

Chapter 6: Aldo Rossi's visual strategies and the prioritization of the observer

Urban facts as objects of affection

This chapter examines the following two aspects of the impact that Aldo Rossi's encounter with the American context on his design process: firstly, the tension between architecture as art-object manifestation and architecture as reflection of reality in his work, which becomes particularly apparent during the period of his stays in the United States of America; secondly, the impact that the American "urban facts" had on his understanding of architectural objects as objects of affection. At the core of influence of his stays in the United States on Rossi's thought is the ambiguity between the individual and the collective dimension of architecture. Comparing Rossi's approach with Oswald Mathias Ungers and John Hejduk's viewpoints and *modus operandi* would be helpful for better grasping the tension between the individual and collective dimension in his thought, on the one hand, and to question to what extent the relationship between the individual and collective memory is dialectic, on the other had. Hejduk was particularly interested in individual memory. Rossi shared with Hejduk his interest in individual memory and poetic imagination and with Ungers his concern about collective memory and *genius loci*. For Rossi, "[t]he city [is] a concomitance of different architectures whose meanings lie in the context"¹. According to Ungers's understanding of the city as Archipel, "the city is a history of formation and transformation, from one type into another, a morphological continuum"². Given that their approaches are characterized by many affinities, it would be thought-provoking to reflect upon how their collaboration at the Cornell University affected their approaches.

Two parameters of architecture's epistemological reorientation are linked to the period of the first visiting professorships of Aldo Rossi in the United States: firstly, the transformation of the status of architectural drawings;

secondly, the redefining of architecture's role in the city. Among the episodes scrutinized are Rossi's collaboration with Ungers at Cornell University, his teaching at Cooper Union, Yale University and Princeton University, his lectures at Pratt Institute and Harvard University and his involvement in the Institute for Architecture and Urban Studies. The main objective is to explain how Rossi's double preoccupation with individual expression and architecture's civic effectiveness evolved during his teaching in the United States. Rossi was invited to join as Visiting Professor Cooper Union's School of Architecture and the Department of Architecture of Cornell University by Hejduk and Ungers respectively. During his stays in the United States, he participated in various collective exhibitions along with Hejduk and Ungers and gave several lectures in various institutions.

A statement of Rossi that is at the center of his encounter with the American urban artefacts is the following: "A knowledge of the city [...] enables us not only to understand architecture better, but also, above all as architects to design it"³. Given that, for Rossi, the understanding of a city played an important role in establishing his design process, it would be interesting to reflect upon the impact that his encounter with the different urban artefacts in the United States of America, in general, and Manhattan, more specifically, on his compositional strategies. According to Rossi, "no urban construct in the world equals that of a city like New York"⁴. Rossi also underscored that "New York is a city of monuments such as I did not believe could exist"⁵ and that his experience of America confirmed the theory he had developed in his famous book *The Architecture of the City*, which was originally published as in 1966⁶. He also said to Agrest during an interview he gave to her for *Skyline* in 1979:

in no other city are monuments more present than in New York. They witness the city's history and underline its personality [...] the city grows, changes, and renews itself around them.⁷

The idea that a city's knowledge enables new design methods "has never appeared so clearly to" Rossi as when he "saw the city of New York, and above all Manhattan."⁸ The concept of geography of experience is useful for understanding how Rossi conceptualized the impact of his encounter with the American urban and architectural artefacts on his design methods. Characteristically, he remarks, in his *Scientific Autobiography*, regarding this concept: "If I were to speak now of my American work or 'formation,' I would be digressing too far from the scientific autobiography of my projects and would be entering into a personal memoir or a geography of my experience"⁹. He also notes: "I will say

only that in this country, analogies, allusions, or call them observations, have produced in me a great creative desire and also, once again, a strong interest in architecture"¹⁰. Rossi, referring to the way in which his ideas were reconceived when his geographical context shifted, stated: "These experiences [...] had a peculiar effect on me: while on the one hand they increasingly distracted me from my concentration on architecture, on the other they seem to have crystallized objects, forms, ideas about design"¹¹. He placed particular emphasis on the phenomenon of crystallization of design ideas about design thanks to his relocation in the United States of America.

Rossi drew a distinction between the impact that American culture had on him through cinema and literature and America's impact on him through his real encounter with the American cities. He wrote, in the introduction to the American edition of *The Architecture of the City*: "Even though I was influenced by American culture as a young man, especially its literature and film, the influence was more fantastic than scientific."¹² According to him, his real encounter with the American "urban facts" helped him transform his "fantastic" experience into a "scientific" one, and the American architectural and urban artefacts into "objects of affection"¹³. This process of looking at architectural and urban artefacts as "objects of affection" is essential for understanding the importance of Rossi's experience in the United States for the evolution of his design processes. Rossi, in "The Meaning of Analogy in my Last Projects", published in *Solitary Travelers*, during his first appointment as Mellon Professor at Cooper Union affirmed: "My last projects represent the way I have found of looking at objects. I look at things as I always have, but I have reached a firmness that frees me from every technique of representation"¹⁴. Therefore, in Rossi's case, we are confronted with a manner of looking at objects that tends to overcome the obstacles of conventional modes of representation. This freeing from representation's conventional techniques is related to an act of liberation from memory and a sensation of "uneasiness of "déjà vu""¹⁵. Rossi shed light on the fact that his conception of architecture differs from a "sense of "toward" a form of architecture, or a new architecture"¹⁶. On the contrary, what was essential for him were "the usual objects, fixed and rigid with the accumulation of meanings"¹⁷.

Rossi, during his teaching in the United States, took into account the specificity of American urban artefacts. He chose topics related to the American urban reality and intended to put forward the articulation between architecture and reality. He mentions: "when in past years at the Cooper Union and last year in the Institute I have been working with American students, I have preferred to choose themes linked to the American town, to your tradition and your expe-

rience”¹⁸. For his studio at Cooper Union, he chose as topic the “American Academical Village”, asking students to work on a new version of the Academical Village on the site of their choice. In the introduction of the American edition of *L'architettura della città*, one can read: “After I had completed work on the Casa dello Studente in Chieti, an American student gave me a publication on Thomas Jefferson's Academical Village at the University of Virginia. I found a number of striking analogies to my own work”¹⁹. Hejduk wrote to Rossi regarding this choice of topic for his studio: “Your idea about doing an “American Village” sounds perfect; I think it would be an excellent problem”²⁰. Rossi writes, in his *Scientific Autobiography*: “In 1978, when I was teaching at The Cooper Union, I gave my students the theme of the “American academical village.” This theme interested me because it has many references in the culture, which are truly foreign to Europeans: for example, the very concept of the “campus””²¹.

The results of this assignment “seemed extraordinary [to him] because they rediscovered older themes and went back beyond the unique order of Thomas Jefferson's “academical village” to the architecture of forts, to the New World where the old was silence above all.”²² In the preparation notes of this studio at Cooper Union, Rossi wrote that he chose this subject because it is, at least for a European, typically American. He also explained that the idea of this topic for his design studio came to him when a student, after a presentation of Students' Residence Building for Chieti in Cambridge, Massachusetts, gave him the publication of University of Virginia of Thomas Jefferson's project: the academical village of 1819. He did not know this project and was impressed by the similarities between Jefferson's project and his project. He was particularly interested in the relationship between the small buildings and the two central ones and the historical relationship with the imported English models from Cambridge to the United States.

According to Rossi, the significance of this topic lied, according to him, on the fact that it could make visible and comprehensible how these imported English models “have changed and become an original part of American history [...] like the transformation of Spanish and Portuguese models in South America”. He believed that the consideration of these transformations could help students understand “that in sciences as in culture nothing is ever invented, but progress, as in architecture, takes place by means of development and the study of reality”²³.

Aldo Rossi, for a design workshop in architecture and urban form that he taught at the Institute for Architecture and Urban Studies in 1980, he chose as theme “Columbus Circle Hotel”, which also shows his insistence on choos-

ing topics related to the American reality. His interest in the mechanisms of metamorphosis of models coming from different geographic contexts when imported in the context of New York City becomes also apparent from what he said to Agrest in 1979:

Venice, during its economic and commercial expansion, brought home elements of architecture from distant cities and used them to give birth to a new composition. In this respect New York City is similar to Venice: its neighbourhoods such as Chinatown, Little Italy, the Ukrainian quarter, are attempts at reproducing a certain environment. Put all together they form a city which is different from, but at the same time analogous to the previous one.”²⁴

6.1 Aldo Rossi's transatlantic exchanges and the proliferation of exhibitions on architectural drawings

The publication of Rafael Moneo's “Aldo Rossi: The Idea of Architecture and the Modena Cemetery” next to Rossi's “The Blue of the Sky”, introduced to the “English-speaking readers, for the first time, the work of Aldo Rossi”²⁵. This may seem contradictory if we think that, in his first days, *Oppositions*, as Paul Goldberger informs us, “better read in Europe than America”²⁶. The introduction of Rossi's work in the American milieu was characterized by a misinterpretation of his oeuvre, which reduced his draughtsmanship to an aesthetic fetishizing. This becomes evident when we read: “[w]hat remains in question, ten years after Rossi's book, is whether 'architecture autonomy' is merely another architect's smokescreen, as Functionalism was, for 'aesthetic free-play'”²⁷. This reductive reading of Rossi's work could be explained by the fact that his first stays in the United States coincided with significant changes in the status of architectural drawings, which, during the late 1970s and the 1980s, acquired a protagonist role in the American architectural debates. This transformation was expressed through the abundance of exhibitions focused on architectural drawings, such as a series of exhibitions at Max Protetch, Leo Castelli and Rosa Esman galleries.

This proliferation of exhibitions on architectural drawings in the United States was paralleled by an intensification of the interest in architectural drawings in Italy, expressed through several shows at the Galleria Antonia Jannone in Milano and exhibitions as “Europa-America. Architettura urbana, alternati-

ve suburbane" and "10 Immagini per Venezia: Mostra dei Progetti per Cannaregio Ovest", held in Venice in 1976 and 1980 respectively, and "Roma Interrotta", held in Rome in 1978²⁸. The epistemological and semantic significance of the mutation of architectural drawings' status is related to the recognition of architects' individual expression and of the autobiographical character of their creative processes.

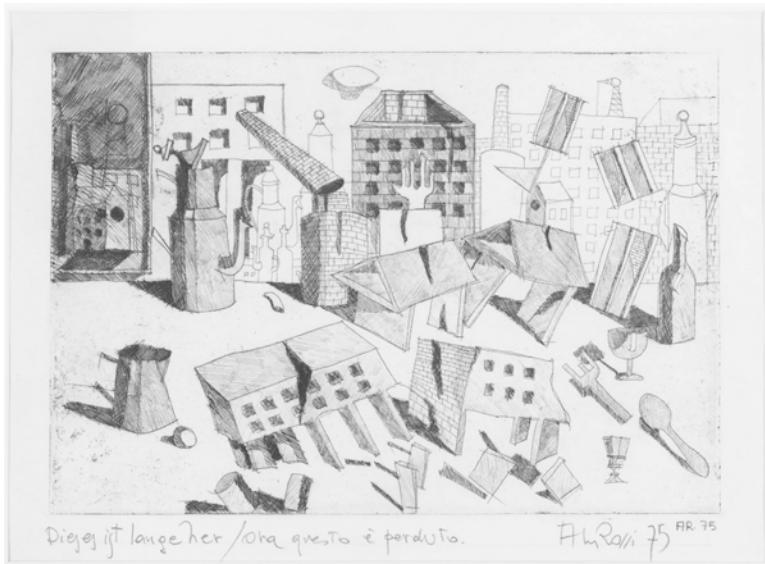
The raise of architectural drawings to art-objects is linked to the acceptance of the "archaic" or "archetypal" dimension of architectural design process, which cannot be expressed through words. The elaboration of the expression "silent witnesses" by Hejduk and the adoption of Carl Jung's definition of analogical thought by Rossi as "sensed yet unreal, [...] archaic, unexpressed, and practically inexpressible in words"²⁹ are symptomatic of the recognition of a non-accessible through words dimension of architectural design process. Ungers also drew on Jung's approach in order to explain how archetypes and primeval images are inherited and "contained in the 'collective unconscious'"³⁰.

In conjunction with Rossi's arrival as Andrew Mellon Visiting Adjunct Professor at Cooper Union an exhibition was held at Arthur A. Houghton Gallery in March 1977. This show displayed projects by Raimund Abraham, Peter Eisenman, John Hejduk and Aldo Rossi previously shown in the American section "Alternatives: Eleven American Projects" of the exhibition "Europa-America. Architettura urbana, alternative suburbane", held in the framework of the Biennale di Venezia of 1976. The fact that much attention was paid to Rossi's drawing "Dieses Ist lange Her" ("Ora questo è perduto"), which was among the exhibits, pushes us to think that the interpretation of Rossi's work in the United States was based on an understanding of his work as an "architecture of melancholy"³¹ and not as "an architecture of optimism"³². Rossi claimed that in his "etchings "L'architettura assassinata" and "Dieses is lange her. Ora questo e perduto", there is a romanticising [...] process, although [...] it is a sanctioned act"³³ (Figure 6.1).

A significant exhibition for the transformation of architectural drawings' status, held in New York during the period of the first stays of Aldo Rossi in the United States, was the exhibition "Architecture I: Architectural Drawings" at Leo Castelli gallery (22 October 22–12 November 1977) and the Institute of Contemporary Art of the University of Pennsylvania in Philadelphia (15 December–February 2 1978), which brought together drawings of Raimund Abraham, Emilio Ambasz, Richard Meier, Walter Pichler, Aldo Rossi, James Stirling and Robert Venturi and John Rauch³⁴. Among Rossi's works displayed in this exhibition were a drawing and a model for the Cemetery of San Cataldo in Modena.

Ada Louise Huxtable's "Architectural Drawing as Art Gallery Art" and Paul Goldberger's "Architectural Drawings Raised to an Art" are useful for understanding the role that the display of Rossi's drawings played for the transformation of architectural drawings' status. Both articles show that Rossi's first encounter with the American scene was linked with the construction of his persona as the architect that contributed to the raise of architectural drawing to art. Huxtable shed light on the "dramatic changes in [...] theory and practice" and "the state of architecture vis-a-vis the other arts" that the "interest in architecture on the popular high art circuit" had provoked. She described Rossi's drawing for the Cemetery of San Cataldo as "one of the more remarkable drawings" and as a "Boullée-like vision [...] [and] a "post-modernist" icon"³⁵.

Figure 6.1. Aldo Rossi, "Dieses Ist lange Her" ("Ora questo è perduto"), 1975, etching.



Credits: collection Bonnefantenmuseum © Eredi Aldo Rossi

Skyline's issue of September 1979 featured Rossi's drawings for the Modena Cemetery (Figure 6.2) and announced a major two-part exhibit: "Aldo Rossi in America: Città Analoga Drawings" at the Institute for Architecture and Ur-

ban Studies and “Aldo Rossi: Architectural Projects” at Max Protetch Gallery. In the same issue of *Skyline* two other architecture exhibitions at Max Protetch Gallery were advertised: John Hejdruk’s from 23 January to 16 February 1980 and Massimo Scolari’s in May 1980. In the same issue of *Skyline*, a thought-provoking axonometric drawing with a view from above of Frank Gehry for Los Angeles law office was also published, accompanying an article of Joseph Giovanini on Los Angeles³⁶. Peter Eisenman writes, in his preface to the catalogue of the exhibition “Aldo Rossi in America”:

To explore the foundations of Rossi’s imagery the Institute has prepared this exhibition and catalogue. This effort, which will soon be complemented by the first English translation of his seminal *The Architecture of the City*, to be published in the Institute’s series of *Oppositions Books*, will begin to situate his work in the context of his emerging ideas of the city. But it will not entirely explain his drawings, which as he himself states in the essay reprinted here, are inspired by an idea of analogy which can never be fully possessed by the conscious and rational mind³⁷.

The special attention that Eisenman paid to the *Città analoga* should be interpreted in relation to the fact that the introduction of Rossi’s theory in the American context is linked to the concept of analogy. Eisenman wrote to Rossi that “[i]n order to make the catalogue unique and valuable [...] [he wished] to concentrate on [...] the *Città Analoga*”³⁸ and that they would try to include in the exhibition as many as possible “original drawings from the Rome exhibition”, from Rossi’s archive and “from collections [...] in New York”³⁹. His insistence on the significance of original drawings reinforces that hypothesis that Rossi’s encounter with the American milieus is related to the upgrading of architectural drawings’ artefactual value. A model of Rossi’s first American solo exhibitions was the exhibition “Aldo Rossi: “Alcuni miei progetti” held from 31 May to 30 June 1979 at Antonia Jannone gallery in Milan, which was the first gallery in Italy to display architects’ designs. This becomes evident from what Franklyn Gerard wrote to Rossi: “I think that the exhibition of your work at Antonia’s Gallery is a good example of how the show at Max’s Gallery should be”⁴⁰.

Max Protetch wrote to Huxtable on 9 August 1979: “As you know Aldo Rossi will be having a one-man show of drawings and models at my gallery in the Fall. I know from your review of the ‘Roma Interrotta’ exhibition at the Cooper-Hewitt that you are interested in his work. I’ve therefore taken the liberty of enclosing a translation by Aldo, of one of his texts”⁴¹. The exhibition “Roma interrotta”, which was held in Rome in 1978 in the framework of the Incontri

Internazionali dell'Arte and at the Cooper-Hewitt National Museum of Design in New York from 12 June to 12 August 1979. It brought together works by Piero Sartogo, Costantino Dardi, Antoine Grumbach, James Stirling, Paolo Portoghesi, Romaldo Giurgola, Robert Venturi, Colin Rowe, Michael Graves, Leon Krier, Aldo Rossi and Robert Krier.

Figure 6.2. The cover of the issue of September 1979 of the journal Skyline that featured a drawing of Aldo Rossi for the Cemetery of San Cataldo in Modena.



Credits: Aldo Rossi Papers, Getty Research Institute, Los Angeles, CA. My own photo

Huxtable, in “The Austere World of Rossi”, which was published in *New York Times* when Rossi’s exhibition at Max Protetch gallery was still on display, wrote that “[m]uch has been made of Mr. Rossi’s [...] connection with Marxist politics” and that “[f]or Marxists, architecture has lost all public meaning”. The aforementioned words of Huxtable invite us to wonder whether she situated all the Italian Marxists architects under the same umbrella, neglecting the differences between Manfredo Tafuri’s approach and Rossi’s stance. She reduced the complexity and heteronomy that characterized different Italian Marxist stances during that period and also disregarded that public meaning was a very essential aspect of Rossi’s preoccupations. She characterized Rossi’s stance as destructive and nihilist and ignored his interest in architecture’s social role. Huxtable concluded her aforementioned article with the following phrases: “To those practicing architects who still believe that building is a positive, creative and problem-solving necessity, this makes Mr. Rossi not an architect at all”⁴². The proof that Huxtable misinterpreted Rossi’s approach is found in what Rossi writes in “Architecture for Museums”: “I mean ‘architecture’ in a positive sense, as a creation inseparable from life and society”⁴³.

A series of collective exhibitions reflects the galloping fascination with architectural drawings’ artifactual value and the prioritization of observers of architectural drawings over the inhabitants of spatial formations. In their majority, these exhibitions constituted instances of cross-fertilization between European and American participants. Such cases were exhibitions as: “10 Immagini Per Venezia: Mostra Dei Progetti Per Cannaregio Ovest”, held in April 1980, including projects of Raimund Abraham, Carlo Aymonino, Peter Eisenman, John Hejduk, Bernhard Hoesli, Rafael Moneo, Veleriano Pastor, Gianugo Polesello, Aldo Rossi and Luciani Semerani; “Art by Architects”, held at Rosa Esman Gallery in New York from 3 December 1980 to 9 January 1981, with drawings of Michael Graves, Eileen Gray, Arata Isozaki, Louis Kahn, Andrew MacNair, Richard Meier, Michael Mostoller, Aldo Rossi, Cesar Pelli, Oswald Mathias Ungers, Stanley Tigerman, Susanna Torre, Lauretta Vinciarilli, Stanley Tigerman and Elia and Zoe Zenghelis; “Autonomous Architecture: The Work of Eight Contemporary Architects” at Harvard University’s Fogg Art Museum, held from 2 December 1980 to 18 January 1981, with drawings of Aldo Rossi, Diana Agrest and Mario Gandelsonas, Mario Botta, Peter Eisenman, Rodilfo Machado, Jorge Silvetti and Oswald Mathias Ungers. Rossi’s “Urban Composition with Red Tower” was shown in “Autonomous Architecture”, while some his drawings for the Berlin Südliche Friedrichstadt were part of the

exhibition "Drawings by Architects" at Artworks gallery at the Yale Center for British Art building in spring 1982.

Francesco Dal Co was the curator of the exhibition "10 Immagini Per Venezia: Mostra Dei Progetti Per Cannaregio Ovest". Three years after this exhibition, he addressed a letter to the Secretary of the Jury of the Pritzker Architecture Prize, on 30 November 1982, where he wrote: "In my opinion it would be appropriate if the Jury of the Prize take in some consideration, for the next years, the work of the very well-known Italian architect Aldo Rossi. I am at your disposal to give you any further information about Mr. Rossi's work"⁴⁴.

Aldo Rossi writes in *The Architecture of the City*: "After arriving at its own specificity through its relationship with different realities, a form becomes a way of confronting reality"⁴⁵. One aspect that is useful in order to better grasp how Rossi perceived this evolution of form is its comparison with Le Corbusier's understanding of architecture as playing of forms. Rossi privileged form over function, but did not wish to reduce architecture to a playing of forms. This becomes evident when he underlines that he had "never regarded architecture as a playing with forms"⁴⁶. He insisted on the relationship of forms to reality and conceived forms "as being inseparable from reality"⁴⁷. At the same time, he criticized the conception of forms as "deprived of engagement"⁴⁸. An issue of his approach that could help us comprehend how he associates reality with the city is his following declaration: "For the architect this reality is reflected in the city."⁴⁹ From this phrase, it becomes evident that, for him, the city played the role of connecting architecture to reality. He believed that the impact of reality on architecture and the impact of reality of architecture are unavoidable.

In 1980, during a conference he gave at Pratt Institute in Brooklyn in New York, Rossi remarked: "I have stated that form is more important than function, not from a formalist position, but really from a historical point of view, that of the evolution of form in reality"⁵⁰. For Rossi, the capacity of architecture to reflect reality is not related to function. This becomes evident when he argues that "[e]ven buildings which both historically and functionally seem to stand apart cannot but be affected by the reality in which they continue to exist, and this is irrespective of their function"⁵¹.

6.2 Aldo Rossi's representations as transforming architectural and urban artefacts into objects of affection

Michael Sorkin, in "Drawings for Sale", draws a distinction between two levels of the impact of architectural drawings on their spectator, that is to say "the drawing as artifact and the drawing as the representation of certain ideas about some architecture". Sorkin also argues that the power of the impact of a drawing on its spectator depends on the interaction of these two different levels. He also underscores that "[a]rchitectural drawing almost inevitably contains a rhetorical element, the essay to produce conviction about the building's rightness"⁵².

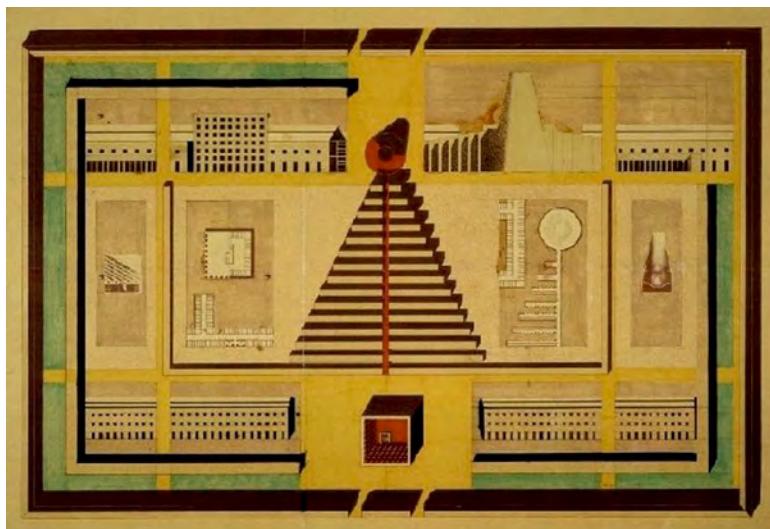
The architects through the design process address to the "observers", who are called to interpret their architectural representations, and, to the "users", who are destined to inhabit the spaces they conceive. In the case of Eisenman, Hejduk, Rossi and Ungers' approaches, the "observers" became more central and the "users". The critique of functionalism, the intensification of the interest in the reinvention of the modes of representation and the raise of architectural drawings to art-objects lead to a prioritization of the "observers" of architectural drawings over the inhabitants of architectural artefacts. However, the aforementioned architects, in their writings, insisted on the importance of human spatial experience.

Despite Rossi's insistence on "human living", "living history" and the experience of architectural artefacts as "objects of affection"—preoccupations that became even more important for him during his stays in the United States—the introduction of his theory and the exposure of his drawings to the American scene coincided with a prioritization of the observers' role over the inhabitants' role. In parallel, his interest in collective memory, despite his intention to take into account architecture's civic effectiveness, contributed to the transformation of inhabitants' experience into an abstract category. This seems paradoxical if we recall Rossi's interest, in "The Analogous City", in the dialectics of the concrete and the "capacity of the imagination born from the concrete"⁵³. In a similar manner, the conception of the city as a "living collage" and the rejection of any unitary vision of urban reality, as expressed in "Cities within the city"⁵⁴, privileged observers over inhabitants.

The starting point of Rossi's pedagogy in the United States was the intention to capture the reality and the "living history" of American cities and culture. This intention was trapped between two opposing forces: a trend of raising of architectural drawings' artifactual value that was paralleled by an

appraisal of the individual poetic of architects' task, on the one hand, and a trend of establishing methods capable of rendering what is collective in the city architecture's primordial instrument and apparatus, on the other hand. The dialectic between the two aforementioned opposing forces could be grasped through the act "of seeing autobiography [...] as the nexus of collective history and creation"⁵⁵ and as their superimposition. As Rafael Moneo has remarked, Rossi's stance reminds us that "the architect does not act in a vacuum in radical solitude, but, on the contrary, knowing what is collective in the city he, as an individual, could penetrate the ground where architecture belongs, and make architecture"⁵⁶. In the case of John Hejduk's approach "[t]he representation of architecture [...] is 'already' architecture, reality..."⁵⁷.

Figure 6.3. Aldo Rossi, Cimitero di San Cataldo: *Il Gioco dell'Oca*, 1972.

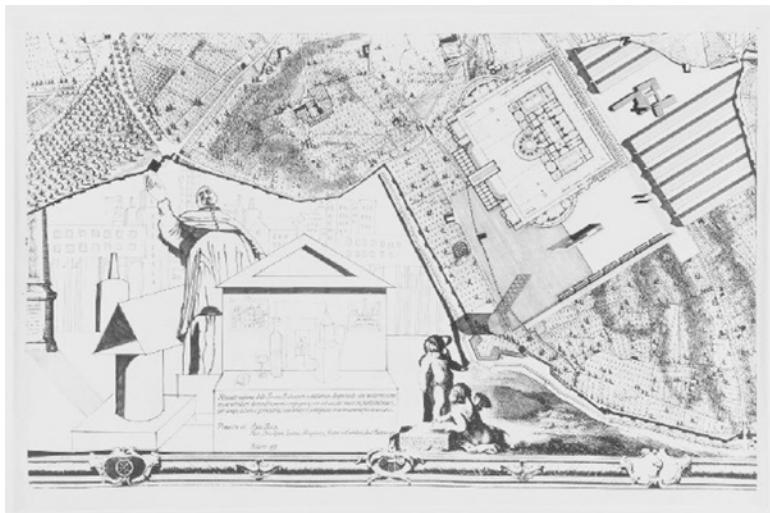


Credits: Aldo Rossi. L'archivio personale Disegni e progetti dalle collezioni del Museo nazionale delle arti del XXI secolo (MAXXI)

Rossi's insistence on the fact that "[a] knowledge of the city [...] enables us not only to understand architecture better, but also, above all as architects to design it"⁵⁸ and his belief that the act of drawing objects transforms objects

into objects of affection show that he did not wish to reduce his drawing practice to the objective *per se* of his architecture. His fascination with the “living history” of American cities reveals that he conceived architecture’s individual and collective dimension as always intermixed and superimposed in a never-ending game and, in contrast to Hejduk, he would never be satisfied with an understanding of architecture’s reality as architecture’s representation, despite the fact that the way his work was interpreted in the United States contributed to the prioritization of the “observers” of architectural representations over the inhabitants of real space.

Figure 6.4. Aldo Rossi, *Roma interrotta* presentation drawing, 1977. Technique and media: Diazotype on paper. Dimensions: 91 x 139 cm (35 13/16 x 54 3/4 in.).



Credits: Aldo Rossi fonds, Canadian Centre for Architecture, Montréal, Reference number: AP142.S1.D43.P2.2. © Eredi Aldo Rossi/Fondazione Aldo Rossi

Rossi’s design method was based on an understanding of the act of drawing as a means of transforming architectural and urban artefacts into objects of affection. For this reason, he always conceived compositional process as a mechanism of accumulation of meanings. His disapproval of any *tabula rasa* con-

ception of architectural forms and of the notion of invention, on the one hand, and his attraction to typology, repetition and living history, on the other hand, reflect his conviction that, firstly, the architect should never act in the vacuum and, secondly, architectural projects cannot refer to a totality, since they are always in a state of becoming and their character is always fragmentary. In his eyes, the individual autobiographical aspect of architects' creative process and the collective nature of urban reality are in a state of constant interchange. Any fixation to one of them would not satisfy Rossi's desire to capture architecture and city's vivid and evolving reality and their ceaseless interaction. His conception of architecture as inseparable from reality becomes evident when he underscored that he had "never regarded architecture as a playing with forms, as being unrelated to reality, deprived of engagement [...] but on the contrary as being inseparable from reality"⁵⁹. The elaboration of the concept of analogy helped him distance himself from a dialectical understanding of repetition, as it becomes evident in the following statement:

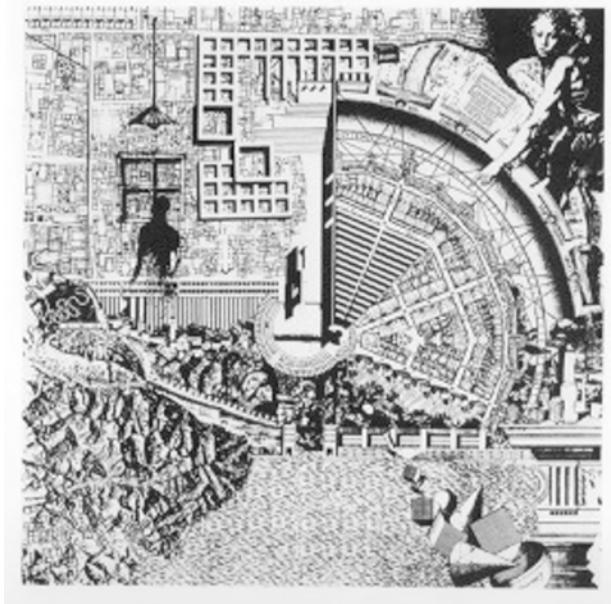
I could believe that this is a sort of hopeless circle and it could be thought without a dialectic [...] in reality it is not the emotions that prevail but the logical development of the facts, which inside themselves are completed or renewed without duplicating themselves perfectly.⁶⁰

Rossi's stance is characterized by the use of different modes of representation in the same drawing, as, for example, in his drawing for the Cimitero di San Cataldo in Modena entitled "Il Gioco dell'Oca" drawn in 1972 (Figure 6.3), the presentation drawing for the exhibition "Roma interrotta", drawn in 1977 (Figure 6.4), but also the famous collage "La Città analoga" that Rossi produced in collaboration with Eraldo Consolascio, Bruno Reichlin and Fabio Reinhart for the 1976 Biennale di Venezia (Figure 6.5). In these cases, we are confronted with the use of plans, elevations, axonometric representation and perspective representation in the same drawing. Rossi's simultaneous use of elevations, bird's-eye axonometric views and distorted perspectives within the same drawing could be interpreted as an endeavor to enforce multiple viewpoints.

Rossi was particularly interested in the autobiographic character of architectural design process and in the uniqueness of how each individual interprets architectural and urban artefacts: "Hundreds and thousands of people can see the same thing, yet each perceives it in his own unique way. It is a little bit like love: One meets many people and nothing happens, and then falls in love with one destined person."⁶¹ Manfredo Tafuri, in "The Theater of Memory", published in *Skyline* in 1979, argued that the "continuous frustration", which is

present in Rossi's work "becomes the opportunity for a restless renewal of the transformational games of materials reduced to a zero degree"⁶².

*Figure 6.5. Aldo Rossi, Eraldo Consolascio, Bruno Reichlin and Fabio Reinhart, *La Città analoga* presented at the 1976 Biennale di Venezia. The original drawing located at the centre of the collage is by Aldo Rossi. Technique: Collages of paper, felt, India ink, gouache and synthetic film on paper. Dimensions : 230 x 240 cm.*



Credits: Gift of the Société des Amis du Musée national d'art moderne, 2012. Numéro d'inventaire: AM 2012-2-371

6.3 Aldo Rossi's understanding of the tension between individual and collective memory

Two issues that are important for understanding Rossi's thought are: firstly, the difference between the notion of "history" and the notion of "memory", and, secondly, the operative nature of memory. The concept of recollection-images, which we can find in Gilles Deleuze's *Cinema 2: The Time-Image*, is useful for analysing Aldo Rossi's conception of the relationship between memory and repetition. Deleuze draws on Henri Bergson's conception of "recollection-images". What is at the centre of Deleuze's analysis of "recollection-images" is that with them "a whole new sense of subjectivity appears"⁶³. Following Nicolas de Warren, we could claim that "[r]ecollection-images are images of the past actualised in the present with a material support in the perceptual present"⁶⁴.

Rossi writes in his notebooks, the *Quaderni Azzurri*: "every work or part is the repetition of an occurrence, almost a ritual since it is the ritual and not the event that has a precise form"⁶⁵. He also wrote in the introduction of the catalogue of his first solo exhibition in the United States: "with each return there is a change, little modifications and alterations that are developed in the direction of a different discourse"⁶⁶. Peter Eisenman, in his preface to the American edition of Rossi's *L'architettura della città*, entitled "The Houses of Memory: The Texts of Analogue", refers to Jacques Derrida's *Writing and difference*. He highlights the difference between "memory" and "history" in Rossi's work: "in the city, memory begins where history ends"⁶⁷. In order to understand Rossi's conception of "memory" and especially the distinction between individual and collective memory, we should take into account how Maurice Halbwachs examined the notion of "collective memory" in *La mémoire collective*⁶⁸, which was published posthumously. This book played a significant role for the theory that Rossi developed in *The Architecture of the City*⁶⁹. One of the subtitles of the chapters of Rossi's book is "The Thesis of Maurice Halbwachs"⁷⁰. Rossi draws on Halbwachs' theory in order to explain how the individual personality contributes to urban changes.⁷¹ Rossi cites the following passage from Halbwachs' book entitled *La mémoire collective*:

When a group is introduced into a part of space, it transforms it to its image, but at the same time, it yields and adapts itself to certain material things which resist it. It encloses itself in the framework that it has constructed. The image of the exterior environment and the stable rela-

tionships that it maintains with it pass into the realm of idea that it has of itself.⁷²

Paolo Jedlowski underscores that “Halbwachs showed how the images of the past conserved by individual and by societies are, more than a substantive re-living of the past”. She also underlines that these images are also “products of active reconstructions”⁷³. Two questions that are important for understanding the role of memory for architecture are the following: in what sense does memory constitute part of the aesthetic of architecture? What is the role that memory plays during the design process? Adrian Forty notes that the “the modern interest in ‘memory’ and architecture has been less concerned with intentional monuments than with the part played by memory in the perception of all works of architecture, whether intentional or not”⁷⁴. John Ruskin noted in “The Lamp of Memory”: “We may live without her [architecture], and worship without her, but we cannot remember without her.”⁷⁵

6.4 Aldo Rossi's interest in the vitality of the dynamic of the expansion of the city

Aldo Rossi was interested in identifying “the specific forces acting upon the city”⁷⁶. He was against quantitative methods of analysis of the effects of urbanization, and positive vid-à-vis processes of investigation founded on the forces that act within architecture. In 1965, in the framework of the nineteenth congress of the Istituto Nazionale Urbanistica (INU), held in Venice, Rossi along with his colleagues Gianugo Polesello, Emile Mattioni and Luciano Semerani claimed:

It is difficult, if not impossible to define the formal and spatial terms of urban transformation within the presumed global vision of planning, because planning often presumes a demiurgic design of the entire territory... From the point of view of the design of the city it is difficult to understand the exact meaning of expressions such as “open project”. These expressions are similar to such very fashionable aesthetic categories as “open form”, and they are mystifications in view of the fact that any design intervention addresses a problem by means of a form. It is only the possibility of a closed, defined form that permits other forms to emerge.⁷⁷

The attitude of Rossi and his colleagues regarding the importance of well-defined form could be juxtaposed to the point of view described by the Smithsons: "In an open aesthetic, one senses that an architect is involved in a changing situation; in a closed aesthetic, an architect provides the solution to a problem which has been arbitrarily limited just for the sake of reaching formal definition"⁷⁸. Alison and Peter Smithson, through this distinction they draw between open and closed aesthetic, they privileged open aesthetic and blamed certain architects for having overlooked the dynamic character of architecture because of their intention to maintain the specificity related to well defined architectural forms.

Aldo Rossi along with certain of his colleagues were doubtful vis-à-vis the focus of the debates on concepts such as "city-territory", "network", "open project" etc. They were convinced that the potential of the creative forces of architectural and urban design were embedded in the form making of architectural objects. Therefore, they maintained that the starting point should be the design of well-defined and determined architectural forms and not the abstract, quantitatively oriented procedures of urban analysis.

Aldo Rossi, in "La città e la periferia", referred to Pier Paolo Pasolini, Luciano Visconti, Federico Fellini and Michelangelo Antonioni and related contemporary city to urban periphery. He asserted that "[t]he face of the contemporary city is represented for the most part by the periphery, a great part of humanity is born, grows and lives in the urban peripheries". He perceived the suburbs as "vast zones of the modern city that depart from the old centres and in form show both the lacerations of extremely quick growth and a vitality that is intense and new"⁷⁹. Despite his rejection of concepts such as "city-territory", "network", "open project", and "new dimension", he was particularly interested in the vitality embodied in the dynamic of the expansion of the city.

6.5 The import of the discourse around typology in the American scene

Typological thought presupposes two things: firstly, to discern basic types and, secondly, to see things in complementary relationships. For Rafael Moneo, "the type, rather than being a "frozen mechanism" to produce architecture, becomes a way of denying the past, as well as a way of looking at the future"⁸⁰. On the contrary, for Rossi, the notion of typology does not seem to be related to the denying of the past⁸¹. Peter Eisenman underscores, in the preface of the Amer-

ican translation of *L'architettura della città*, that in the case of Rossi, “[t]ype is no longer a neutral structure found in history but rather an analytical and experimental structure which now can be used to operate in the skeleton of history; it becomes an apparatus, an instrument for analysis and measure”⁸². Rossi insists on the fact that the components of the city “are the results of history”⁸³. The importance of this assertion becomes very evident when he mentions that “[t]he relationship of geometry and history, that is the history of the application of geometrical forms, is a constant characteristic in architecture.”⁸⁴ Rossi is attracted by the phenomenon of evolution of the application of geometrical forms. In “Considerazioni sulla morfologia urbana e la tipologia edilizia”, relates urban morphology to building types.⁸⁵

Werner Oechslin reminds us that “[t]he discussion of typology was at the front ranks in architectural circles in the 1960s and early 1970s.”⁸⁶ Terrance Goode, in “Typological Theory in the United States: The Consumption of Architectural “Authenticity””, underlines that “[b]y the mid-seventies, the typological project had been disseminated throughout the various centers of western European architectural culture.”⁸⁷ An aspect of the concept of typology that is of great interest is its function as a link “between architectural iconicity, social function and form.”⁸⁸ Stanislaus von Moos, in his *Le Corbusier: Elements of a Synthesis*, notes: “With architects like Aldo Rossi and theoreticians like Giulio Carlo Argan and Anthony Vidler, the concepts of ‘type’ and ‘typology’ defined by 18th-century authors like Quatremère de Quincy re-entered the bloodstream of architectural discussions around 1970”⁸⁹.

Vidler, in “The Third Typology”, published in *Oppositions* in 1977, distinguishes three concepts of typology: that corresponding to the rationalist philosophy of the Enlightenment linked to Abbé Laugier, that emerging because of “the need to confront the question of mass production” associated with Le Corbusier and that related to Aldo Rossi and the brothers Krier⁹⁰. In the first two cases, “architecture, made by man, was being compared and legitimized by another ‘nature’ outside itself”, while in “the third typology, as exemplified in the work of the new Rationalists, however, there is no such attempt at validation. The columns, houses, and urban spaces, while linked in an unbreakable chain of continuity, refer only to their own nature as architectural elements, and their geometries are neither scientific nor technical but essentially architectural”⁹¹. Argan drew a parallel between typology in architecture and iconography in figurative arts. According to him, “it is legitimate to postulate the question of typology as a function both of the historical process

of architecture and also of the thinking and working process of individual architects.”⁹²

Goode is “especially interested in the ways in which typological theory, imported into the United States from Europe, was transformed [...] from a critical theory of architectural resistance, absorbed into the largely ameliorative project of post-modernism, and ultimately reduced to an instrument of the very forces that it was initially intended to oppose.”⁹³ This observation is very relevant for understanding how Rossi's posture when imported in the United States was reduced to a poetic elaboration losing its political and civic dimension. Rossi's arrival to the United States is situated just after the import of the discourse around typology in the United States.

Oswald Mathias Ungers invited Léon Krier to Cornell University just one year before Aldo Rossi, that is to say in 1975. According to Wendy Ornelas, “[t]he Kriers have interpreted typology in a manner similar to the definition from Durand. Theirs is, as was Durand's, a “cookbook” method for the design of architecture. On the other hand, Aldo Rossi has emphasized, in his idea of type, the morphology of the composition.”⁹⁴ An observation of Goode that I find worth noting in order to understand the specificity of the import of the discourse around typology in the American scene is the following: “Separated from their initial ideological context, there characteristic forms and representational idiosyncrasies of such “stars” of the typological movement as Aldo Rossi and the Krier brothers were eagerly received as images ready for immediate appropriation by students and practitioners alike”⁹⁵.

Kenneth Frampton, in the brief of the second-year design studio “Composite Perimeter Housing Prototype for Marcus Garvey park Village Extension” that he taught during the autumn semester at the Graduate School of Architecture and Planning at Columbia University in 1977, proclaimed that “architectural education and design practice should be typologically based and the nature of the relevant type form should be allowed to establish the generic parameters of the problem from the outset”⁹⁶. Leandro Madrazo Agudin has underlined since 1995 the risks of assimilating type to typology: “In recent times, the term type has been used by architectural writers as synonymous with typology. Unfortunately, establishing this identity between type and typology has served to undermine some of the essential meanings conveyed by Type”⁹⁷. Sam Jacoby underlines, in “Type versus typology Introduction”, that “[t]ype originally denoted a medium of non-imitative reproduction”, while “typology indicated a reasoning by analogy”⁹⁸.

6.6 Aldo Rossi's attitude toward typology and the urban facts of the American city

A main characteristic of “Rossi’s attitude toward typology is his belief that, over time, architectural forms accumulate new meanings”⁹⁹. For Rossi, “[b]arns, stables, factories, workshops” were “[o]bjects of affection that reveal ancient problems”¹⁰⁰. Rossi related his “attachment to the objects” to the fact that “reproducing them, they become objects of affection”¹⁰¹. He referred to a “particular affection towards the things that we ourselves have brought about”¹⁰². For him, the act of drawing objects functioned as a way of transforming objects into objects of affection. Rossi remarked, in “The Meaning of Analogy in my Last Projects”: “the most exciting experience I had visiting [American] cities [...] is that they are loaded with living history”¹⁰³. He also stated: “we have to reflect in architecture the vitality of experience”. He highlighted that “[t]he myth of the American City, all new, efficient, etc. seems to [...] to have been invented to sell a certain model of architecture”¹⁰⁴. He related the falsehood of this constructed image of the American City to modernist European architecture, as it becomes evident in his following words:

I believe that by observing American towns, where people live mainly in one-family houses, we can question the abstract thesis of Le Corbusier and of the European Rationalists that the task of modern architecture is to design large apartment houses¹⁰⁵.

Rossi maintained that his theory of typology acquired a special value in the case of Manhattan because of the typology of the skyscraper. Aldo Rossi notes: “typology has a particular value [in] N.Y. or Manhattan with the type of the skyscraper”¹⁰⁶. Rossi defined typology as it follows: “in fact by concept of typology I mean the concept of a form in which human living expresses itself in a concrete way.”¹⁰⁷ Rossi, during his stays in the United States, he is not only interested in the typology of the skyscraper. He shows a particular interest for other typologies found in the American cities, such as huge complexes of one-family houses in California and mobile homes in Texas. This becomes evident from what he said to Diana Agrest, in 1979: “I have seen huge complexes of one-family houses in California and mobile-homes in Texas, as well as the new buildings in New York City, and, personally, I don’t have any moralistic feelings toward these works; I even found them stimulating”¹⁰⁸.

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