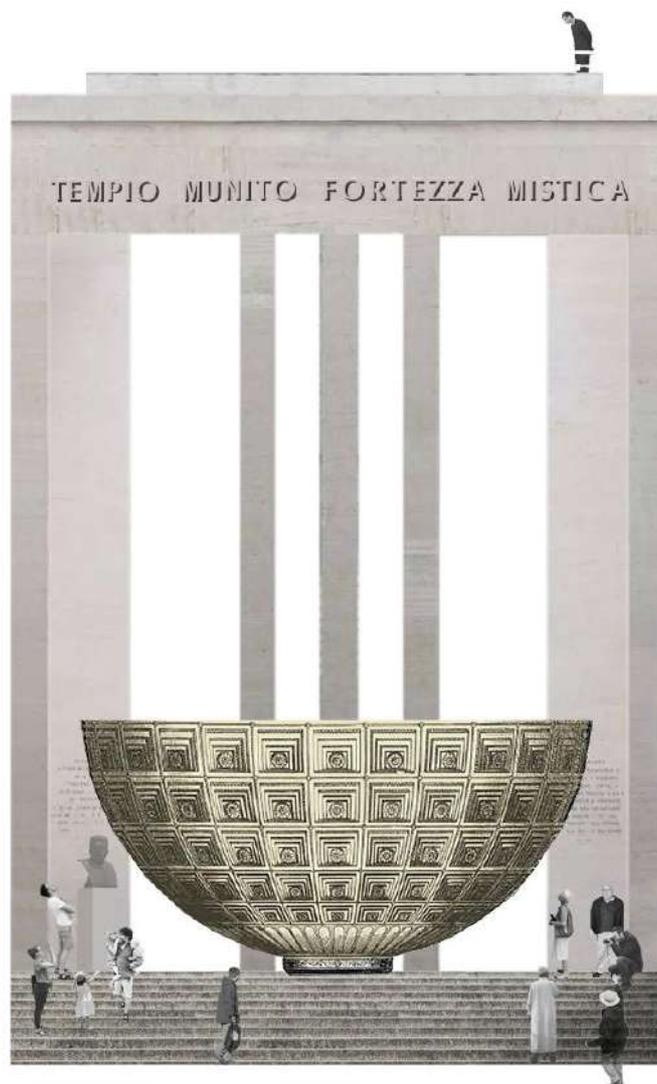


02. The Missing Cupola

Fernanda Ruiz



The missing cupola is an architectural prosthesis for the Casa del Mutilato, a tool to reorient the future uses of the building and very pragmatically to start discussing a needed restoration. It comes to substitute the dome in the atrium that was never built.

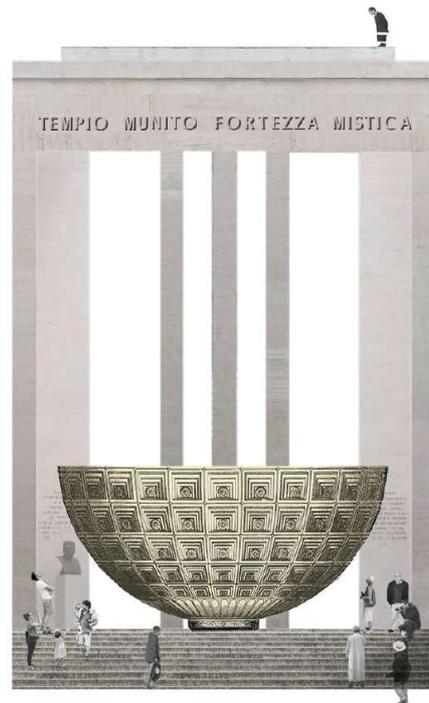
Traditionally, domes in architecture were associated with celestial and cosmic significance, and hence very present in religious architecture. Usually, they are covered with paintings which tell stories about perfection, eternity and the heavens. Later, this celestial symbolism was also adopted by many rulers to emphasize their divine legitimacy and then inherited down to the present days as a general symbol of governmental authority and power.

Usually domes have a circular aperture in the centre like the one in the Pantheon in Rome, called the oculus, which appears as an omnipresent gaze from above, reinforcing the idea of supremacy and control. The circular opening in the roof of the atrium of Casa del Mutilato looks like an oculus. This brings to mind the imaginary of a missing cupola, which its inexistence makes one perceive the building as a mutilated structure, evoking the absence or omission of something.

The architectural style of the building resembles religious architecture. In fact, fascist architects create a lot of formal parallelisms to religious forms in order to show the power and grandiosity of the party. Symbols rituals and myths based in Roman Catholicism were introduced into politics and consequently apply in architecture. This close relationship with religion was a fascist political strategy to create a mass of followers by institutionalizing a collective cult. It is what the Italian historian specializing in the ideology and culture of fascism, Emilio Gentile called "The Sacralization of Politics in Fascist Italy", where Mussolini presented himself as some kind of deity and Fascism as a secular religion.

Bringing the cupola to the ground in an inverted position is an attempt to subvert its sacred and unattainable meaning by altering its physical appearance. Pragmatically, its inversion takes the form of an amphitheatre which becomes a place to host conversations and discussions about the untold side of Fascism and gives the opportunity to contain other narratives, this time not the dominant ones. Reading groups, informal meetings or conferences can happen inside with the purpose of bringing the hidden narratives of the past into our collective consciousness, and ultimately reclaim other possible uses of the building.

Moreover, the sudden appearance of a new infrastructure in the atrium aims to destabilize the quotidian landscape, drawing the attention of passers-by. The permanence of the built environment tends to make its elements become invisible, remaining a mere background curtain in people's everyday lives. In this way, the sole presence of the cupola also seeks to elicit collective thinking on the building's history and current possibilities of use.

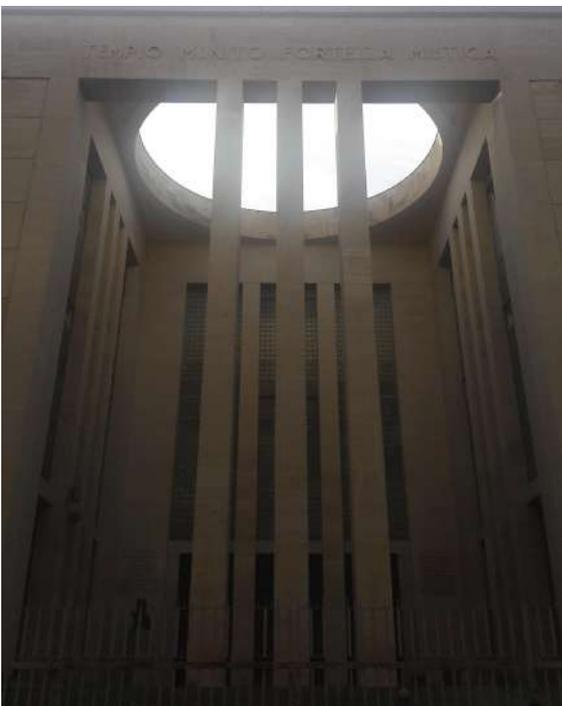




Santa Maria dello Spasimo church,Palermo



Palatine Chapel,Palermo



Casa del Mutilato, Palermo