

Renato Rizzi
Heresy of the rite*

Abstract

The ritual as a deep contemplation of the binomial that makes up the word *Architecture*: τέχνη (*Téchne*) and ἀρχή (*Archè*) *Architecture*, in this sense, is understood as an art where all material and immaterial things converge, in a continuous comparison/clash between eternal and present.

Our time, however, is dominated by technique alone, which distances us from the profound reason for things. The Project of architecture (with a capital 'P' when it belongs to distant times and therefore to the *Archè*) therefore describes the rational structure dictated by the architectural paradigms - linked to the origin - with the aim of rediscovering that shared meaning which is proper to the discipline of architecture and which aspires to the search for truth.

Keywords

Rite — Arché — Téchne — Architectural project

The main ritual, the life. The minor ritual, the days. The pulse of existence beats with the same formula in the binomial of *Architecture*. *Arché*, the main ritual. *Téchne*, the minor ritual. An epistemic similarity feared like the plague. It will not be difficult to understand the causes. In fact, the first root, *archè*-, has been severed from its name as one cuts the head from a body. It was not so much an execution as a sacrilege that continues to be repeated, even today, in the most unsuspected place. In the presumed sanctity of university rooms.

However, this would not have been a scandal if the name *Architecture* had been replaced by *Building*. At least no crime would have been committed. Instead the aura of the word *Architecture* had to remain intact in the prestige of its effigy, while its content had to be completely emptied. Replaced by other. But in order to understand the deception perpetrated by the knowledge of our age, we must pay attention to at least three points:

A- first of all, on semantic structure of the name *Architecture*;

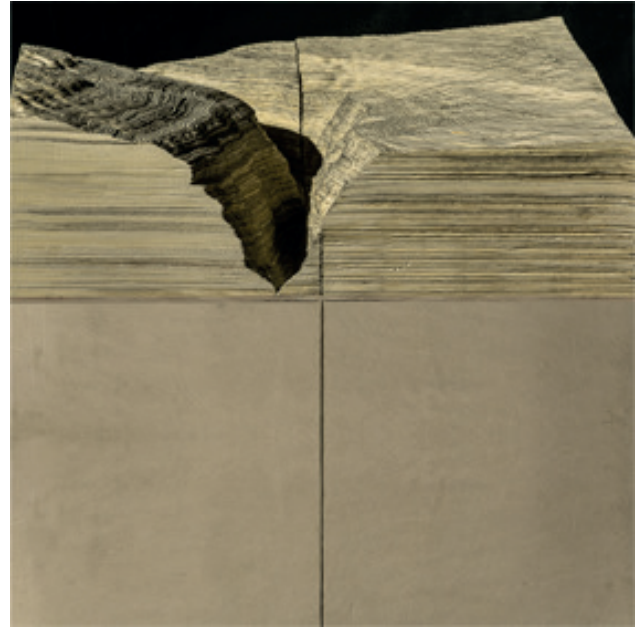
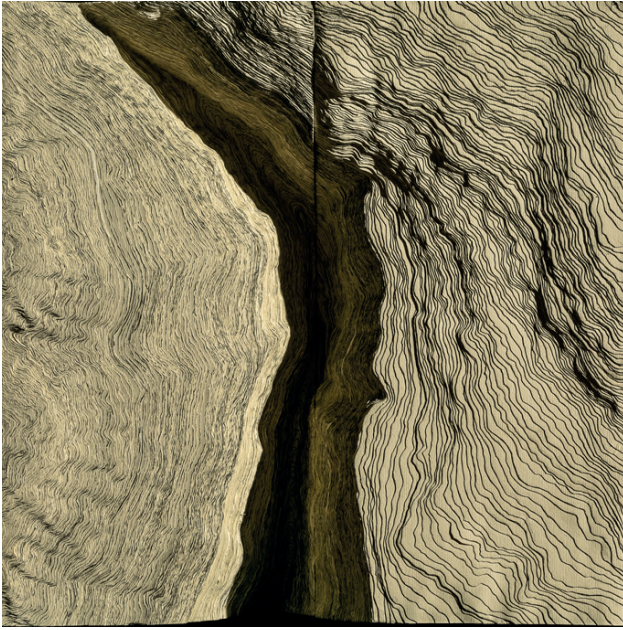
B- on paradigm of our time;

C- on overcoming Western philosophy.

Only in this way the radical difference between main and minor ritual will be able to emerge. Because the rite however and wherever pervades both our daily acts and our innermost thoughts.

A- The semantic structure of the name “architecture”.

The binomial *archè-téchne* brings to the stage of the world the pairs of principles in opposition to each other: *non dominable*-dominable; *unchangeable*-changeable; *eternal*-becoming; *invisible*-visible, etc.



Figg. 1 a-b

Renato Rizzi whit Susanna Piscicella and Marco Renzi e Stefano Gobetti, La Cattedrale di Solomon a Lampedusa. Overhead view and cross section of the gully crossed by the project slope. Cardboard model, scale 1:500, size 42x42 cm.

All the powers from the *non dominable* horizon (the *appearance* of the whole, the *aesthetic*) converge in the name *Architecture* and They cannot in any way be subjected to our rational or irrational will. More explicitly, the *indissoluble bonds* (the *aesthetic*) belonging to cosmic laws converge in the semantic structure of the name *Architecture*. To the *indissoluble bonds* that govern each smallest part with the whole. The *dogmas* of the *form*.

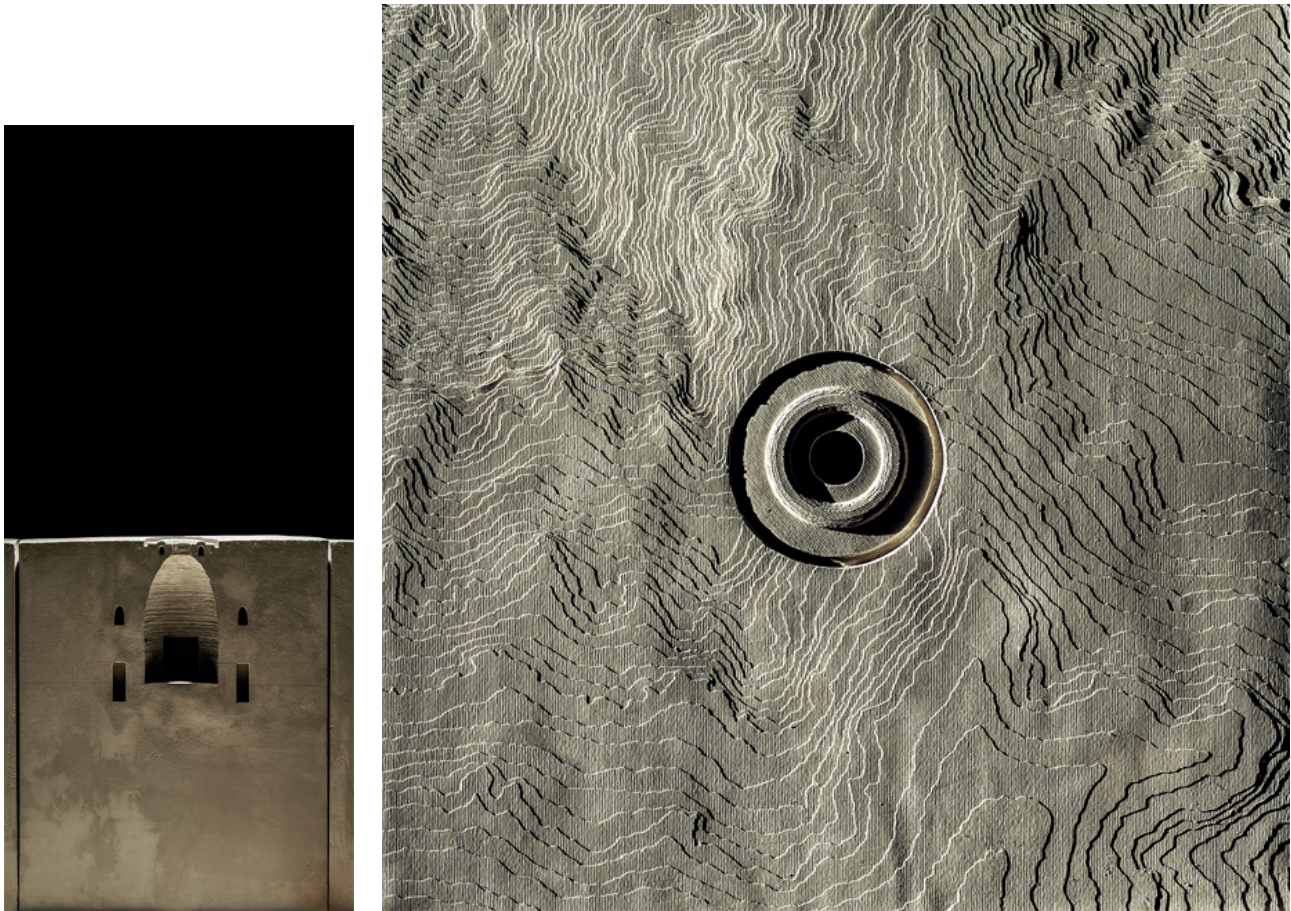
B- The contemporary paradigm.

The technical-social-scientific culture of our time has based its power on the opposite principle. All the things (the bodies) are unrelated, unconnected, and separate from the whole. This is the domain of the *technique*. The paradox and extreme contradiction of our time. An impossible thing. Only our faith (of atheists) believes this is possible.

C- Overcoming the Western metaphysics.

If we compare the three millennia of Western thought, to which the horizon of the name *Architecture* belongs, with the paradigm of contemporary culture, the drama clearly emerges. The radical epistemic contradiction between the *Great Past* (the all tied) and the *Great Present* (the all untied). But, as already mentioned, since it is impossible for a *non dominable* to be overpowered by a *dominable*, it means that our time continues to believe within a negative faith. And a negative contradiction can only produce *violence*. Despite everything, we do not want to *see*. The evident proof is for all to see. The immense *formless* plagues of our megacities or of any other urbanisation or *periphery* (*peri-pherein*, carry around without a scope). The loss of form in the *formless* envelops by now the entire planet Earth in its cultural and factual stranglehold. In fact, we have forgotten that in the synonym for *formless* another removed word resonates (for superstition or hubris?): *death* (another *non dominable*).

We can address the authentic meaning of the word *Architecture* and of the new ritual that accompanies it only with this awareness: only within the horizon of the all times and histories, only by going beyond the Western Greek metaphysics that has brought the project of the technique

**Figg. 2 a-b**

Renato Rizzi with Susanna Piscicella and Marco Renzi e Stefano Gobetti, La Cattedrale di Solomon a Lampedusa. Section and zenithal view of the cathedral. Plaster model, scale 1:500, dimensions 360x31,4x165 cm.

to completion in our time (metaphysics and technique are now two overlapping terms). In fact, these considerations move the cultural axis from the exclusive pole of the techniques towards the centre of gravity of the name *Architecture*. This moving has semantic repercussions with respect to: our name (A1); our responsibility (B2); the sense of the project (C3).

A1- Our *name*.

The word *person* (from *prosopon*, the mask: an external face turned outwards; an internal face turned towards the individual's interiority) bears an extraordinary structural similarity to the name *Architecture*. Soul, *arché*. Body, *techné*. Soul, what is in common, what binds and constrains us (not only socially). The body, what is not in common, what distinguishes and separates us individually. To the soul belongs *zoè*, eternal life. To the body belongs *bios*, the chronological life (inseparable entities). For the Greeks it is the necklace of eternal life: the *zoè* thread holds all the *bios* pearls together. Therefore, we are the living example of this *non dominable* mystery (that we should celebrate with our works). The analogy with *Architecture* is stronger than any other law, however. Yet, at the same time, we are also referred to as *subject*. A word separated from its remote origin. *Sub-iacere*, from the Latin; *ipokeimenon*, from the Greek. However: "what is under". But this condition of "being under" is not a preclusion, nor a condemnation, nor even a punishment. (While for the technique we are those who are above, those occupying the command position, even if this assumption is based on a faith in which we believe blindly!). Thus, far from it. Rather, this is the *gift* that is freely offered to us by the appearance of the worlds, by the appearance of the whole. From the infinite horizon of the eternities

of the starry sky. We received a special privilege: *to contemplate* the spectacles of the worlds.

We are the spectators of enchantment, of wonder, of astonishment, as well as of terror, of fear, of the anguish for a universe that welcomes us, protects us, questions us, troubles us. And at the same time it scrutinises us, more curious than we are to be mirrored in the enchantment of the works we are supposed to create.

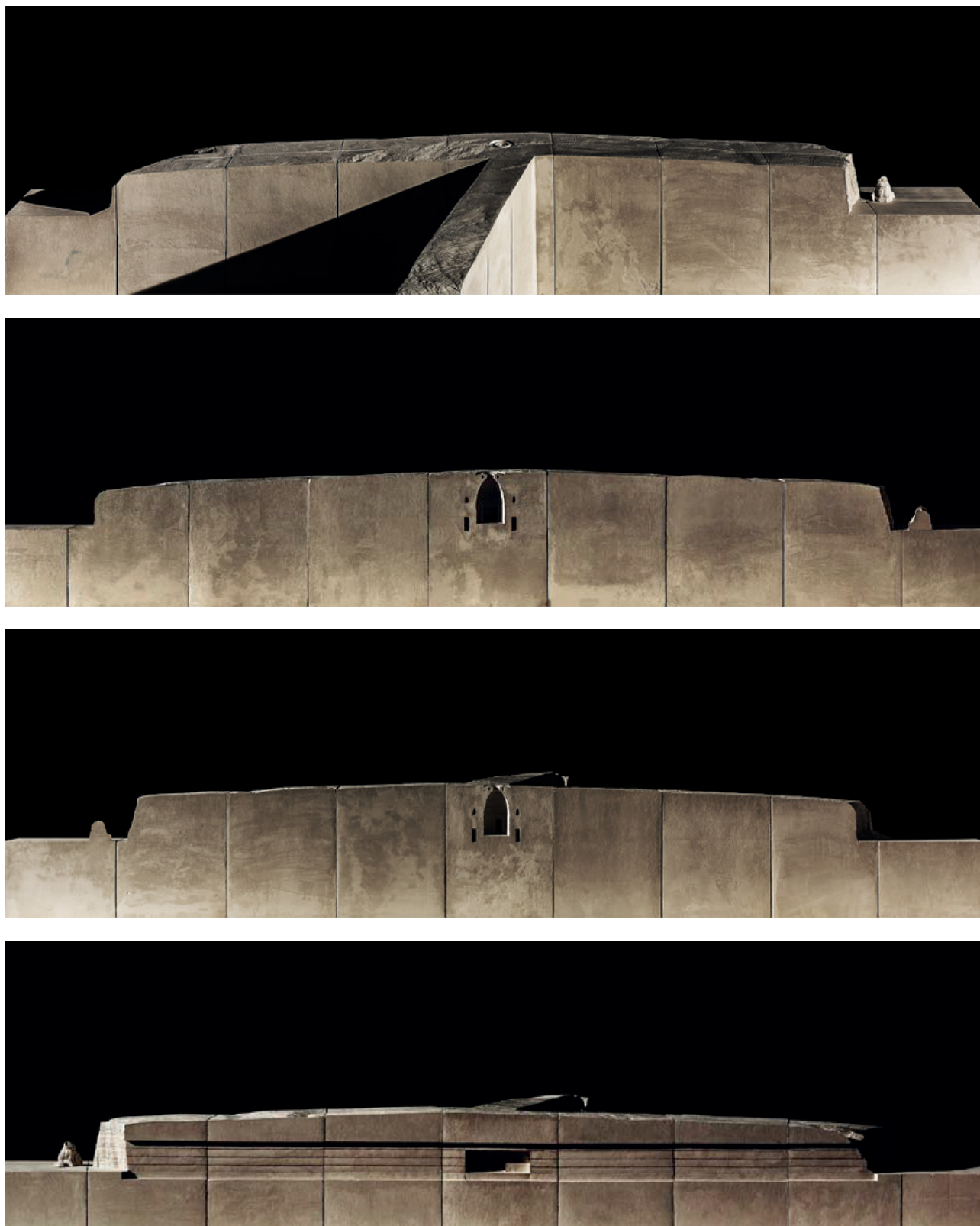
Here, then, is how the rite would change if bound to the new (and always original) condition of our being: from *nominativi* to *dativi*. It would no longer be the individual Ego that would prevail as the source of the will to power: the condition of *nominativo*. But the Self, that condition which, re-emerging from the depths of the soul, would reverse our vision into the condition of *dativo*. The thruster-centre of the Ego is replaced by the acceptor-centre of the Self. By destiny, since time immemorial, we have always been the *privileged ones*. This radical reversal of our vision is the biggest proof of the greatest gift that belongs to us. It can be assumed that our body, a unit of spirit and flesh, is the most complex and mysterious device in the universe through which the *eternals* appear, in order to be contemplated here, on this Earth, on which we live our sensory experience as if it were a miracle. Quite! We are this mystery-miracle. We are those who receive from the eternal horizon of the *non dominables* (*archè*) the rays that rekindle the matrixes of the images. These images have always been imprinted and mute in our souls (*zoè*) from which they are generated, and the final *forms* of the works feed off them, in order to be contemplated by those same *eternals* from which they come and to which they belong, coming back to them.

B2- Our responsibility.

This radical change of vision implies a very severe intellectual, as well as individual, effort. The transition from arbitrariness (of the *téchnai*) to *singularity* (of the *arcuai*) is certainly not easy to implement. Nor is it automatic. Rather, we must have the strength to break out of the world of (false) security (semantic paradox, *sine-cura*) of technical and regulatory knowledge to enter the world of *appearance* (the eternal horizon of the immutable). We must have the courage to face the reign of the *risk*, of the *form*. A real *exile* for our minds and our education. From uncritical anonymity to the loneliness of *singularity*, it is a long step. Because each of us, being a temporal absolute, is always a new *adam* appearing on the world stage, destined to repeat the originality of the beginning in its infinite richness. Just as we are forced each time to leave our *eden* to develop the *project* ahead of us.

C3- The sense of the project.

We are now faced with the secret hidden in the word *Architecture*. If the terms placed by the semantic structure of its name stand at the extremes of the whole (*non dominable*-dominability, *eternal*-becoming, etc.); if the extremes of our existence lie between the *impassable* limits of *birth* and *death*, then the terms of the *project* must also occupy a similar spatiality. Precisely because each of us is a *project* that must be brought to its manifestation. Indeed, every *project*, like every existence, lies between a *debt* contracted with our predecessors (*birth*) and a *gift* to be returned to our successors (*death*). In other words, between an *eden* of the beginning and an *eden* to be delivered. The whole childhood is full of the rite of enchantment of the world. There is no difference for a child between *non dominable* and *dominable*. He is everything. He identifies himself in all things. Total uni-



Figg. 3 a-b-c-d

Renato Rizzi whit Susanna Piscicella and Marco Renzi e Stefano Gobetti, La Cattedrale di Solomon a Lampedusa. From above, project descendant seen from the East; east and west sections of the cathedral; longitudinal section of the tapered tunnel

running in the south-north direction.

Plaster model, scale 1:500, dimensions 360x31,4x165 cm.

ty. But like every *adam*, he too must leave the *enchanted* (and dangerous) world and walk into the places of consciousness. It will take the whole of life to rework the childhood experience (the Greek anamnesis) and translate the enchantment of the early time into the awareness of the works (understood in the most general sense of the word).

Only then, at the height of maturity, or at the peak of one's time, will the time come for the *project to be handed* over to our future successors.

In this profound perspective the sense of the *Architectural Project* expands itself. But we should get used to writing, and at the same time thinking about the word in at least two different ways. With a capital 'P' when referring to the first root, *archè*. With a lower case 'p' when referring to the second root, *téchne*. Only the *Project* of the *archè* can guarantee unity of meaning to the plurality and diversity of the projects of the *téchnai*, always maintaining the inseparable link between the eternal and the present.

This is how the dynamics of the (new) *ritual* of the *Project* can be outlined, to which we should adapt in respect of the *singularity* of *Architecture*. Of the works. Of ourselves. Of the world. Because of that sense of modesty (*aidôs*, the *religio* of all authentic doing) that should pervade our works always inscribed between the two extremes: the *Eden* of the beginning, the debt-*gift* of enchantment; the *Eden* of delivery (*NaTaN* in Hebrew, *paradosis* in Greek), to return that initial gift.

*Warning

The cultural horizon to which this paper refers comes from many different works, ancient and modern. But in this context it is better to remember the main contemporary heretical authors: Emanuele Severino, philosopher (Brescia, 1929-2020). Carlo Enzo, theologian (Venice, 1927-2019). Derek Walcott, poet (Castries, S. Lucia, 1930-2017); Andrea Tagliapietra, philosopher of the history of ideas (Venice, 1962). If one were to point to a concrete, even if totally ignored, example of the above themes, one would refer to the poetic and architectural work of John Hejduk, architect (New York, 1929-2020). Cfr. R. Rizzi, *John Hejduk. Incarnatio*, Marsilio, Venice 2010, et, R. Rizzi, S. Piscicella, *John Hejduk. Bronx. Manuale in versi*, Mimesis, Milan-Udine 2021.

Renato Rizzi (Rovereto 1951) is Professor of Architectural Composition at IUAV in Venice. He collaborated with Peter Eisenman in New York between the '80s and '90s of the twentieth century. In 1984 he won the competition for the Ghiaie sports area in Trento, a work that was awarded the national In/Arch prize in 1992. The project for the Casa Museo Depero realized in 2008, wins the Gold Medal for Italian Architecture of the Triennale di Milano 2009. In 2014 he realized the Elizabethan Theater in Gdansk, a work nominated for the Mies van derRohe Award 2015 and awarded the Gold Medal of Italian Architecture in the same year. Many of his works have been exhibited at the Venice Architecture Biennale in 1984, 1985, 1996, 2002, 2010. In 2019 she received the Prize of the President of the Italian Republic for Architecture, on the indication of the National Academy of San Luca. He has published numerous essays including: *The Daimon of Architecture* (2006), *The Jewish Wall: the Eisenman Empire* (2009), *John Hejduk: Incarnatio* (2010).