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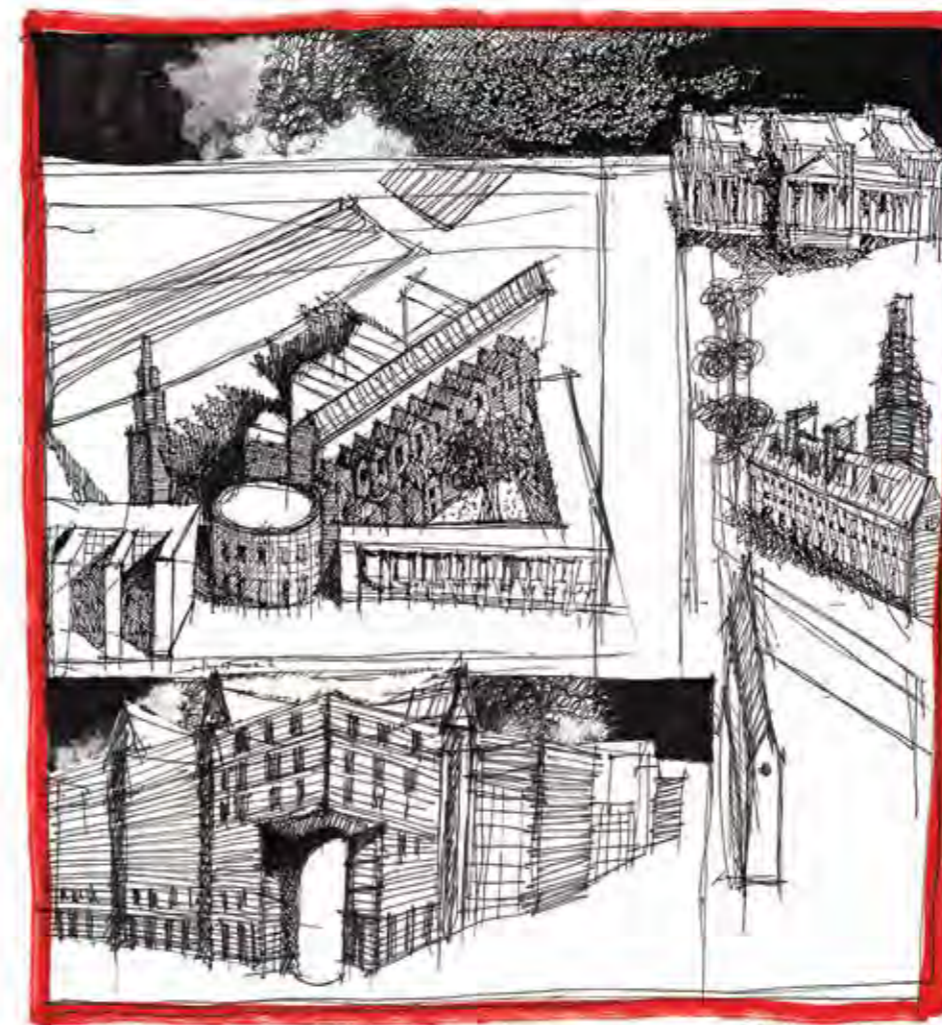
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in copertina

Aldo Rossi, *Study for Berlin*
(*Deutsches Geschichte Museum a Friedrichstrasse*), 1988, detail
(MAXXI - Museo Nazionale delle arti del XXI secolo, Roma,
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ALDO ROSSI, PERSPECTIVES FROM THE WORLD

ILPOLIGRAFO



ALDO ROSSI, PERSPECTIVES FROM THE WORLD

Theory, Teaching, Design & Legacy

edited by

Marco Bovati, Michele Caja, Martina Landsberger, Angelo Lorenzi

scientific supervision Adalberto Del Bo

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ILPOLIGRAFO

Aldo Rossi, one of the most important figures of the last century who determined and characterized the theoretical debate of international architecture, both in the academic and professional fields, died prematurely on September 1997.

Translated into many languages, Rossi's *The Architecture of the City* (1966) soon became a reference for world-leading schools of architecture, bringing into focus the urban dimension of architectural design, and the fundamental role of history. In different occasions over the years, such themes have stirred up the debate from different standpoints, opening further lines of inquiry for generations of scholars and academics all over the world. Since the time of the exhibition "Architettura Razionale" at the 1973 Triennale di Milano in which, as a curator, he had called on architects from different and distant places to confront each other, Rossi had shown this propensity to look beyond national borders with interest and curiosity. This volume aims to examine how much Rossi's theoretical and design teaching is still relevant today. For this purpose, forty young national and international scholars and researchers have dealt with the master's theoretical and constructed work, verifying its relevance and useful indications for the contemporary project. The volume, introduced by a theoretical essay, consists of four sections corresponding to four thematic issues: "Theory & Design"; "Teaching & Design"; "International Design Legacy"; "Design". Each chapter presents a theoretical introduction that aims to discuss and summarize the topics covered in the section by offering a possible interpretation of the texts.

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*This book is dedicated to the memory
of Francisco José Barata Fernandes*

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POLITECNICO MILANO 1863

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E STUDI URBANI

DIPARTIMENTO DI ARCHITETTURA,
INGEGNERIA DELLE COSTRUZIONI
E AMBIENTE COSTRUITO

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THE CONSTRUCTION OF A DESIGN THEORY

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The formation of a design theory constitutes the specific objective of a school of architecture and its priority over any other kind of research is incontestable. A design theory is the most important moment, the founding event of each work of architecture, and therefore a course on design theory should be established as the main axis of a school of architecture.¹

These are the words that open “Architecture for Museums”, an essay in which Rossi tackles the theme of education with great determination and clarity to track down a relationship between the theoretical and operational aspects of the craft, or rather, to identify “rational explanations on how to proceed in making a work of architecture”².

In point of fact, this issue returns often in his writings – and in this light *The Architecture of the City* can be read as a text closely linked to the possibility of constructing a specific method useful for design, in the most general sense of the term – but without adopting a totally explicit form. For example, this is the case of the *Quaderni Azzurri*³ in which, although the words *teaching* and *university* appear rarely, there are repeated references to the need to construct a design theory together with the highlighting of certain themes and principles necessary for its foundation.

The point of departure of this brief essay, whose objective is to introduce the section of the volume dedicated to Rossi’s teaching, is to try and outline a design theory starting from the Italian master’s jottings in his notebooks – the *Quaderni Azzurri*.

A first initial and essential consideration concerns the structure of this work which is arranged as a collection of notes and memos of use to Rossi to fix his ideas, to outline the structure of some writings, to reason – somewhat unsystematically – on themes and problems that arose from time to time. If on the one hand this unsystematic approach to reasoning represents the underlying nature of this work, it is still possible, albeit with a certain difficulty, to trace a sort of progressive reasoning by following a chronological itinerary given by the numbering and dating of the individual notebooks.

The first question to be clarified is the possibility of defining a design theory⁴ which, in Rossi’s view, must refer to works of architecture and be based on an analysis

¹ A. Rossi, “Architettura per i musei”. In G. Canella, M. Coppa, V. Gregotti, A. Samonà, G. Scimeni, L. Semerani, M. Tafuri, *Teoria della progettazione architettonica*. Bari: Dedalo, 1985, p. 123, English translation by Alex Gillan.

² *Ibid.*

³ A. Rossi, *I Quaderni Azzurri (1968-1992)*, edited by F. Dal Co. Milano - Los Angeles (CA): Electa - Getty Research Institute, 1999.

⁴ A. Rossi, *I Quaderni Azzurri (1968-1992)*, cit., n. 1, *Architettura*, 19 June 1968.

of them. As he himself observed, this choice makes it possible to establish a “Trend” [it. *Tendenza* – translator’s note]⁵, that is, to make an accurate assessment of the world of architecture which one finds oneself working in⁶.

The objective of design is to ‘transform a form’, an operation made feasible through the application of a series of notions that are ‘technical’, as it were, but from which it is impossible to exclude the intervention of that autobiographical aspect linked to what Rossi termed the *field of emotions*, a topic that recurred constantly in all his theoretical writings and project reports.

Form, he explained, necessarily establishes its own precise and indisputable relationship with the idea of architecture it is representing, and manifests through certain “techniques” that refer firstly to the typology, in the sense of “the logical moment of constructing the form”⁷, “the prominent aspect of each work of architecture”⁸, and secondly to the survey, a tool that allows us to really get in touch with architecture.

From these first considerations what appears crystal clear is the role played by the cognitive process, seen as a crucial element in approaching a project. For Rossi – and for his future students – designing meant investigating a topic, getting to know it through a study of references, i.e. those works of architecture that had physically resolved the same issue, to end up defining a specific idea through which to construct a new, *modern* form, i.e. belonging to the present. In this rational process, invention was clearly a forbidden concept.

It is interesting to note how often the description of his own projects recur in the *Quaderni Azzurri*; the tool through which we can try to verify the questions related to design theory⁹.

I am convinced that the spaces arranged for this daily life, the great portico, the elevated streets and the loggia will emphasize the dense flow of daily life and the profound popular roots of this residential architecture, of this great house that could be aligned along the Milanese canal or any other of Lombardy,¹⁰

⁵ From 1973, the word *Tendenza* would be taken to mean a “cultural project that seeks to bring together heterogeneous research projects within a single movement, but all related in various ways to the architecture of the city and its history. Thus, *Tendenza* wishes to generate not an umpteenth style, but an architecture that stems from a development of typology and morphology [...]” B. Lampariello, *Aldo Rossi e le forme del razionalismo esaltato. Dai progetti scolastici alla “città analoga” (1950-1973)*. Macerata: Quodlibet, 2017, p. 322.

⁶ A. Rossi, *I Quaderni Azzurri (1968-1992)*, cit., n. 10, *Architettura*, 21 November - 13 February 1972.

⁷ A. Rossi, *I Quaderni Azzurri (1968-1992)*, cit., n. 1, *Architettura*, 19 June 1968.

⁸ A. Rossi, *I Quaderni Azzurri (1968-1992)*, cit., n. 10, *Architettura*, 21 November - 13 February 1972.

⁹ “The analysis of my projects proposed here attempts to lay the foundations of an analytic theory of architecture that is independent of the conditions that architecture is always forced into: historical, functional, economic, and so on. It is presented as a pure theory of composition, and as such is addressed to those elements of architecture whose presence in each composition is a fact [...] I have tried to overcome this by bringing the typological questions into the foreground, even if I have realized that such a typological reduction can lend itself to many misunderstandings and, furthermore, while constituting a large part of architecture it is not the whole of architecture”. A. Rossi, *I Quaderni Azzurri (1968-1992)*, cit., n. 14, *Architettura arch. analitica - città analoga*, 5 November - 31 December 1972.

¹⁰ A. Rossi, *Aldo Rossi. Controspazio*, 4, 1974, p. 36. “In the Monte Amiata plan the balconied type summarizes the form of a continuous rectilinear path, open on one side. On the other side its doors and windows open; here the walkway is in reality a street, a skyway. It is also a corridor, or a loggia”. A. Rossi, *I Quaderni Azzurri (1968-1992)*, cit., n. 2, *Architettura*, 26 November 1968.

wrote Rossi upon finishing the works for the Gallarate 2 neighbourhood in Milan (1968-1973). These words enclose first and foremost the sense of the project as a whole: the idea of a house designed as a place in which the public and private spaces enter a continual relationship exactly as happens at the city scale; just as the typological choice appears equally clear, finding its reference in the traditional balconied houses of Milan.

The project for the Gallarate neighbourhood also represents a good example through which to try and verify Rossi's theory of composition. Ezio Bonfanti wrote that Rossi's architecture is composed by *elements*: by pieces, intended as elements that cannot be reduced further, and by *parts*, "more complex elements that can coincide in some way with entire works of architecture."¹¹ An interpretation that underscores the additive process used. "The parts are predetermined elements, architectural solutions, finished products. Established pieces of architecture that can be used in different ways. The diversity is given by the context and therefore by the compositional procedure or system used. This is necessarily additive"¹², wrote Rossi.

Such a process is compositional¹³ therefore yet again the result of a design theory which recognizes in the cognitive process the initial moment of each design approach. This includes the history, the association, and the study of references, knowledge of the city, its artefacts and its monuments. "My works of architecture, the individual projects, are in turn parts of a single work of architecture that they are unable to compose in its entirety. I conceive these as fragments"¹⁴, Rossi added.

The fragment, if we turn to Bonfanti's definition, is also a part, a completed and finished element, drawn from history, through which we can devise different compositions every time. Thus we might come to wonder how many "parts" Rossi's architecture is composed of: a finite or infinite number of elements? On a closer look at his projects, it seems clear that the elements are limited in number and, to a greater or lesser extent, recurrent.

Again, in the project for the Gallarate neighbourhood, it is easy to recognize the "pieces" of which it is composed: the street, the portico, the balcony, the stairway, the monumental column, the partition wall, and so on. Each of these elements of the composition finds its proper place and appropriate measure to represent the idea underlying the project. In this way, the collective space takes shape around the wide porticoed street built by the rhythmic sequence of a series of deep over-sized septa in virtue of the expressiveness sought¹⁵; a rhythm which is broken in correspondence

¹¹ E. Bonfanti, "Elementi e costruzione. Note sull'architettura di Aldo Rossi". *Controspazio*, 11, 10, October 1970, pp. 19-28, also in Id., *Nuovo e moderno in architettura*, edited by M. Biraghi and M. Sabatino. Milano: Bruno Mondadori, 2001, pp. 343-358. See also the correspondence between Rossi and Bonfanti included in the book edited by Biraghi and Sabatino on pp. 361-376.

¹² A. Rossi, *I Quaderni Azzurri (1968-1992)*, cit., n. 4, *Architecture*, 26 January - 30 December 1970.

¹³ Ernesto N. Rogers with whom Rossi collaborated in *Casabella-Continuità*, proposed this definition of composition: "Composing means putting together various things to make them one. But these various things could become, all together, a new one, because its components establish a relationship among them, influencing one another, establishing their synthesis, through an inner dialectic relationship", E.N. Rogers, "Utilità e bellezza della composizione architettonica". In Id., *Esperienza dell'architettura*. Milano: Skira, 1997, p. 171.

¹⁴ A. Rossi, *I Quaderni Azzurri (1968-1992)*, cit., n. 4, *Architecture*, 26 January - 30 December 1970.

¹⁵ "The question of the dimension and the scale presents itself as a principle, it also concerns the elements". A. Rossi, *I Quaderni Azzurri (1968-1992)*, cit., n. 8, *Architecture*, 10 July - 31 July 1971.

with the expansion joint, a technical element that here becomes an opportunity to build a variation in the composition which takes shape through the insertion of four cylindrical columns “of a dimension which is also exceptional, again calculated for the visual effect, in order to create in that sector a triumphant central point of rest in the unceasing flow of the eye guided by the ‘dynamic’ rhythm of the dividing walls”¹⁶.

In the same notebook (number 4), Rossi describes and explains his additive process (to himself, almost as if wishing to convince himself of the validity of his method) through a series of drawings in which the elementary volumes – parallelepipeds, cones, cylinders, pyramids and cubes – are arranged along a horizontal or vertical line¹⁷. “The union of the pieces,” he wrote, “is quite simple: the simplicity consists in the fact that the individual parts already have their configuration and it can be assumed that this is not diminished by their mutual union.”¹⁸ In this perspective, the union becomes “an eminently compositional fact” through which to build relationships between different pieces chosen from within the great depository of history. It is therefore none other than the compositional act, which can never neglect the relationship with the context and with the city, that determines new forms every time and thus new design solutions. To this end, as reiterated in *The Architecture of the City*, knowledge and interpretation of urban aspects becomes fundamental¹⁹.

The possibility of building relationships and references between parts should be attributed to the analogical process – which is also closely linked to the cognitive project dimension – with which Rossi interpreted reality to compose new forms. The application of the analogical process, he wrote, can occur in two different ways: by superimposing foreign elements or citations, “that have the value of a collage in the compositional process”²⁰; or through an “analogical analysis of the meaning of form” i.e. by resorting to one’s own imagination and therefore one’s knowledge of architecture to build new kinds of reality.

“Thus analogy presents itself as an element referring to known forms. And also the reference affects the meaning”²¹, Rossi explained. Canaletto’s *Capriccio with*

¹⁶ B. Lampariello, *Aldo Rossi e le forme del razionalismo esaltato. Dai progetti scolastici alla “città analoga” (1950-1973)*. Macerata: Quodlibet, 2017, pp. 242-246. “In the Gallarate project the elements of tension are concentrated in one part of the construction that is shorter than the approximately 200-metre long façade. Among these elements we can count on the use of the expansion joint to split the continuous horizontal line marked by the flat roof. To this is added the different height of the pillars, the 4 columns, the variations in height”, wrote Rossi in *I Quaderni Azzurri (1968-1992)*, cit., n. 47, *Analytical Architecture*, 28 May - 23 June 1971.

¹⁷ According to this interpretation, we can understand Rossi’s interest in the so-called ‘Sacred Mountains’ whose main characteristic is that of constructing a site through a sequence of composed elements in a set order, surrounded by nature.

¹⁸ A. Rossi, *I Quaderni Azzurri (1968-1992)*, cit., n. 4, *Architecture*, 26 January - 30 December 1970.

¹⁹ In “Architecture for Museums”, Rossi proposed a definition of architecture in which, it seems to me, he summarized all of his thinking about the role of the project: “[...] I mean architecture in a positive sense as a creation inseparable from the life and society in which it manifests; this is largely a collective fact. Its stable characteristics are the creation of an environment that is more conducive to life and the aesthetic intention. Architecture is built with the city”. A. Rossi, “Architettura per i musei”, cit., p. 123.

²⁰ A. Rossi, *I Quaderni Azzurri (1968-1992)*, cit., n. 14, *Architettura arch. analitica - città analoga*, 5 November - 31 December 1972.

²¹ *Ibid.*

Palladian Buildings kept at the National Gallery of Parma became – on more than one occasion – an example to illustrate precisely how it is possible to use the tool of analogy to build a new reality in which to identify oneself and feel represented precisely because it is composed of individual recognizable elements – the works of architecture Palladio designed for Vicenza and his project for the Rialto Bridge.

The contributions of which the second section of this volume is composed (*Teaching & Design*) therefore try to shed light on some of the methodological issues that we have just endeavoured to analyse, according to two prevailing points of view. The first focuses more specifically on the subject of teaching in the strict sense and therefore on the activity carried out by Rossi at university, or on particular aspects of his thinking that still appear valid assumptions to be adopted and practised in the activity of teaching. Conversely, the second theme refers to the legacy of Rossi's thinking and his influence, whether direct or indirect, on the work of some contemporary architects or our own generations.

With respect to the first field of investigation, Florencia Andreola, for example, deals with a specific period of Rossi's life, namely, the years when, as a result of the ministerial decree suspending him from the Politecnico di Milano (1971), he was awarded the post of visiting professor (*Gastdozent*) at the ETH in Zürich. Here, in a new school, but in a context which granted him an increasingly decisive role in the theoretical and operational international architectural debate, Rossi had the possibility to continue the research he had begun in Milan. The question of the relationship between typology and morphology, the role of analysis seen as a project tool, the relationship with history and references, rationalism and the question of realism, were the themes on which he concentrated his teaching activities, finding his own object of research in the interpretation of the city. This context is dealt with by Cecilia Fumagalli whose contribution sets out to verify the relevance and validity of the tool of urban analysis and the typological studies applied to the case of the Islamic city.

Andrea Oldani instead focuses on the theme of observing reality. Rossi, through a free gaze, looked at the world and re-designed it, in order to grasp the aspects to be reused in a project, to discern new possibilities with inquisitiveness. This is an attitude of openness towards reality that today more than ever should again be practised at school. This essay can complement that of Sebastiano Fabbrini, who focuses on the role of drawing in Rossi's education, and that of Marianna Charitonidou who, by retracing Rossi's American experience, for example his acquaintance with John Hejduk on the one hand, and that with the city of New York on the other, again proposes the theme of the relationship with reality as fundamental, reaffirming the role of knowledge as a driving force for the progress of knowledge and the project.

Instead, the second part is referred to in contributions that are quite different in their setting but all in some way centred around the legacy of Rossi's thinking in the case of some specific architects who have explicitly mentioned their link with the master. For example, Herzog & De Meuron who are dealt with by Francesca Belloni. Serena Acciai, instead, focuses on research into the Ticino Canton carried out by Rossi together with his pupils from Zürich, recognizing a strong analogy with the study and analysis of the construction of the Turkish-Ottoman house carried out by the architect Sedad Hakki Eldem.