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City of Id: Modernism Couched

“The City is the Locus of Collective Memory”¹

In the two books *The Architecture of the City*² and *A Scientific Autobiography*³, Aldo Rossi defended the notion of timeless architectural principles that govern the formation of the city. To identify these principles and elucidate how permanent characteristics of the urban realm are constituted required a conceptual shift away from the modern movement’s claim of a “radical break” with the past, toward a more inclusive understanding of the continuous history of the city. Focusing specifically on the traditional city as an enduring model of spatial organization, his methodology was predicated on the revaluation of memory, typology, and analogy in relation to urban form. Considered in tandem as a critical response to the utopian aspirations of modernism, it is along these two interrelated vectors that Rossi attempted to systematically account for the underlying conditions that give rise to lasting morphological configurations of the city. His discourse will be examined relative to specific aspects of the psychoanalytical theories of Sigmund Freud and Carl G. Jung. Although distinct in their respective disciplinary orientations, the work of these three protagonists intersects on the thematic of the unconscious. Whereas in psychoanalysis, frameworks are devised to address the covert dimension of non-rational conditionings of conscious thought, with Rossi a comparable framework is put forward to divulge latent factors that are nonetheless active in the formation of urban territories. By interweaving these two disciplinary axes, relations that operate transversally across ostensibly unrelated domains of knowledge are disclosed, thus revealing the subtle contours of less than obvious discursive terrain between psychoanalysis and urbanism.

The concern for a timeless urban standard was born of Rossi’s desire to emphasize an enduring coherence against the modernist ethic of transience and the correlating imperative for continuous change in search of the ever new. His critique of a “radical break” with the past targeted the modernist exaltation of a unique juncture in history. Commenting on such exaltation, Jürgen Habermas states, “the new value placed on the transitory, the elusive, and the ephemeral, the very celebration of dynamism, discloses a longing for an undefiled, immaculate and stable present”.⁴ Challenging this pretense, Rossi divulged an unsuspected paradox intrinsic to modernism. Insofar as utopian visions were supposedly liberated from the dictates of a defunct past, a relativized “new will” of the modern age was given over to an inevitable forward thrust that cleared the path for a time of pure presence. Despite being the harbinger of constantly changing values, architecture was nonetheless to convey the specific qualities of an unrivaled epoch. Evident at once is the contradictory state of being both relative and inevitable. Such a paradox betrays the pre-eminent value placed on the immediacy of expressed desires in relation to an “immaculate, undefiled, and stable” consciousness. In this sense, Rossi’s denunciation of the modernist assertion of self-determined originality echoes

1 Aldo Rossi, *L’architettura della città* (1966), *The Architecture of the City*, translated from the Italian by Diane Ghirardo and Joan Ockman, The MIT Press (Cambridge and London), 1982, p. 130. Rossi cites his indebtedness to the sociologist, Maurice Halbwachs for the notion of collective memory. See Maurice Halbwachs, *La topographie légendaire des Évangiles en Terre sainte. Etude de mémoire collective*, Presses Universitaires de France (Paris), 1941

2 Ibid.

3 Aldo Rossi, *Autobiografia scientifica* (1990), *A Scientific Autobiography*, translated from the Italian by Lawrence Venuti, The MIT Press (Cambridge), 1981

4 Jürgen Habermas, Modernity – “An Incomplete Project” in *The Anti-Aesthetic: Essays on Postmodern Culture*, edited by Hal Foster, Bay Press (Seattle), 1983, p. 6

Sigmund Freud's assault on the sovereignty of immediate thought. Seeking to uncover primal forms of the human condition beneath idealizations, Freud (re) positioned conscious thought in a continuum with unconscious volition. The ego was no longer the *subject* of the thinking "I" but rather the *object* of repressed desire. Advocating a strategy of dispossession, Freud avowed the need to overcome the symptom of "being conscious" in order to confront the task of "becoming conscious" of hidden motives over which little or no control is exercised. Only by relinquishing oneself to the domineering flux of these motives can the underlying situation of the subject be disclosed. In a similar vein, Rossi expressed skepticism toward the face value of unabated innovation or progress, emphasizing instead the city's indelible *other scene* of the past. The return to traditional origins was announced as if to assert that an authentic urban sensibility can only be re-grounded by becoming aware of its embeddedness in history and thus, renounce the conceit of uniqueness.

Rossi's critical reassessment of modernism suggests that as a movement, it was ill-fated from the outset by assuming the omnipotence of unmediated intentionality. This assumption was driven by the desire to systematically annul the past through attenuation of its referential validity. Confronting such a reduction to present consciousness required of Rossi a counter reduction of its ostensible immediacy. Relevant here is Freud's effort to overcome the pseudo assurances of conscious thought. For him, this meant that the analysand must abandon the wished-for object as manifest in repressed desires. What had initially appeared as novel or exceptional in a subject's condition was revealed to be a substitute of primal desires that resurfaced in derivative guise. For Rossi, circumventing the tenets of the modern movement entailed a similar modal shift away from conceiving the city exclusively in terms of a wished-for object anticipated within the purview of *projective urbanism*. With foresight deferred, the city in its contemporary veneer could no longer serve as the primary guide for his analysis. On the contrary, he asserted that the investigation of surplus impressions registered in the city's material substrate constitutes the authentic *subject* of urban discourse. Insofar as these impressions impart a continuous effect upon the city's physiognomy, claims to do away with supplementary influences of the past are forever frustrated. Implying a double valence inherent to the built environment, Rossi readdressed the urban realm as that obscure density within which can be disclosed primordial ideas and representations that recur without end, "almost as if the city were a purely mental place".⁵ This conceptual position played a significant role in his methodological approach to analyzing the city. If the fundamental ways of making architecture had already been established, as Rossi claimed, then the urban realm could be conceived as a vehicle of remembrance referring endlessly to an *a priori* logic despite ongoing shifts in material expression. Thus, what had been marginalized in

5 Op. cit., *The Architecture of the City*, p. 137. Rossi is specifically referring to the ancient "polis" of Athens in this statement, but carries it forward to address urban culture in general.

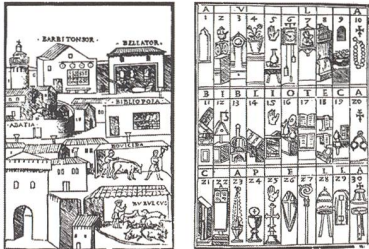


Fig. 1: Abbey Memory System from Johannes Romberch, *Congestorium Artificiose Memorie*, edition of Venice, 1533, p. 117, cited in Frances Yates, *The Art of Memory*, p. 113



Fig. 2: Display cabinet in Sigmund Freud's consultation room in Vienna, cited in Eduard Engelman, *Berggasse 19: Sigmund Freud's Home and Offices 1938*, Basic Books, Inc. Publishers (New York), 1976, p. 51. Photograph taken in May 1938

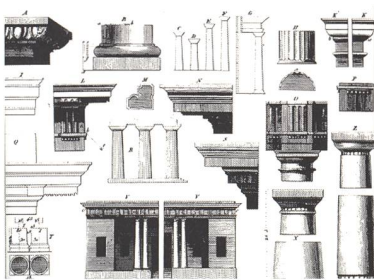


Fig. 3: The Doric Order, from *Principi di Architettura Civile*, Francesco Milizia, 1832, cited in Aldo Rossi, *The Architecture of the City*, p. 37

6 Sigmund Freud in *The Complete Letters of Sigmund Freud to Wilhelm Fliess 1887-1904*, (December 6, 1896), translated from the German and edited by Jeffrey Moussaieff Masson, The Bellknapp Press, (Cambridge and London), 1985, p. 208. Freud differentiated "normal" from "pathological" defenses: the former makes itself known as a defense, thereby implying that the "unpleasure" has at least been recognized and experienced at some point in time. The latter form of defense is unacknowledged as such, thus giving rise to a pathological condition.

7 Frances A. Yates, *The Art of Memory*, The University of Chicago Press (Chicago), 1966

modernist consciousness by appeals made to prophetic visions of the future, the primacy of functional requisites, or a technologically determined self-referentiality of architectural objects was recentered in Rossi's urban discourse by a revaluation of memory, typology, and analogy in relation to urban form.

With importance ascribed to urban memory, Rossi contested the notion that the city could be treated as an unmediated signifier isolated from the accumulation of impressions and circumstances which make up its evolving physiognomy. In that the modern city was to provide a credible testament of what the future promised to deliver, retrospection gave way to anticipation; memory ceded to prophecy. Architecture became a purified *agent of change*. Devoid of any rhetorical supplement, the urban realm was supposedly purged of any mythical or iconographic content, being no more than the logical derivative of contemporary conditions and a direct manifestation of common purpose. The conception of the city as a compilation of empirical facts, however, was compromised by the very ambition to prophesize. For how could speculative endeavors gain any legitimacy in communicating a collective goal without somehow relying on meanings that still carried undertones of a past thought to be thoroughly repudiated? To answer this question would be to relativize the very foresight of prophecy by acknowledging that its operative condition is the *repression of memory* as its basis. It should be recalled here that Freud had defined "repression" as a pathological defense against the potential release of unpleasure generated by translating memory traces from an earlier phase into the present. He stated, "it is as though this unpleasure provokes a disturbance of thought that does not permit the work of translation".⁶ Insofar as it can be argued that the modern movement suffered from a similar pathology in barring overt references to the past, the ambition to affect a wholesale flight from tradition was tantamount to an interdiction of translation from one era to another. With this in mind, Rossi's appeal to memory suggests that critical recollection functioned as a *translating agent* in his analysis of the city.

Implying that lived experience and architecture share the same source in mentally eternal values, Rossi conceived the city to be constituted in such a way that both current and recollected sensations directly infuse its materiality so as to remain inseparable. The psyche and the city thereby intersect in his discourse to form a mnemonic system similar to those investigated by Frances Yates in the book *The Art of Memory*, where architecture's pivotal role in the ancient technique of "mnemotechnics" is addressed.⁷ Most often relying on spatial sequences of an existing edifice as the referential frame, such a procedure was deployed to imprint upon memory a place with a clear, accessible organization that could then be "installed" with figurative likenesses of what was to be retained. Once this interface had been established, all that was subsequently required to recollect the things themselves was to remember the arrangement of locations and their corresponding content. Attributed with the capacity to animate memory repeatedly, and thus, exceed the contingencies of direct perception, the city likewise assumed the mediating role of a *mental map* for Rossi's investigation, where real and ideal coordinates were incorporated in order to figure forth the intangible.

Rossi's ambition to classify the city according to characteristic formal traits of typical elements is made explicit in a retrospective comment on how past and current experiences influenced his own approach to urban analysis. He stated,

“now I seem to see all the things I have observed arranged like tools in a neat row: they are aligned like a botanical chart, or a catalogue, or a dictionary. But this catalogue *lying somewhere between imagination and memory*, is not neutral; it always reappears in several objects and constitutes their deformation, and in some way, their evolution.”⁸ Suggested by this statement is the dual capacity of memory to simultaneously record and transform. Both a static and transient agent, it indexes traces of the past, while advancing as a mobile indicator to inflect present perception, thereby modifying the rereading of those traces. With this understanding, memory could be strategically deployed as an intermediary “tool” with which to delineate a system of relations traversing various strata, thus accounting for processes within the city underwriting conditions of permanence and change. Here, Rossi’s methodological framework is revealed as having affinities not only with classical mnemonics, but also with Freud’s attempt to formulate a taxonomic schema of the psyche. (Figures 1-3)

In his attempt to disclose primal influences on the subject that operate by deferred action, Freud hypothesized that the psyche is compounded in layers, stating “it has come into being by a process of stratification.”⁹ Within such a manifold system, a record of conglomerate registrations is transcribed, thereby providing a deep-seated inventory of impressions for subsequent reanimation in consciousness. To explain how these two domains can nonetheless interact, Freud turned to the example of the “Mystic Writing Pad.”¹⁰ The functioning of this device enabled him to treat the coexistence of a permanent register and a renewable surface as the condition for exchange between independent parts of one dynamic system. In comparing the psyche to a retentive writing machine, Freud could thereby address memory in terms of product and process. Not only deposited trace, memory also serves as the relay or translating mechanism linking registrations situated beyond the recall of consciousness to an ever changing perceptual “screen” of inscriptions. At stake in Rossi’s methodology was also the disclosure of a latent urban code made possible by tracking its disseminated traces. Whereas the co-presence of morphological constants and ongoing compositional modification manifests similarities to differential relations of language, Rossi claimed that cities can be read as “historical texts” whose syntax is “affirmed by the continuities that exist in the deepest layers of the urban structure”.¹¹

The conception of the city as a text rooted in history and memory was instrumental to Rossi’s revaluation of traditional architectural typologies. As urban indices of a time-honored consensus concerning spatial organization, typologies gain credence by being carried forward in collective memory. Typologies thus cross over from being a static record of past events to a psychological dimension where urban form is continuously re-imprinted upon a sensory datum to give enduring material expression to the flux of experience. Attempting to designate a deep-seated syntactic order, Rossi also alluded to distinctions made by Carl G. Jung. Jung had distinguished the *personal* from the *collective* unconscious, claiming that unlike the former, “the contents of the collective unconscious have never been in consciousness...” because this content is jointly inherited through the arbitration of “*archetypes*”.¹² Defining an archetype as a primordial form which transcends what he called the “empirical psyche” of personal thought, Jung thereby proposed that there is a “second psychic system of a collective, universal, and impersonal nature which is



Fig. 4: Giovanni Antonio Canaletto, *Capriccio*, ca. 1743-1744, National Gallery, Parma, Italy. cited in Aldo Rossi, *The Architecture of the City*, p. 164

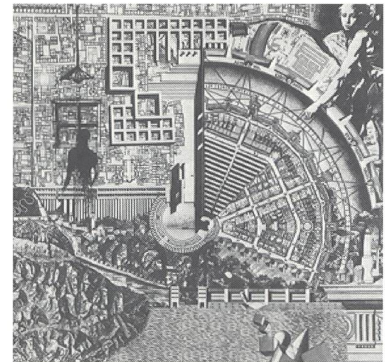


Fig. 5: Aldo Rossi, with Eraldo Consolascio, Bruno Reichlin, and Fabio Reinhart, *analogous city*, 1976, cited in *La città analoga*, Lotus, December 1976, vol. 13, pp. 5-6

8 Op. cit., *A Scientific Autobiography*, p. 23. Emphasis added

9 Op. cit., *The Complete Letters of Sigmund to Wilhelm Fliess 1887-1904*, p. 207

10 See Sigmund Freud, “A Note Upon the ‘Mystic Writing Pad’” (1925), in *The Standard Edition of the Complete Psychological Works of Sigmund Freud*, 24 vols., edited and translated from the German by James Strachey with Anna Freud, Alix Strachey, and Alan Tyson, The Hogarth Press and the Institute of Psychoanalysis (London), 1953-1974, vol. XIX. Hereafter referred to by individual volume title and date followed by The Standard Edition with indication given of the volume and page number.

11 Op. cit., *The Architecture of the City*, pp. 127-128

12 Carl G. Jung, “The Archetypes and the Collective Unconscious” (1933), in *The Collected works of C. G. Jung*, 21 vols., edited by Sir Herbert Read, Michael Fordham, Gerhard Adler, and William McGuire, translated from the German by R.F.C. Hull, Bollingen Series XX, Princeton University Press (Princeton), 1969, vol. 9, part I, par. 90, p. 42.

13 Ibid., p. 43

identical in all individuals”.¹³ Consequently, archetypes manifest a tendency toward autonomy, surmounting any singular will to alter their symbolic effect since they are perceived only secondarily after having *already* given form to mental content. For similar reasons, Rossi accorded signifying autonomy to typologies due to the fact that, although their intrinsic formal premises are most often remote from conscious reception, they nonetheless latently frame shared perceptions and associations. Inasmuch as these representations are transpersonal, they circumscribe a semantic horizon of the city that is intersubjectively embedded in a given system whose significations emanate from a common origin.

Whereas typologies index an already existent order while at the same time register that order’s ongoing diffusion by collective memory, they serve to breach striations of urban meaning. This allows a decontextualized *ur-text* be repeatedly recontextualized in form and thought through a transcoding across strata. Thus in Rossi’s view, there was no justification for seeking the city’s essence beyond its constituent morphologies. Such a position informed his rejection of the modernist attempt to produce a new master code for architecture delimited by what he criticized as “an ingenious empiricism which holds that *functions bring forms together* and in themselves constitute urban artifacts...”¹⁴ In that traditional formal solutions had been abandoned in the modern movement, the resultant referential void in form-making processes was filled by what amounted to programmatic determinism. Reduced to pure formula, architecture’s *raison d’être* was considered to be no more than the fulfillment of functional requisites specific to the age. The goal of affirming a direct correspondence between function and form, however, bound the discipline to mechanically reproducing a prevalent ideology concerning the parameters of production, thereby making the city unreadable except in terms of that ideology. Implying a confrontation of texts, it is as if the functionalist doctrine for Rossi presided as a surrogate script of overt performance specifications positioned above a covert “historical text”, thus serving to disturb or prohibit any lingering manifestations of that text in the attempt to master architecture’s signifiatory presence. Aiming to circumvent this prosaic script and to bring into relief a more evocative and expressive meaning of the city, he proceeded from surface significations toward another remote locality in search of ulterior motives.



Fig. 6: Aldo Rossi, *Gallaratese Housing Block*, Milan, Italy, 1970-1973

¹⁴ Op. cit., *The Architecture of the City*, p. 46.
Italics in the translation

To imply that the city manifests an unconscious text to be deciphered compels a certain abstinence from cursory readings of the city which focus exclusively on the technological stature of a particular age. Accordingly, Rossi set out to disclose a more pervasive symbolic dimension of the urban realm grounded in a historical repertoire of type-forms. As the link between memory and the ongoing evolution of material expression, typologies constitute an ingrained system of formal references that survive technological advances or social changes, thus establishing within history an immutable architectural referent. This suggests that certain symbolic relationships pertaining to the city are already negotiated in a culturally determined nexus of underlying significations from which an *urban unconscious* can be inferred. Collective attractions and aversions toward specific objects or events operate to coalesce memories, sensations, as well as past and present circumstances. In this respect, the physical form of the city was crucial for Rossi, providing tangible evidence

of nuanced processes of modification, superimposition, and transformation which fuse the rediscovered with the never-before-seen. As with dreams for Freud, it is the originary “scene” of architecture that for Rossi is perpetually re-enacted, albeit in various semblances, thus serving to anchor the transitory series of human events. Juxtaposed, the accounts of Freud and Rossi suggest that the unconscious and the city are stratified sites of primordial signifiers that condition both the psyche and joint urban experience.

To demonstrate the expressive power of images to connect apparently contradictory or unrelated urban situations in a seamless composite, Rossi referred to the “Capriccio” from Giovanni Antonio Canaletto. Not unlike the formal regression to images characteristic of the unconscious or the jarring of contexts championed by the Surrealists, the scene yields a dream-like displacement and condensation. Here, artifacts from varying periods and locations are recombined in a real, yet unreal setting comprised solely of architectural references. From this, a *counter city* emerges in place of its reasoned complement. Disparate figures enter into mutual dialogue with each other in an altered a-historical situation, manifesting in their revised composition an *urban mindscape* that is recognizable, but simultaneously new and unknown. Although admittedly by its title a work of fantasy, the force of Canaletto’s painting for Rossi was its paradoxical testimony to something historically established that imparts the authority of fact despite never having existed as such. Cast from their former relations into cross-referential exchanges, such architectural forms extend beyond their original functional or contextual meanings to incarnate both real and imaginary dimensions of the city. Similar to Freud’s treatment of dream symbols, Rossi identified originary formal icons that convey accumulated meanings throughout the city’s evolution and continue to frame collective experiences. He thereby rejected the rarified formal abstraction of the modern movement in order to extrapolate a more extensive significance from the emblematic status of the city. Deploying analogy as an analytical and generative tool, Rossi set out to chart migratory associations and evocations whose recurrences are never fully conscious, yet actively inflect collective sensations to awaken in urban experience an intertwining of past and present references. (Figure 4)

Rossi’s turn to analogy was admittedly influenced by Jung’s categorical distinction of two general types of thinking: *logical* and *analogical*. Referring to this differentiation, Rossi quoted from one of Jung’s letters to Freud where Jung stated, “I have explained that ‘logical’ thought is what is expressed in words directed to the outside world in the form of discourse. ‘Analogical’ thought is sensed yet unreal, imagined yet silent; it is not a discourse but rather a meditation on themes of the past, an interior monologue. Logical thought is ‘thinking in words.’ Analogical thought is archaic, unexpressed, and practically inexpressible in words”.¹⁵ Implied in such an account is that conscious processes are oriented outwards toward an objective reality via communicative purpose through language. In this case, external conditions supply the validating and determining criterion for the legitimacy of statements as well as that of their correlating references. As a result, the latent subjective origins of any proposition are usually rendered incompatible with the mandate of rationality. Consciousness can thus be conceived as exercising an assertive, but reticent prohibition on all material considered detrimental or subversive.



Fig. 7: Aldo Rossi, *Design with the left hand*, 1973

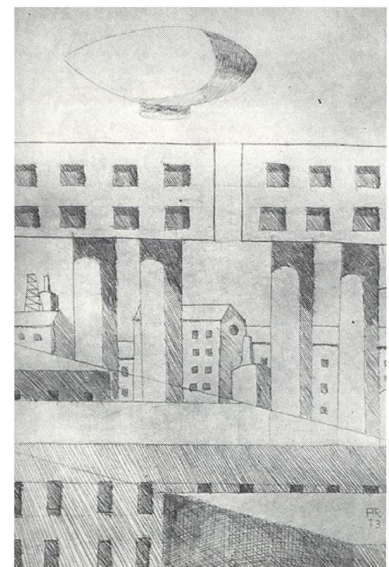


Fig. 8: Aldo Rossi, *The two cities*, 1973

¹⁵ Carl G. Jung in: *The Freud/Jung Letters: the Correspondence between Sigmund Freud and C.G. Jung* (March 02, 1910), edited by William McGuire, translated from the German by Ralph Manheim and R. F. C. Hull; abridged by Alan McGlashan, Penguin Twentieth Century Classics (London), 1991, p. 160. Cited in Aldo Rossi, “An Analogical Architecture”, in: *Architecture and Urbanism*, translated from the Italian by David Stewart, (May 1976), vol. 56, pp. 74-76, p. 74. Cited also in Vittorio Savi, *L’Architettura di Aldo Rossi*, Casa Editrice di Franco Angeli (Milan), 1976, pp. 112-113



Fig. 9: Aldo Rossi, sketch for the San Cataldo Cemetery, Modena, Italy, 1972

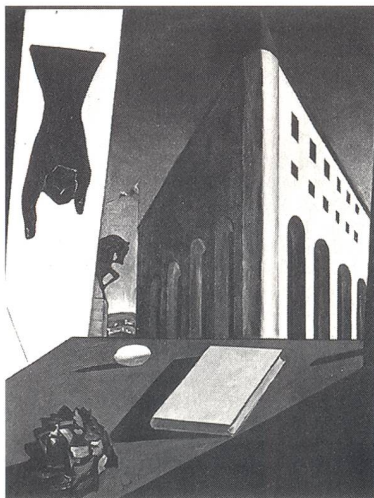


Fig. 10: Giorgio de Chirico, *Still-life-Turin in Spring*, 1914

16 Henri Focillon, *La vie des formes* (1934), *The Life of Forms in Art*, translated from the French by Charles Beecher Hogan and George Kubler, Zone Books, Urzone, Inc. (New York), 1989, p. 155. Modification added

17 It should be recalled that Freud had likewise speculated that rather than being spontaneously derived, the mnemonic symbols of the dream-work are ready-made. He inquired, is it so highly improbable that the dream represents a phantasy which had been stored up ready-made in [the dreamer's] memory for years...? See Sigmund Freud, "The Interpretation of Dreams", in: *The Standard Edition*, vol. V, pp. 533-534

Converse to logical thought, Jung claimed that analogical thought operates in and across the gaps of unspoken censorship. Rather than being dictated by pretenses of immediate consciousness, such indirect thought processes are spontaneous and *imagistic* since they are guided by unconscious motivations that conflate reality with dreams or fantasies, thereby superseding the principle of non-contradiction. Furthermore, Jung's statement suggests that analogical thought does not necessarily lead from objective experience back to a concrete object, but instead back to collectively derived content comprised of both real and imagined associations. If external facts do not serve as the aim or origin of analogical thought, it cannot, as an inferred procedure, avoid or dispense with the admixture of latent, intersubjective parameters of symbolization. This led Rossi to surmise that through analogical thinking, logical thought is brought into connection with the more fundamental signifying origin of the urban realm.

For Rossi it was not a question of assigning new values to the city, but rather of disclosing those that constitute an intersubjectively-rooted signifying spectrum, one in which society as a whole participates whether recognized or not. Consequently, he conceived of the city not simply as a compilation of empirical facts, but as a composite of symbolic relays that surpass apparent contrasts between its traditional and modern countenances or the vogue of a certain age. Through analogy, contingencies of specific time- or context-bound meanings are transcended by a meshing of collective memories, dreams, and fantasies with the associative dimension of given urban morphologies. The rarefied "no place" of utopia was countered by the "refracted presence" of the *analogous city*, a latent reality already operating within asserted reality. In a collaborative work of the same title, Rossi attempted to illustrate his conception of the urban realm as a psycho-physical milieu of exchanges, where the city unfolds onto other latent cities positioned somewhere between remembrance and current phenomena. Not unlike Canaletto's "Capriccio", this dream-like montage of pre-existing elements, including those of Rossi's own design, merge with imaginary geographic formations and traditional iconic features, the borrowings of which are reassembled to engender unexpected relationships. Instead of offering a purely objective rendering of the overt city, the result conveys a weave of covert connotations which have been collectively applied to it, but are suddenly remotivated within another referential frame. Although anchored by an eternal logic of perpetual returns, it is these returns that accord the urban realm with indeterminacy prior to their revived charge in thought and material. That which appears to be novel or unknown is recast in terms of that which is already known, modified only by appearing to be seen (again) for the first time. (Figure 5)

As if to claim that the city is always already available to be newly made, Rossi's appeal to analogy was forwarded to reveal how a metamorphosis of first principles can yield a wealth of slight deviations from those principles, thereby generating unexpected differences within repetition. This hints at Henri Focillon's claim that form "can assume a new and revolutionary character without being an event itself; it (form) can also be transported from a rapidly moving environment into a slowly moving environment or inversely".¹⁶ A single project in Rossi's case is likewise transposed, playing the dual role of hushed witness and assertive catalyst as it is set into ongoing

relational exchanges with the existing city. Forms are given in advance to be displaced and condensed through recombinations, not dissimilar to the surreal juxtapositions by Giorgio de Chirico, whose work suggests that among other found objects, the city itself is a *ready-made*.¹⁷ The non-event of the ready-made is also reactivated in Rossi's work. Challenging the linearity of design processes that typically proceed along the progressive axis of idea – sketch – drawing – realization, Rossi introduced a phantasmagoric circularity into such procedures, where subsequent transcriptions are (re) in-formed by previous projects. Projects such as the Gallarate housing block engender a succession of re-readings and re-writings for Rossi, evidenced by its numerous reappearances within different circumstances and in varying guises. Its material duration is lent a plastic quality, thereby de-forming its givenness into something still known, yet unexpected. This procedure is revealed once again in his project for the San Cataldo Cemetery in Modena. Suggesting an architectural narration of the cyclical plot of generation – decay – regeneration, Rossi charts the itinerant route of an archetypal situation: a collective house for the living is re-lived in and through the city, to become transformed into a communal house for the deceased, only to reappear again as an ephemeral element for ongoing derivations in the urban fabric. (Figures 6-11)

Two additional drawings provide a more extensive example of how Rossi incorporated such ideas into an alternative meditation on the idea of city. The earlier drawing, illustrating a combination of pre-existing architectonic elements, reveals how architecture can be conceived as sustaining a dialectic of identity and estrangement involving primary forms. It is here where urban morphology is potentially liberated from the mandate of a modernist will intent on locking form into a singular referential frame and is thereby released in a latent slippage toward unforeseen meanings. The later sketch entitled, “L’architecture assassinée”, presents an ensemble of the same principal elements, only this time at the tentative juncture of disintegration. Their rendered dissolution certainly alludes to what Rossi considered to be the detrimental effects of the modernist legacy: the city reduced to a systemization of empirical facts. For him, it is such a reductive mantra that shatters the symbolic dimension of urban artifacts by making every overt activity conform to the strictures of instrumental reason. In the tense polarity opened up by these two drawings, architecture was once again asked to provide an introspective narrative on itself, but not in the reductive terms of modernism. In Rossi's case, this narrative was suspended in a dialogue between past and present, between two divergent languages of the unspeakable and the sayable – analogical and logical – which, for him, ultimately approach in their circuitous paths the same immutable origin of architecture, if only by different detours of covert or overt desire. (Figures 12-13) *

* This essay is a (hyper) condensed version of a lecture given on May 05, 2003 at the ETH Zürich in the series entitled “Tuesday Morning Positions” organized in the Chair of First Year Architecture and Design of Prof. Marc Angélil.

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Fig. 11: Aldo Rossi, *Architecture and the imaginary sky*, 1974

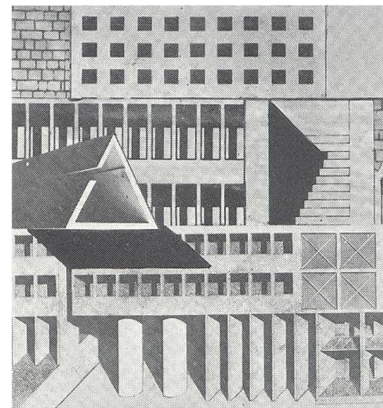


Fig. 12: Aldo Rossi, sketch showing recombination of elements, 1972

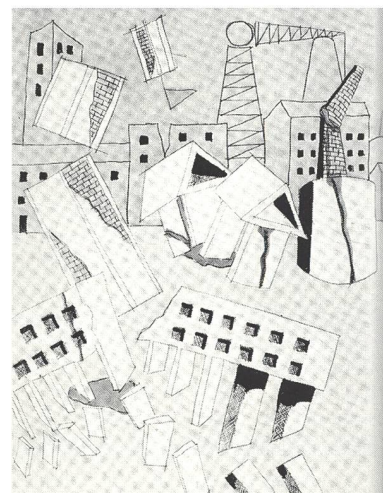


Fig. 13: Aldo Rossi, *L'architecture assassinée*, 1974