill of the 6 Tombs. These latter funerary structures are designed to allow a new use of the nineteenth-century cemetery park while respecting its specific characteristics of identity which, as described above, are not only found in the architectural quality of the tombs but also and above all in that of the vegetation.

The Glade of the 36 Tombs is located in the extreme south-eastern corner of the Colerici burial ground: an area of about five hundred square metres at the lowest level of the funeral park. Specifically, the new structure consists of two topiary box hedges, parallel to each other, lying in a north-south direction and located on the two sides, east and west, of a square-shaped clearing in which there are thirty-six burial tombs arranged in six rows. Only a tall stone stele located in the north-eastern corner of the Glade of the 36 Tombs, on which various types of crosses in bas-relief are engraved, indicates the presence of the new burial structure from the neighbouring sectors.

While the Glade of the 36 Tombs is located in the lowest altimetrical depression of the Colerici burial ground, the last proposed funerary settlement, the Hill of the 6 Sepulchres, is situated above the four terraced steps that form the north-eastern end of the 19th-century cemetery. Terraced steps on which are located six old sepulchres dating back to the period between 1884 and 1887. More specifically, the third burial settlement in the Colerici burial ground is characterised by four in-line buildings, each of which is located on a single terrace with the rear elevations facing south. In this way, access to the burial niches is from the rear of these volumes, allowing these four in-line structures to appear as a sort of retaining wall with four recourses completely covered in lava stone. In this way, too, an architectural and environmental mimesis is guaranteed that respects the identity of the Colerici's funeral enclosure.

Paolo Giordano (Naples, 1956) is full professor of the scientific disciplinary sector ICAR/19 RESTORATION at the Department of Architecture and Industrial Design of the University of Campania "Luigi Vanvitelli", ASN commissioner in SC. 08/E2 - History and Restoration of Architecture, appointed by Directorial Decree n. 3479 of 20/12/2016. He graduated in Architecture in 1982 from the University of Naples "Federico II" with a thesis entitled The design of the City Palace on the Riviera di Chiaia, Naples. In 2019 he was Visiting Professor at the Faculdade de Arquitetura da Universidade de Lisboa in Portugal. In 2018 he was Visiting Professor at the Dia of Dessau in Germany. In 2017 he was Visiting Professor at the Faculty of Architecture of the Polytechnic University of Tirana in Albania. From 2013 to present, he is coordinator of the PhD in "Architecture, Industrial Design and Cultural Heritage" at the Department of Architecture and Industrial Design of the University of Campania "Luigi Vanvitelli". From 2011 to 2013, Coordinator of the PhD in "Representation, Protection and Safety of the Environment of Structures and Government of the Territory" at the Faculty of Architecture "Luigi Vanvitelli" of the Second University of Naples. From 2009 to 2012, Vice Director of the Department of Culture of the Project at the Faculty of Architecture "Luigi Vanvitelli" of the Second University of Naples. He was a member of the Board of Teachers of the PhD in "Survey and Representation of the Architecture of the Environment", at the "Department of Culture of the Project". Besides monographic books, he has published articles and critical essays on "Domus", "AU" "Stadt Bauwelt", "Building Design". From 1985 to 1995 he collaborated with the international architectural magazine «Domus».