In the End: Architecture

50 Years of ARCH+

Wilfried Kuehn

ALDOLOGIES: Rossi, the Swiss, and Us

Aldo Rossi, Model Reconstruction Teatro Paganini, Piazza Pilotta, Parma, 1964 / © 1964 Aldo Rossi, Fotography: Cino Zucchi

> Rossi was an unbelievably fascinating teacher. He was good-looking, he was intelligent, he had unbelievable charisma. . . . Rossi fascinated us. Through his methods we learned to see the city analytically. —Jacques Herzog

Autonomies

It begins with a paradox. Aldo Rossi took up his Zurich teaching post in 1972 thanks to the efforts of Bruno Reichlin and Fabio Reinhart, after losing his position at Milan Polytechnic one year earlier. Yet although he'd been let go from Milan because of his solidarity with the striking students, at ETH Zurich the success of his professorship was grounded in the discipline he imposed on the equally rebellious students. The university leadership had appointed Rossi to re-center the pedagogical focus on architectural design—this before the backdrop of a recently published polemic authored by a collective from ETH in 1972, *Göhnerswil: Wohnungsbau im Kapitalismus* (Göhnerswil: Apartment Construction under Capitalism), and the Marxist seminar taught by Jörn Janssen at ETH, where debates and demonstrations were a matter of course. Rossi succeeded in bringing the students from the street to the drawing board.[1] He was first introduced to Zurich by a small exhibition in the Globus Provisorium, where he gave a lecture in which he distanced himself from the Zurich Marxists and outlined his concept of autonomy. Bruno Reichlin remembers Rossi's talk from February 8, 1972 as follows: "He criticized those who argue that machines and computers—i.e. the technocrats—have replaced the work of architects," instead seeing "the defense of the individuality of design [as] a defense of humans and of individual freedom." He spoke out against positions that "advocate for a utopian, fantastical vision of megaprojects with no connection to reality and . . . throw the actual achievements of modernism into crisis. . . . All of these positions have no place in the [architectural] schools; they are nihilistic, and impede the practical imparting of any sort of working method."[2]

Rossi's talk was no bluff. His anti-utopian concept of autonomy had resulted through a decade-long process of self-discovery in design and print, undertaken in the face of opposition from other initially ascendant positions in Italy —the paternal generation centered around Ernesto Nathan Rogers and Ludovico Quaroni; proponents of organic architecture centered around Bruno Zevi; the group centered around Giancarlo De Carlo with links to Team 10; and the neo-modernists, of which Manfredo Tafuri was still a member at the time, who were striving for architectural solutions at the scale of a *Città-Territorio*, a city not thought in formal terms but related to the urban territory in infrastructural terms.[3] Rossi first expressed his ideas in comprehensive theoretical form with the publication of *The Architecture of the City* in 1966, but his competition designs and *Casabella Continuità* articles in the early 1960s were important steps in the same direction. Pier Vittorio Aureli reconstructed this journey in his book *The Project of Autonomy* and related it to Italy's political situation in the 1960s, which made it possible for a concept of political autonomy to develop:

> For Rossi and his colleagues, therefore, the city's technological advancement coincided with its political decadence. In this sense, there was more than an incidental analogy betweenRossi's idea of autonomy and the Autonomist positions of [Raniero] Panzieri and [Mario] Tronti. All were attempts to demystify capitalist development by opposing to the continuity of economic development the separateness of both society and the city. . . . To the tendentious abstractions of economic programming and capitalist planning, Rossi, like Panzieri and Tronti, counterposed a reality based on the tension between antagonists. For the Operaists, this conflict played out in the political and institutional forms that the working class evolved out of its own experience; for Rossi and his colleagues, it played out in the form of the individuality of the urban artifact, the singularity of the *locus*, and the idea of the city of separate parts.[4]

In the distillation of the urban artifact, the *locus*, and the typological analysis of existing structures, Rossi created a designmethod that was teachable. Involvement with place in all its specificity served as the basis of a design approach grounded in morphology and typology, an approach that proved itself resistant to the modernization craze of the early 1970s—resistant to both commercial megastructures as well as to contemporary young "auteur architectures" like the Olympic Stadium in Munich by Günter Behnisch and Frei Otto, or the Centre Pompidou in Paris by Richard Rogers and Renzo Piano. Jacques Herzog and Pierre de Meuron were also initiated into this form of autonomy while writing a term paper for Aldo Rossi at ETH Zurich that they dedicated to the "Architectural Elements of Urban Development in Basel," using these as the foundation of a design for Basel's Barfüsserplatz.[5] While this focus on historicity and local context makes clear its resistance to the logic of capitalist exploitation and capitalism's blind faith in technological advancement, at the same time it de-ideologizes the act of design. In being translated to the Swiss context, Rossi's approach underwent a semantic realignment—it shifted from positing architecture's autonomy from appropriation by the economic system to positing its autonomy from social demands. Rossi's autonomy was thereby turned on its head. Sent back to the *locus*, the architects experience this *locus* itself as a problem. Or as Jacques Herzog characterized it in hindsight: "Swiss architecture already had a tendency toward autonomy. This is precisely theflaw of much of the architecture produced over the past thirty years. It corresponds to Swiss society, which doesn't live in public to the same degree as other cultures."[6]

Aldo Rossi in Moscow, 1955 / © The Estate of Massimo Vignelli

Realisms

Built in 1985–86, ten years after their studies in Zurich, Herzog & de Meuron's House for an Art Collector in Therwil near Basel—a shed-like home with a pitched roof, sitting squarely atop a concrete block that houses the art collection—demonstrates the possibilities of working in a manner that is site-specific, typological, and morphological while only distantly employing Rossi's architectural language. Their method of developing autonomous designs through a combination of cheap materials and equally simple building types ensures that no one project by the office resembles another. This capacity for stylistic freedom, quite in contrast to Rossi's own architecture and the architecture of Rossi's Italian students, was a breakthrough that also distinguished others of their mostly Swiss-German colleagues such as Peter Märkli. In the specific way that these projects were handled, beginning around the 1970s, they opened up a different direction than any taken by rationalism. For Rossi, *Architettura Razionale* earned the designation "rational" because it sought its basis in science, and was indebted to a particular strain of modernism: the middle class–rational architecture of French revolutionary architects; the same strains of Milanese neoclassicism; the social democratic–rational architecture of Red Vienna; and the socialist-rational housing of Hannes Meyer and Hans Schmidt, the Swiss architect involved in creating East Germany's typological architecture after 1956. Rossi wasn't only conscious of the direct correlation between architecture and its being commissioned; he sought an architectural language that could express the specific in the universal and thus give architects an emancipatory power vis-à-vis their commissioners. Rossi's realism was necessarily socialist, and in his eyes it found its embodiment in Berlin's Stalinallee (renamed Karl-Marx-Allee in 1961). Dietmar Steiner summed up the Copernican shift that Rossi's thinking had occasioned within architecture in the 1970s when he explained in hindsight what Rossi had been postulating since *Architecture of the City*: "Stalinallee is good architecture, and true fascism is what took place on Italy's coast in the postwar years."[7]

Yet Jacques Herzog has as much trouble understanding Rossi's appreciation for Stalinallee today as he did back then, and he's not alone.[8] In Charles Jencks's *The Language of Post-Modern Architecture* from 1977, under a photograph of the Stalinist highrise building that houses Lomonosov Moscow State University, Jencks wrote: "Classical realism, the architectural form of Socialist Realism, here borrows the repressive forms of czarism, the stepped pyramids, and the signs of bourgeois power. . . . That several western Marxists such as Aldo Rossi admire these buildings as socialist dreams is their luxury; but that they should be offered as urban prototypes is laughable."[9]

And indeed, beginning in the early 1960s, there has been a capitalist realism that stands opposed to socialist realism: artists like Andy Warhol, Ed Ruscha, Richard Hamilton, Gerhard Richter, and others have taken consumer society as their theme, making use of its iconography and of popular culture. The contemporaneous work and writings of Robert Venturi, John Rauch, and Denise Scott Brown enact a capitalist-realist architecture that generates architecture from the everyday imagesand ordinariness of American mass society. This realism is empirical and pragmatic, observant and appropriative and, in the inverse of Rossi's realism, it proceeds from practice to theory, not vice versa. Thanks to the efforts of Stanislaus von Moos, who in 1974 served simultaneously as a professor at the Carpenter Center for the Visual Arts in Harvard and as *Archithese*'s editor-in-chief in Zurich, Venturi and Scott Brown were publically accepted in Switzerland while they were still largely controversial in the USA. With the publication in 1975 of *Archithese* volume 13 (entitled Las *Vegas etc. oder: Realismus in der Architektur*, "Las Vegas, etc., or Realism in Architecture"), followed in 1977 by *Werk-Archithese* volumes 7–8 (entitled *Venturi und Rauch: 25 Öffentliche Bauten*, "Venturi and Rauch: 25 Public Buildings"), the colorful iconography of the "American vernacular" gained entrance to the Swiss architecture world. In the Swiss architectural debates of the 1970s, Main Street and Stalinallee thus stood as direct antagonists. In the *Archithese*issue "Realism in Architecture" from 1976, Denise Scott Brown's essay "Signs of Life" followed immediately after Aldo Rossi's "Une éducation réaliste." Through the combination of Rossi's *locus* and Venturi–Scott Brown's *icons*, there emerged a Swissarchitectural realism that took the everyday as the point of departure for place-specific designs. As distant from indigenous regionalism as from abstract universalism, Swiss architecture developed from the 1970s onward not as a major school of architecture, but as an intensive context for different sorts of contextualists.

Ed Ruscha, Standard Station, Amarillo, Texas, 1963 / © Ed Ruscha. Courtesy of the artist and Gagosian.

Analogies

It has become clear to me that my favorite examples—Lucca, Arles, Granada—interest me most at those places where their image doesn't attest to their later meaning, but instead it is destroyed by new functions, so that nothing more than an almost grotesque pure form remains behind—the pure form of a bone, a useless relic, whose deterioration amounts to a kind of natural condition, as if in a second act of creation.[10]

After his time in Zurich, Rossi also began to use concrete images. Like Venturi, he introduced a direct pictoriality to his narratives, first in the form of drawing and collage, and later in the form of architectural citation. Canaletto's painting *Capriccio with Palladian Buildings* from 1756 occupied a special place for Rossi as an image, becoming a launching point for the *Città Analoga*—the "analogous city"—that was taking shape in his imagination at the same time as his Zurich posting. In *Architecture of the City*, the images complement the analytical side by making space for the "ability to imagine."[11] The projects by Palladio in Canaletto's painting, constructed in an imaginary Venice, stage a counter-version of reality that functions as its own independent image. Similarly, the seven-meter-wide panorama Rossi commissioned for the XV Triennale di Milano in 1973, which was executed by Arduino Cantàfora, depicts some of Rossi's own work from a perspective with multiple vanishing points situated in a shared context with a number of iconic buildings: the Pyramid of Cestius and the Pantheon in Rome; the Mole Antonelliana in Turin; Adolf Loos's Michalerplatz building in Vienna [*known as the Looshaus*]; Ludwig Hilberseimer's design for a "Vertical City." By having the architecture of the city, as image and as imagined, also enter into the design, *Architettura Razionale* embraces the unpredictability of the artistic act. In contrast to Manfredo Tafuri, who insisted on a strict separation between analysis and design, Rossi set out to link the two inseparably. His *Analogical City* collage for the 1976 Venice Biennale, created in collaboration with his ETH assistants—Bruno Reichlin and Fabio Reinhart, as well as Eraldo Consolascio—is once more a combination of historical plans and his own works, and itcatapulted him into the image-obsessed reality of American architecture. It wasn't the buildings or competition victories he was realizing at the time that garnered Rossi an exhibition (with catalogue) in Peter Eisenman's Institute for Architecture and Urban Studies (IAUS) in New York, but instead the two-dimensional *Analogical City*. Both Rossi's Gallaratese Quarter in Milan as well as his San Cataldo Cemetery in Modena appear in Eisenman's IAUS exhibition, *Aldo Rossi in America: 1976–1979*, exclusively as analogical drawings in the style of a capriccio—an architectural fantasy.[12] The "paper architects" John Hejduk and Peter Eisenman were just as fascinated by Rossi's auto-referentiality as Oswald Mathias Ungers, who taught at Cornell in the 1970s and, influenced by Rossi's analogies, showed his *City Metaphors* at Hans Hollein's *Man TransFORMS* exhibition at the Cooper Hewitt Museum in New York. Accompanying the group of images was a design manifesto that would prove seminal for his work: "Designing and Thinking in Images, Metaphors and Analogies."[13]

In 1976, in an effort to define analogy, Rossi cited Carl Jung to stress the willfully irrational *dérive* of what begins as a logical-formal operation:

> Logical thought is 'thinking in words.' Analogical thought is archaic, unexpressed, and practically inexpressible in words. I believe I have found in this definition a different sense of history, conceived of not simply as fact, but rather as a series of things, of affective objects to be used by the memory or in a design.[14]

Rossi described this rational operation with an irrational starting point like a readymade by Marcel Duchamp: starting with simple and everyday objects whose form is determined, but whose meaning can be changed if subjected to a new use, he's interested in "barns, stables, sheds, workshops, etc.," which he describes as archetypal objects (in the Jungian sense) at the origin of design.[15]This analogical approach to design made it possible for his Swiss students, from Herzog & de Meuron to Miroslav Šik, to copyRossi's conceptually without copying his style. A formalvocabulary with certain idiosyncratic handcrafted elements led, by way of analogous architecture at ETH in the 1980s and 1990s, to a newly invented vernacular language that defines Swiss architecture into the present—and has created, in the words of Jacques Herzog, the "transfer-image architecture" of a "purportedly national style."[16] Unlike the rational Rossi, this school of architecture doesn't measure itself against modernism's objectlessness (*Gegenstandslosigkeit*), but rather, like the analogous Rossi, seeks out a concreteness (*Gegenständlichkeit*) that retransforms the image one-to-one into architecture. Thus, the problem that Herzog raises in describing Rossi's Gallaratese Quarter as a "built drawing"[17] isn't overcome, but only transformed from a rational form to an irrational form; it becomes figurative instead of objectless, but it remains abstract.

Houses in Mira, Portugal. From Aldo Rossi: A Scientific Autobiography

Alienations

In his elaboration of the archetypal hut, Rossi followed in the tradition of Marc-Antoine Laugier's "primitive hut" rather than the "decorated shed" of Venturi, Scott Brown, and Izenour. The hut served to invigorate the typology discussion of the 1960s by positing an elementary architecture, anchored in the collective memory, against the progressive architecture prevailing in the zeitgeist. This elementary architecture doesn't recognize progress, but instead persists as a timeless expression of an attitude. Unlike the historical prototypes put forward by rational architecture, it's not difficult to apply such an ahistorical archetype to design. In an analysis by the artist Dan Graham published in 1981, which contrasts Rossi's use of image with that of Venturi, Graham argues that, for Rossi, the simple types are not simply available, but instead must be reconquered, reclaimed from the everyday seductions of consumerism and media society.

Rossi sees the roll of architecture as 'political,' political being identified with its root word, *polis*, the Greek word for city.Like Michel Foucault, he views collective memory as connected to a political struggle of the urban working classes—their representation of themselves in history. Foucault notes, 'if one controls their dynamism one controls them . . . for [media's] intention is to reprogram, to stifle . . . 'popular memory'; and also to propose and impose on people a framework in which to interpret the present.[18]

Dan Graham's attempt to position Rossi, along with Léon Krier, *against* postmodernism reminds us that the "European city" as conceived in the 1970s was an emancipatory project opposed to the commercialization and functionalization of urban life. Considering the commodified version of the European city that confronts us two decades later in projects such as Rossi's Berlin city block, Schützenstrasse, it would seem that this project failed politically insofar as it was successful economically. In reality, unlike in theory, what Dan Graham diagnosed as the "alienation effect" between the architecture and its content in Rossi's work[19]did not lead to the resistance of the architectural form against its economic exploitation. To the contrary, in fact. Its effect was that architecture, turned into an image without reference to its content, could all the more easily be exploited.

In 1966, the year *Architecture of the City* was published, Giorgio Grassi and Aldo Rossi submitted their competition entry for the residential complex San Rocco in Monza near Milan. The complex took the form of a closed courtyard structure, the antithesis of the open development that was expected at the time. The grid of courtyards formed a figure whose modularity was so generic that Rossi could fit it into the *Analogical City* ten years later, expanded by a few wings, without any problem. The design derived its specificity from the fact that two of the grid fields were slightly offset at one point, skewing away from each other. In this minimal gesture, Mark Lee sees the transformation from field to figure.[20] Together with Venturi and Rauch's design for the Fire Station Number 4 from the same year (also the year *Complexity and Contradiction in Architecture* was published), Lee sees San Rocco as "a model for what architecture could be before the architectural concept became disengaged from reality and wentinto orbit." In the image of "orbit" borrowed from Jean Baudrillard, conceptual reality is decoupled from the objective reality underlying it: "To borrow Baudrillard's framework, the world of architectural concepts has similarly flown off on an orbital path in contemporary architectural discourse. It has reached a state of autonomy in which tangible context has been transformed into conceptual context, and in which a set of real circumstances has been replaced by one of intangible ideas."[21]

Analogy and autonomy, a double alienation—here, the architecture of the market became an image; there, conceptualism became academicism. In the schism between theory and practice, something that seemed possible around 1970 up and vanished: a concrete *architecture of the city* that put the content in the center and that made individual buildings into parts of a greater spatialand political narrative. Since then, the increasing abstraction of pictorial analogies and discursive autonomy has led to theopposite. Solitary "starchitecture" celebrates individualauthorship, not collective practice; singular structures, not contextual enmeshment; novelty, not historical complexity. For those born around 1970, the era's designs bear the potential for a different trajectory, an unrealized path for autonomy andanalogy. San Rocco has become a watchword for our generation: artistic authorship is no excuse for insufficient historical awareness. *Architecture of the City* presupposes a practice that takes society's foundations as its basis, to an extent that hasn't been seen since the 1970s. From this perspective, what makes Aldo Rossi contemporary is his concrete demand for a specific architecture: one of political form and theoretical practice.
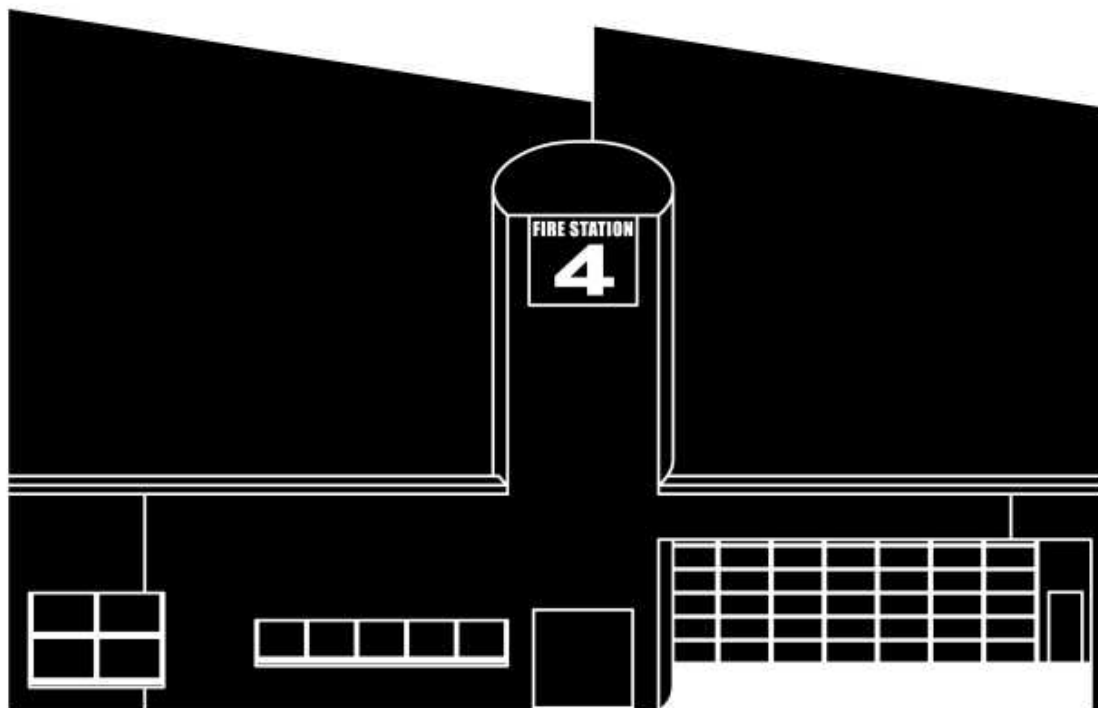
Venturi & Rauch, Firestation 4, Columbus, 1968 / © Robert Venturi: Fire Station Number 4. Design by Michele Marchetti / Display Office for San Rocco

[1] See Kurt Forster, "Architektur vor dem Verstummen retten – Rossis Zürcher Jahre als Transit," in *Aldo Rossi und die Schweiz: Architektonische Wechselwirkungen*, ed. Ákos Moravánszky and Judith Hopfengärtner (Zurich: gta Verlag, 2011), 120.

[2] Bruno Reichlin, "«Amarcord» – Erinnerung an Aldo Rossi," in *Aldo Rossi und die Schweiz*, 35.

[3] See for instance Giorgio Piccinato, Vieri Quilici, and Manfredo Tafuri: "La città territorio – verso una nuova dimensione," *Casabella Continuità*270 (1962): 16–25.

[4] Pier Vittorio Aureli, *The Project of Autonomy: Politics and Architecture within and against Capitalism* (New York: Princeton Architectural Press, 2008), 66.

[5] See Ulrike Jehle, foreword to Herzog & de Meuron's *Architektur Denkform: eine Ausstellung im Architekturmuseum* (Basel: Architekturmuseum in Basel, 1988), 7.

[6] Jacques Herzog at the 20th Vienna Architecture Congress, 18–20 November 2016.

[7] Dietmar Steiner at the 20th Vienna Architecture Congress.

[8] Herzog at the 20th Vienna Architecture Congress.

[9] Charles Jencks, *The Language of Post-Modern Architecture* (New York: Rizzoli, 1977), 91.

[10] Aldo Rossi, unpublished manuscript from 1975, cited in Kurt Forster, "Architektur vor dem Verstummen retten," 128.

[11] Aldo Rossi, "La Città Analoga," *Lotus* 13 (1976): 4–9.

[12] Aldo Rossi, *Aldo Rossi in America: 1976 to 1979*, ed. Peter Eisenman and Kenneth Frampton (New York: IAUS, 1979).

[13] O. M. Ungers, *Morphologie: City Metaphors* (Cologne: Walther König, 1982).

[14] Aldo Rossi, "An Analogical Architecture," *Architecture and Urbanism* 56 (1976): 74–76.

[15] Ibid.

[16] Herzog at the 20th Vienna Architecture Congress.

[17] Ibid.

[18] Dan Graham, "Not Post-Modernism: History as Against Historicism, European Archetypal Vernacular in Relation to American Commercial Vernacular and the City as Opposed to the Individual Building," *Artforum* 20, no. 4 (Dec 1981): 57. Graham's citation of Michel Foucault originates from interview in *Radical Philosophy* 11 (Summer 1975).

[19] Ibid., 58.

[20] Mark Lee, "Liberating and Governing Mechanisms," *San Rocco* 4 (2012): 110.

[21] Ibid., 111.