

Lampedusa

Renato Rizzi



Lampedusa

Solomon's Cathedral

Renato Rizzi

Edition

Kärjäkivet

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The eye of the cathedral

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Editor's Note

This issue is dedicated to the project “Cathedral of Solomon”, developed by the Architectural Planning Workshop led by the Professor Renato Rizzi at the IUAV University of Venice. The project is here presented through an unedited and never published essay purposely written for Kärjäkivet.

Undertaken between 2015 and 2018, this project is a response to the tragedy happened on 3rd October 2013, where a boat carrying migrants from Lybia to Italy sank off the Italian island of Lampedusa. The idea for the project is to transform the island in a resting break halfway through the course, where to stop, recover the bodies, but most importantly the souls...

This issue was prepared in close cooperation with the co-authors of the project, Giorgia Antonioli and Susanna Pisciella to whom we would like to address our sincere acknowledgments. Special thanks to Renato Rizzi for his extraordinary effort and commitment during the process.

Lampedusa

- Solomon's Cathedral¹

Renato Rizzi, Architect



The depths of the Mediterranean Sea. Scale 1:1.000.000

© Renato Rizzi. Photo: Umberto Ferro

In the heart of pain. — Again the same question: what response was given to the tragedy of October 3, 2013? 368 migrants drowned in front of sunbathers. If after ten years we still look at that dramatic event, it means that our focus works like the needle of a compass. It always points to a magnetic north: the myth. The incandescent core where stories are still seething magma.

To that effect Lampedusa's tragedy was a true apocalypse, word's etymological sense. An upside down-turn of events. A dramatic revelation. Indeed, that Thursday morning will pulse forever in the Mediterranean skies as in our minds. On the stage of the sea *Ananke* (fate) unleashed *Hades* against *Eden*. The hell of the dead versus the island paradise. The inscrutable of the world lashes when it wills our faiths, and our certainties vanish with a breath.

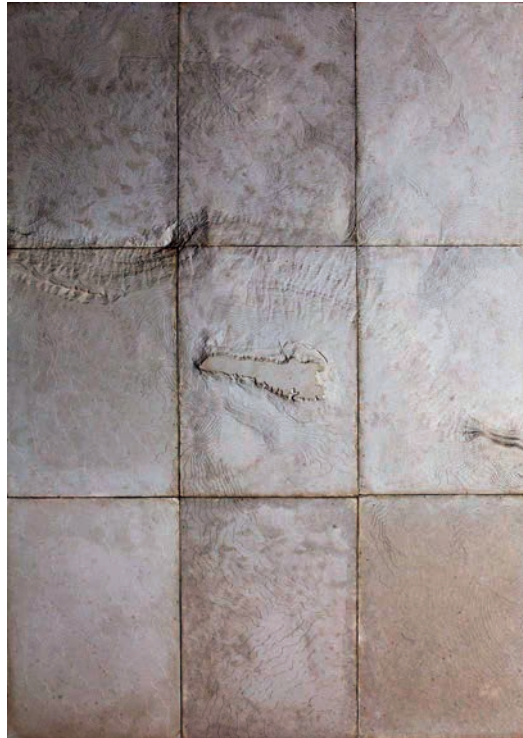
Unfortunately. As long as the paradigm of contemporary technosocio-economic culture keeps its gaze petrified on the everyday of the present, the answers can only be short-sighted and futile. Disconnected from the facts. Commemorations will continue in the *performances* of celebrations and the vacuity of words will prevail over deeds. *Hotspots* will continue to manage the migration flows as casually as *slot machines* do. Life traded for steel marbles.

And yet, we continue to use fundamental words to elude their meaning: Contemporary, Architecture, Europe, Lampedusa, the most obscure and recurring.

Contemporary. — We are bewitched by the present like Narcissus in the mirror. While in the con-temporary all-times converge. From the archaic (*arché*) of the past to the ideals of the future. The extremes of time pulse in unison in our lives. We are the sonar of the invisible and the convergence lens of all times. Casts of the most remote origins, matrices of the most distant ideals.

Architecture. — In the binomial arché-téchne lives the same root of the *con-temporary*. *Arché*, besides being the origin and principle of everything, brings to light the theme of the *unmentionables*. Our making has its own boundary: the horizon of the also passable.

1. Solomon is the real name of a Nigerian boy who crossed the Sarah desert to land as a refugee on Lampedusa. Now he works and lives in Venice.



The depths of the Mediterranean Sea, the island of Lampedusa. Scale 1:50.000

© Renato Rizzi. Photo: Umberto Ferro

While *téchne*, at the opposite of *arché*, believes it can dominate history according to linear progress. Pure faith. When we say the word *archi-tecture* it always remains a severed word. Decapitated of its first root.

Europe. — The spiritual and cultural heritage, which grew on the Greek metaphysics, culminates at the apex of semantic-symbolic dialectical ramifications through *migrations of thoughts*. Different cultures have thus collided and intertwined along the troubled millennia of history. However, this extraordinary critical-interpretive vitality of the European spirit has been rapidly extinguished in recent decades in the single thought of techno-socio-virtual globalization. The formlessness of the formless.

Lampedusa. — An island without a sea is an architecture without an *arché* like a body without a soul. In fact, the island is a metaphor for the human condition: we are *orphans* by fate, *migrants* by necessity, *singulars* by birth. Our analogy with islands would help us understand ourselves more, as geology and morphology far anticipate any psychology.

The core of the tragedy. — Here then are the parameters and timeless axes within which the *project* works. The static nature of the gaze regains again that vitality and vigor that comes from the centuries as it enters the flow of the symbolic canals of images. In our case they come from the core of the tragedy. From the center of that heart, where the pain is strongest and most burning. There, exactly there, lies in abundance the spiritual substance to be shaped. Nothing to invent, everything is already there. Images crowd together or recede in their autonomous movements generating those configurations always existing but waiting for their *kairos*. That indomitable and unpredictable moment when they tear through the visible. That precise happening we can call the *indominable punctuality of the project*. Here we find the sense (the direction), the necessity (the drive), the look (the timbre) of our making.



Lampedusa island. Scale 1:14.400

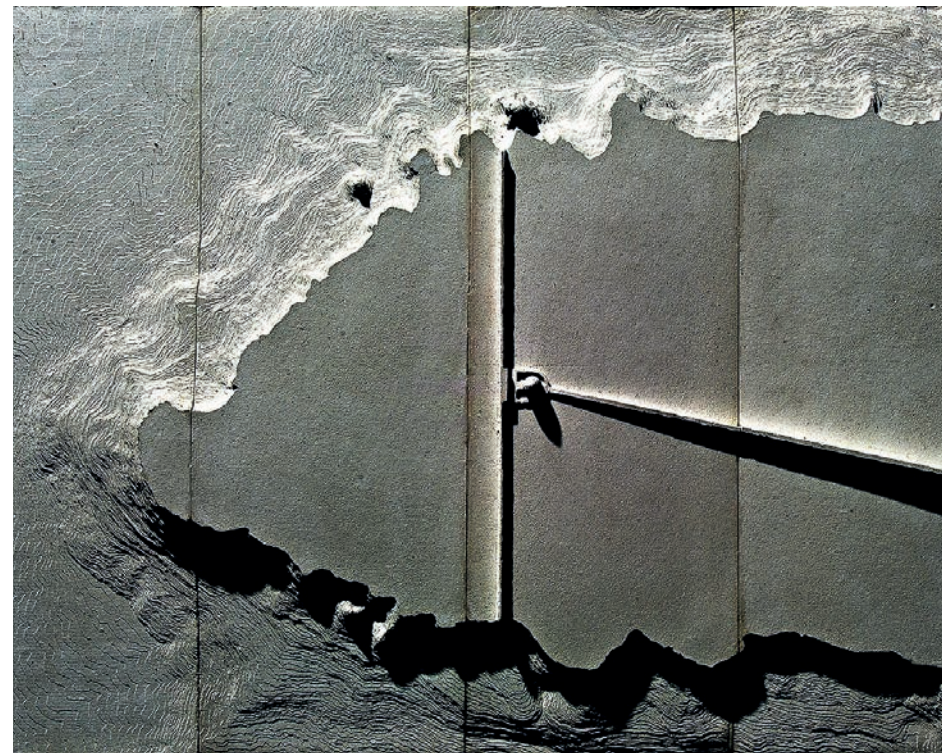
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Denis Diderot. — With the book *Le Fils naturel*, Denis Diderot (sec. XVIII) chose, as the ideal place for the birth of a new civilization, Lampedusa island. The author of the *Encyclopédie* believed that on that virgin plateau could be found the optimal conditions for the birth of a moral and civil revolution of the habits. The island, an intermediate point between the extremes of possibility and necessity, becomes an authentic stage facing the whole world. Only there can a new theatrical genre be born: the drama, intermediate between tragedy, too distant in history, and comedy, too close to its time. Diderot sensed the spiritual power of this remote island in the Mediterranean from the emergence of its lonely, rocky wedge. A promontory between Africa and Europe always struggling with the waters of the sea for its own survival. To keep the gateway of hope open. Not to succumb to resignation.

Porphyry. — Now we must sink our gaze far beyond the centuries. Into the myth. Ithaca, the island in the Aegean Sea of the hero Odysseus, anticipates by millennia the plan for Lampedusa. In Porphyry's (3rd century B.C.) book *The Cavern of Nymphs*, we find a commentary on some verses in Canto XIII of the *Odyssey*, when, after his troubled wanderings, *Odysseus* finally lands on his island and hides his gifts in a cave. For the Neoplatonic philosopher, that cave (like the caves of Lampedusa) becomes a metaphor for the creation of life. In that great dark cavity, illuminated by the golden reflections of the honey-covered walls, the nymphs weave on huge stone looms the lives of men. So that the process of creation can continually regenerate itself, the cavern has two entrances. From the north for the men, from the south for the gods.

The work. — The islands of Ithaca and Lampedusa thus overlap each other. Their profiles and hollows fray until they decant into the germinal image of a new *cathedral* for the regeneration of man.

Homer, Porphyry, Diderot...were already at the heart of the tragedy of 2013, as in the very heart of Lampedusa. Infused in its rock and melted in its waters, the project becomes *contemporary* to all times. Past and future. The pain that had frozen hearts then, now



The eye of the project. Scale 1:2.000 / The input axes of the project. Scale 1:5.000

© Renato Rizzi. Photo: Umberto Ferro



expands and shapes the inner cavity of the cathedral. A 96 m. high space, with 48 m. Diameter. At the top a dome with an eye to the sky. The emptiness of the cathedral acts as a median pivot for the two large galleries orthogonal to each other. One for access from the sea, the other for exit onto land.

The first, a navigable canal, oriented north-south and connects the north and south cliffs. 1,200m long, 14m wide, 54m high. It allows migrant boats safe access at all times. The second tunnel starts from the cathedral with a slightly inclined slope to climb the back of the island. In the exact center of gravity of its perimeter.

All internal forms, invisible from the outside, possess a monumental character. The migrant, after resting inside the cathedral, will come out alone on the island's plateau. He will stand on an altar in the middle of the sea and will be able to contemplate the immensity of the vision that surrounds him. In the same way having first contemplated the meandering veins of rock within the cathedral he will have seen his own image reflected with the images of the cosmos.

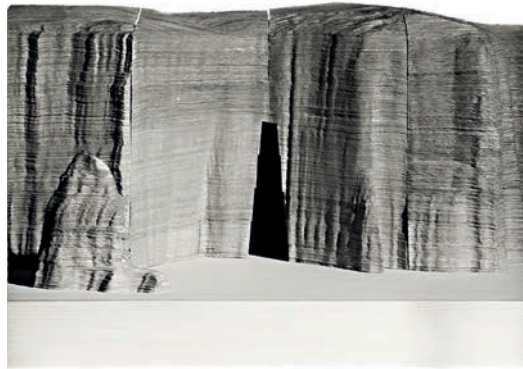
From the anonymity of a migrating crowd to the resurrection of individual *singularity*. A revelation for the soul: of man, of the island, of the world.

The project is hidden in the heart of tragedy.

From far, on the open sea, the outline of Lampedusa blurs into the dark silhouette of a huge cetacean. At dusk, from the cathedral's blowhole, a jet of light can be seen rising in the darkness. It will be hard to say then whether mirage or truth.

Section of the Cathedral. Scale 1:500

© Renato Rizzi. Photo: Umberto Ferro



Elevation of the north cliff. Scale 1:250

© Renato Rizzi. Photo: Umberto Ferro

Giorgia Antonioli and
Susanna Piscella,
Co-authors

- Technical Postscript

Numbers.

Project duration: *three academic years*, 2015-2018

Workplace: Architectural Planning Workshop led by Prof. Renato Rizzi, IUAV University of Venice.

People: *209 students + 27 teaching assistants and professors*

Classroom work hours: *40,000*

Extra-work hours: *2,500*

Working scales: from 1:1,000,000 to 1:250

Materials:

Plaster *1.200 kg*

Cardboard about *1.700 sheets* 100 x 70 cm

Silicone rubber *220 kg*

Matter, mass, and weight are essential vectors to make the ineffable of things visible. The most imperceptible. To give body to what is spiritual. An authentic expenditure: *dépense*. The same required by culture, which sets the direction of the project. The form always requires the merge all the paces of knowledge for the actualization of its inner images. The Work is predisposition to wonder.

Images. — Models are essential tools in the generation of images, the foundation of every project. Not simple graphic outcomes. Each model (image) brings together remote-irreconcilable dimensions of time and space. It ignites in matter the physiognomy of all times of the place, subject of the project. Not abstract, analytical, mathematical theory of knowledge of our time. But *theoria*, concrete, operative vision. Ploughshare of time, history, and geography.

Organization. — Rigorous, organized procedure. Simple, clear, verifiable steps. For an economy of labour. For a harmonious and coordinated growth of all project's participants. And of the project itself. Relentless precision and repetition, the same for all actions. Squaring, marking, shaping, gluing, pressing, and all over again. Methodology or liturgy? The manual translation of Ignazio Di Loyola's 'Spiritual Exercises'. Layer by layer, the geological process is replicated. For an ever clearer vision of the characteristics of the place. The repetition of operations is not alienation but concentration. It doesn't take away time, it gives time to the project.



Zenith view of the north cliff. Scale: 1:250

© Renato Rizzi. Photo: Umberto Ferro

Representation. — Rigorous exercise of site redesign. Construction of new cartographies. Even the cartographic representation requires a specific project to restore to the model the vision that belongs the reality of places. In fact, altimetry does not follow the scalar reduction, but requires an increase of heights. Every representation needs the risk of the result.

Matrix. — The final plaster model is reached through two distinct procedures. 1_construction of the negative cardboard matrix and related direct casting of the final plaster. 2_construction of the positive matrix in cardboard; casting of the two-component rubber for the mould; casting of the final plaster. In this procedure, the matrix is the operational translation of the arché within the name Architecture.

Model. — The maximum rigor and control of each single step corresponds to maximum imponderability of the result. The two-component nature of the plaster affects the final mix in unpredictable ways. The result is still an unknown factor, depending on several environmental factors (water, temperature, hardness, etc.), plaster (state of conservation, quarry, etc.). As the plaster dries, it heats up. In contact with the matrix, it reacts to the new face. An exogenous reaction is triggered: decency, the material plane trespasses into the spiritual one. The material becomes conscious of its own aesthetic condition.



South cliff elevation. Scale 1:250 / Zenith view of the south cliff. Scale: 1:250

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Kärjäkivet is an independent publisher of thought and criticism of art and architecture that was born from an artistic research around the unbuilt Saivaara Monument designed in 1978 by the legendary Finnish artist Tapio Wirkkala for the Saivaara fjeld in Lapland. The publisher has been achieving, not in form but in content, the concept of Kärjäkivet that Tapio Wirkkala wanted for the Saivaara Monument: the creation of a place where men of all races and colors can gather to think. In this sense, there is an online platform - www.karajakivet.com - where several invited authors are able to gather through literary constructions produced by them, sharing their ideas about architecture, art and culture in general, in a sort of modern-day assembly.

Evoking the place that Tapio Wirkkala wanted to create at the top of the Saivaara fjeld, Kärjäkivet meant to be a place of slowness and introspection where to stop, "observe the landscape" that surrounds us and think.



KÄRÄJÄKIVET

Finnish word meaning “court stones” or “circle of stones”: places of judgment (originally iron age graves), where judgments were held and justice carried out, accordingly to the Finnish National Board of Antiquities.

In the ancient times, they were important places where the primitive leaders of the North got together in order to discuss and decide about common matters.

www.karajakivet.com

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