

Renato Capozzi, Claudia Pirina  
**Forms of ritual, forms of architecture**

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Abstract

The aim of this issue is to solicit the exploration of the meaning - by scholars and researchers from Italian or foreign universities engaged in their research in an unstructured condition - of the relationships between the condition of the transition from life to death and the forms of architecture. The call, using as an opportunity recent images and reflections highlighted by the particular condition of the current pandemic, will select a series of contributions that will complement the interventions proposed by some scholars and architects of renown who, in recent years, have dealt with the theme. Participants to the call can propose contributions related to each of the two sections (rites that accompany, rites that pass on) illustrated in the text below.

Keywords

Architecture — Rites that accompany — Rites that pass on — Forms

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Asking about the permanence and change of forms, in *L'eterno presente: le origini dell'architettura* Sigfried Giedion identifies religion as the key to understanding the attitude of a people towards its destiny, but above all to expressing that «unquenchable and universal human desire [...] for a longer life, for survival after death» (Giedion 1969, p. 7). Religion, in its broadest sense, is therefore understood as that «complex of beliefs, feelings, rituals that bind an individual or a human group with what it considers sacred, in particular with the deity» (Eliade 1982), whatever that may be. The historian identifies its genesis in «man's aspiration to make contact with supernatural forces in order to know the future» (Giedion 1969), tracing a relationship between this aspiration and the primordial forms of art and architecture.

During the months of the Covid-19 pandemic, the images of mass graves, of coffins piled up waiting to find a decent burial, or of long lines of military trucks driving them away from their loved ones, prompt a new reflection on the tragic but entirely human condition of the transition from life to death, and on the appropriate forms capable of reifying, in a hierophany that is also secular, the sacredness engendered by abandonment and detachment from earthly transit. The contingent condition has made it impossible for us to carry out our «funeral rites». But what are funeral rites? As Alain (1975, p. 109-110)

warns us «[...] when the stick wounds us, nature, which dies without knowing it, is not enough to call us back to our job as men, and we need other things, human things [...] well planted in the ground, equal on both sides, and proceeding according to a rule. [...] There is, however, a common reason, a child of the earth like us, but which is the most beautiful fruit of the earth and the true God, if we really want one, according



**Fig. 1**

Bas-relief known as the "death of Meleager". Marble, 2nd century AD, possibly from a Roman sarcophagus. Borghese Collection of the Musée du Louvre. [https://commons.wikimedia.org/wiki/File:Death\\_Meleager\\_Louvre\\_Ma654.jpg](https://commons.wikimedia.org/wiki/File:Death_Meleager_Louvre_Ma654.jpg).

to which courage bends together with the body, and whereby each one knows that he must stand up and look far beyond his own pains. Not lying down, nor on one's knees. Life is a work that is done standing up.

"Funeral rites" are therefore rites which, in keeping us human, must project us beyond, while architecture, through its appropriate forms, must take on the task of setting in *place* and *in scēna* the repeated sequences of acts linked to remembrance, detachment, memory, passage, the sacred and the symbol.

Can the role of architecture in essence lie in its capacity to ferry, through memory and the sacralisation of the passage, the transient human condition into a permanent and lasting one? And in the task of overcoming the trauma of death, which is both wonder and terror (*Thaûma*), by staging the ritual?

The initial proposal for this issue was to solicit a critical and propositional reflection on the one hand on the ways, places and architectures dedicated to the rites of passage from life to death, and on the other hand to focus attention on the places of representation of memory, on those architectures which, according to Étienne-Louis Boullée (1967, p. 121), «require, in a more particular way than others, the Poetry of architecture». In the first case, in order to promote possible responses to new secular instances as well as to the specific needs dictated by the contingent moment, questions were posed regarding possible themes of architectural invention or reinvention, or new typologies and models such as "halls of farewell" or *funeral homes*. In the case, on the other hand, of places devoted to the representation of memory, a reflection was launched on the condition of the "cemeteries of the poor", of "monuments" to memory, of the cities of the dead, frequently built looking at the cities of the living, making different but comparable cultures and traditions evident. If in northern Europe cemeteries in the form of parks and gardens refer to the archetype of the *Giardino dell'Eden*, in southern Europe it is the *Città di Dio* that is welcomed in burial places as a reference and model for "streets" and "squares". Elementary and symbolic forms, on a domestic or monumental scale, immortalize memory in the solemnity of places, one example being Aldo Rossi's Modena Cemetery.



**Fig. 2**

The tomb of Caio Cestio in Rome. Photograph by Claudia Pirina.

Even in these spaces, however, recent re-semantisations and experiences aim to respond to new needs and requirements resulting from the multi-ethnicity and multiculturalism of the population.

Spaces for secular burials, or for burials of different religions, require a profound and progressive rethinking of the places and forms of burial.

In addition to the private dimension of mourning, there is also the social (and sometimes political) dimension of “collective memories”, as Halbwachs would put it, staged in shrines, memorials, mausoleums or monuments, which convey the iconic memory (which is remembered with fixity) of specific events such as the one that has involved the world in the months that have just passed and, unfortunately, is still ongoing.

Compared to an initial hypothesis of organization of the issue into two precise sections – rites accompanying the deceased in the passage from life to death, and rites handing down the memory –, the contributions received and selected showed how, on many occasions, the two distinct moments of ritual, in architecture, correspond to organic systems or architectural complexes expressing the coexistence and correspondence of the two times. This degree of complexity prevented the essays from being forced into such a binomial, and led to a consequent operation of reconfiguration according to a more complex order and index, grouping the essays according to similar themes or categories.

In his opening text, Renato Rizzi explores the theme of the “rite of Architecture” or the «*ritual* of the Project». According to the author, the profound sense of the project guides (or should guide) the architect in that «ritual that pervades, in any case and everywhere, the acts of our daily life as well as our innermost thoughts» and that must be understood by focusing attention on three fundamental points: «A- first of all on the semantic structure of the name Architecture; B- on the paradigm of our time; C- on the overcoming of western philosophy».

Following this, Renato Capozzi articulates the essay in an initial reflection that retraces some philosophical and theoretical studies (Ragon e Byung-Chun Han) on the general theme of the *sacer* and on the concepts of death and rite in relation to architecture, and which constitutes the prodrome of the subsequent comparison of two works that exemplify, respectively, the



rite of passage and the rite of memory: the *Tempio di cremazione* in Parma by Paolo Zermani and the *Cimiterio de Fisterra* by the Galician architect César Portela. Recognizing the «extreme evidence» that distinguishes the two projects, the text reveals «thematic and formal differences», but also «subtle links of meaning». Zermani’s skill in rendering «in form the difficulty of transforming [...] the impalpable matter of the sacred into an *architecturally constructed space*» is juxtaposed with the recognition of the settlement qualities of Portela’s project, which revolutionize «in no small measure the consolidated idea of the cemetery as a separate, marginal place» to transform it into «a happy place, teeming with life, where the memory of the dead can be celebrated in the presence of nature». It is in the capacity to «sacralise death and, at the same time, life» that the intention and goal underlying these two works lie.

Studio Monestiroli’s projects for the enlargement of the Cimitero Maggiore in Voghera and the one on the island of San Michele in Venice form the core of Tomaso Monestiroli’s reflections in his essay. In the project of these architectures the author recognizes the founding role of some preliminary questions: what is «the deep sense of the funeral rite»? And what are «the appropriate architectural elements to represent it»? By reading the elements of the two projects, their composition, or the declination of the relationship between nature and architecture, Monestiroli intends to propose answers to these questions, highlighting peculiarities or differences. On the one hand, in fact, the relationship with the place plays a primary role in defining the “responsive form”, taking up the legacy of Nordic cemeteries «in which the place of peace and eternal rest is represented by the forest, where nature is the protagonist of the sense of place». On the other hand, the architectural elements, and once again the place, in the two projects contribute to defining that dual character – private and public – which, according to the author, must coexist in the «place of farewell and the custody of memory».

A similar interest in the cemetery space is expressed in Paolo Giordano’s reflections on the history of the *Cimitero delle 366 fosse* and the *Sepolcreto dei Colerici* in Naples, with an eye to the present and future of these extraordinary spaces that define a part of the city. The close relationship between the architectural configuration, the morphology of the site on which they are located, and the natural element characterizes these burial spaces which, in their different features, «well express the different 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». Against the architecture of Enlightenment reason of Ferdinando Fuga’s *Cimitero delle 366 Fosse* «based on a rigorous anonymity incapable of recalling stories of lived life» Giordano contrasts the romantic park of Leonardo Laghezza’s *Sepolcreto dei Colerici* «of irregular shape and dotted with tall trees, in whose enclosure various types of tomb are scattered». Proposals for the restoration and spatial reconfiguration of the entire system aim at a new order which, starting from the study of the ancient layouts and the subsequent selection of the one identified as most effective, would make their different characters manifest.

Uwe Schröder broadens the concept of sacred space by proposing an interpretation of «Simon Ungers’ *Seven Sacred Spaces* from a sensual and symbolic perspective» taken from Étienne-Louis Boullée’s work. To the categories identified and transposed in the terms Poetry, Object, Measure, Proportion, Light, Character, Sublime, Schröder directly associates the seven types of sacred spaces examined by Ungers: the Basilica, the Cathedral, the Synagogue, the Mosque, the Church and the Chapel. These binomials substantiate Schröder’s

conviction, echoed by Boullée, that «buildings are designed to capture our senses and [...] awaken feelings in us», and that borrowed from Ungers that «to think sacred space is to think architecture in its purest form».

The mystery of permanence is the theme investigated by Claudia Pirina in the forms of the sacred and in those architectural devices capable of relating man to the divine. This aspiration can be found in a series of primordial archetypal forms of architecture which demonstrate that «in the infancy of time, art was prayer» (Parmiggiani 2010, p. 4). However, these forms are perpetuated over time, in a circularity that becomes essence, stimulating reminiscence. «Memory [in fact] does not mean past but thought. Bringing together distant forms, in time and in the mind, bringing together one time with another time, creating short circuits; another idea of time» (Parmiggiani 1995, p. 170). Two works can be used as examples for their ability to express another idea of modernity, between archaic forms and new figuration: Jože Plečnik's Garden of the Dead in the Žale cemetery in Ljubljana and Edvard Ravnikar's Kampor Memorial on the island of Rab.

The idea of time permeates the contribution by José Ignacio Linazasoro, who entrusts the description of the Valdemaqueda church project with the task of exemplifying «the character that a sacred space should have when seen through contemporary eyes». The Basque architect recounts the genesis of the work, borrowed from his own world of ancient and contemporary references, juxtaposed with retroactive considerations aroused by the finished work (useful for understanding its underlying reasons), and the description and declination of those architectural devices that allow him to give «the maximum intensity to the space with the least number of means possible». The modulation of light and the conformation of space through careful control of its structure, according to Linazasoro, are those elements capable of transforming sacred space into symbolic space.

The first part of the issue closes with two contributions which, complementing each other, narrate the project for the double hypogeum of *Cattedrale di Caserta* by Francesco Venezia through the different perspectives of the architect and the photographer. The laconic and intense writing used by the Neapolitan architect to accompany the project is flanked by the work of photographer Mario Ferrara who, through a very short text and a series of photographs, demonstrates how fertile the relationship between the two disciplines can be. Ghirri, Basilico, Guidi are just some of the photographers who have had the ability to weave relationships with architects, building an artistic rapport with them and contributing to offering new looks at their work. The hypogeum of Caserta icastically expresses many themes dear to Venice, which, in Caserta, models space and modulates light, accompanying the visitor along a route that becomes a transit to the world beyond. The spatial sequence is articulated according to a downward trend which, through light, then leads to an ascent towards the outside. «The architecture, as you walk through it, reveals itself as a rhythm of shadow, light and penumbra», interpreting «syracusan» sections «a distant memory of a descent into the depths of the latomie of that city».

Forms of the hypogeum and architecture of hollow spaces return in the opening text of the second section devoted to articles selected through *call for papers*, in which Giuseppe Ferrarella uses the concept of space as a place «carved out of the solid» to propose a view that investigates analogies and differences between Agrippa's Pantheon (Apollodoro), the basilica of Sant'Andrea in Mantua and the sacred mountain of Tindaya in Fuerteventura. According to the author, the three projects can be understood

as spaces «produced by massive forms and the logic of subtraction of volumes» useful for triggering a reflection on the sense of space in places dedicated to the sacred and to ritual.

Adriano Dessi's text also deals with the act of quarrying, investigating the essential identity between ritual and space in the Sacred Well. The propitiatory rain rites present in the Mediterranean give rise to such chthonic architectures, understood as spaces «of catharsis, linked to the rite of descent, of the return to the 'source' as a return to the 'origins'». The text reflects on the analogies between this world and the themes and projects of Francesco Venezia and Aldo Rossi, who by their own admission draw direct inspiration from that world. Aldo Rossi, with his extension of the San Cataldo cemetery in Modena, designed with Gianni Braghieri, is also the field of exploration of Claudia Tinazzi's essay, which opens a series of essays centred on a number of cemetery projects in which archetypes, the relationship with ritual, with nature and with the city and its distinctive forms are differently declined. If in the Chacarita cemetery by Clorindo Testa, examined by Federica Conte, «the endless path, where plays of light and labyrinthine corridors animate the 'eternal' space underground» refers to previously mentioned themes, in the project for the new cemetery in Pesaro, analysed by BoKyung Lee, Luciano Semerani and Gigetta Tamaro conceive and develop a symbolic space in which the forms of the project resort to «the analogy between the forms of the 'city of the living' and the forms of the 'city of the dead'». «The city of the dead always relates to the city of the living through morphological analogies and contrasts, in line with Islamic cosmology» also in the ancient cemeteries of the Islamic Mediterranean world in Eliana Martinelli's text. Enclosures, the relationship with the topography and urban structure are compared with those of European cemeteries in order to bring out singular analogies and differences.

The theme of the route is instead declined in the Nou cemeteries of Igualada by Enric Miralles and Carme Pinós analysed by Carlo Palazzolo and in that of Muda Maé in Longarone studied by Andrea Valvason.

In the Catalan cemetery «the themes of the descent into hell, the decomposition of bodies, the resurrection [...] are evoked [...] by an architecture suspended between construction and ruin [in which] personal and collective memories are stratified to give life to a landscape which is not only geographical but also cultural». This dual relationship also constitutes a founding element of the Muda Maé project, which «takes the form of an ancient necropolis rediscovered, a symbol of memory and rebirth following the dramatic events caused by the Vajont disaster in October 1963». Excavations and trenches that strongly mark this place are a counterpoint to the shape of the furrow engraved by the cemetery on the ground that recalls memories and wounds that have not yet healed.

The core of Alessandra Carlini's essay, on the other hand, is the theme of the re-semanticisation of the modern cemetery in order to give architectural form to the new practices of burial and dispersal of ashes. The projects analysed, although at first glance they may seem distant or even extraneous to the cases previously dealt with, redefine the space of the enclosure and the relationship with the landscape and nature, demonstrating that «as has already happened in history, rethinking burial places means renewing the cultural values of the community that creates them», proposing «new archetypal forms» for ancient and unchanged instances.

A series of articles deal with remembrance in monuments or mausoleums. Claudia Sansò sharply turns her attention once again to the Islamic

world and to the settlement principles of the Islamic tomb in relation to the public space of the city transposed in Marc Barani's Memorial Rafic Hariri in which «the tomb/mausoleum thus participates in the construction of collective space, [...] to the point of becoming an occasion for the re-definition of a public space, offering the places of death to the unfolding of life»; the essays by Giuseppe Tupputi and Gaspare Oliva respectively propose an interpretation of the Ossuary of the Slavic Fallen of Barletta which «appears in the distance, leaning on the edge of a slight slope facing the Adriatic» and of the three Italian monuments post-Fascist regime by Aldo Rossi, Gianugo Polesello and Luca Meda for Cuneo, by Giorgio Grassi and Luca Meda for Brescia, and by Costantino Dardi with Giovanni Morabito, Michele Reborà and Ariella Zattera for Milan. The collective dimension of mourning expressed in these works contrasts with the private dimension of the Brion Tomb designed by Scarpa and analysed by Fabio Garrera who «on the basis of the theoretical arguments developed by Vittorio Ugo with reference to the problem of architectural archetypes» proposes an «archaeo-logical» reading of the sepulchral complex, «with the aim of carrying out a 'classification' of the forms within the monument». Moving on to a different type of sacred space, Alberto Calderoni and Luigi Emanuele Amabile propose an interpretation of Neviges Cathedral by the German architect Gottfried Böhm, which «brings together and amplifies the representative need to celebrate the rite in a strongly evocative formal expression that characterizes the urban space, capable of weaving renewed relationships between the internal space of the church and its exterior». The sacred space of the Chapel type is the focus of Francesca Addario's article, which deals with the «sacredness of nature and interiority of forms» through the analysis of some chapel projects in the woods. The ancestral archetype of the sacred wood «deeply rooted [...] in the imagination of man and the architect» is recognized by the author as a «topical space in which architecture reveals its presence» and in which the ideas of Vitruvius, Alberti, Loos, Asplund and Tessenow find form. Lastly, the issue closes with four articles that interpret the proposed theme from different and original perspectives. From Carlotta Torricelli's reflections on the city, memory and monument that investigate the form of absence in Luigi Snozzi's project for Braunschweig, attention shifts to Roberta Esposito's contribution that «analyses the form of the *mundus* as a foundation pit of the Roman city and, at the same time, an architectural dimension capable of establishing a connection between the infernal world of the dead and the supernal world of the living». Gennaro di Costanzo, on the other hand, intends to reflect on the archetype of the labyrinth and the cave «around which the discourse on the Palace of Knossos is articulated, a work built to accommodate the rites of passage between life and death» and finally Susanna Piscicella's text critically retraces some reflections introduced by Renato Rizzi in the opening text, which investigate the concepts of 'limit' and 'death' in various works and texts by John Hejduk. Finally, to return to the themes proposed for the construction of the issue, we believe and we reiterate that it is precisely the forms of representation and evocation of the absent and unattainable object that are at the center of the architect's interest through the inescapable and inexhaustible educational and of *monère* capacity of architecture as a *nova sed antiqua* appropriate and recognizable representation of the memory of man's life in the motionless fixity of stones.

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