

# ALDO ROSSI – ARCHITECT AND THEORIST. THE DILEMMAS OF ARCHITECTURE AFTER MODERNISM<sup>1</sup>

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From a 21st century perspective the characteristic work of Aldo Rossi (1931-1997)<sup>2</sup>, the Italian architect, theorist, artist, and designer, may look anachronistic. Today, he is considered a representative of postmodernism, though he referred to himself as a premodernist<sup>3</sup>. In his designs he applied historical canons, taking them without “a pinch of salt”, as did many postmodernists who followed Robert Venturi. His inspirations were derived from the world around him, since he considered observation to be the best school of architecture. He used the basic Platonic solids, from which, as if from building blocks, he created monumental architecture, concise in form or almost fairy-tale like (ill. 1, 2). Karen Stein<sup>4</sup>, an American architecture critic, sees a similarity between the creations of Aldo Rossi and the looks of Pinocchio, Carlo Collodi’s fictional character: “his cylindrical body, gangly columnar legs and arms, spherical head, and cone-shaped nose are Rossi’s architecture anthropomorphized”<sup>5</sup>. The architect indeed identified himself with that “easy but also neurotic, in between two worlds”<sup>6</sup>. Rossi’s output includes not only the easily recognizable forms of buildings, sketches and design projects, but first and

foremost his theory of Neo-Rational architecture, explained in masterly fashion in numerous essays and treatises. To present an honest evaluation of Aldo Rossi’s work against the background of changes in architecture in the second half of the twentieth century, we must look at his work in its entirety.

## The Mediterranean origin of historical tendencies in architecture

Aldo Rossi’s career in architecture began in the 1960s, when the rapid economic growth of developed countries made clear the ineffectuality of the doctrines of mature modernism. In philosophy, politics, culture, art, a period of postmodernism began, a time of violating modernist doctrines. In architecture, the paradigm of the modernist movement was questioned and a “revolution the against revolution”<sup>7</sup> began. A true revolution was the return to historic forms. From the middle of the 1960s, Postmodernist architecture started to negate the rigorous rules of modern style, reaching back to history, regional traditions, being playful and populist<sup>8</sup>. Among its pioneers are, undoubtedly, Robert Venturi and Aldo Rossi, whose

<sup>1</sup> The article makes use of unpublished material from the doctoral thesis titled *Neoracjonalizm Aldo Rossiego – główne założenia teoretyczne i ich wpływ na twórczość architektoniczną* (1998, promoter Prof. Andrzej Niezabitowski, D.Sc Eng. Arch.) and of the author’s notes for lectures on contemporary architecture delivered at the Fac. of Arch., Silesian University of Technology.

<sup>2</sup> Aldo Rossi was born in Milan, May 3, 1931, into a devout Catholic family. During the war, he moved with his family to Lake Como, where he attended primary school. He graduated from the A. Volta Archdiocesan Catholic Secondary School in Lecco. Many critics think that his Catholic upbringing determined the restrained form of his architectural style and Rossi agreed with this view.

<sup>3</sup> A. Rossi, P. Portoghesi, *Interview by Antonio de Bonis*, in “Architectural Design”, 1982, issue. 52, p. 14. A dozen or so years ago, the issue of “departmentalizing” of Aldo Rossi’s architecture was widely discussed. Many critics were of the opinion that Neo-Rationalism and Postmodernism are quite different, even opposing movements, even opposing; see: W. Kosiński, *Posłowie*, in: Ch. Jencks, *Architektura późnego modernizmu*, Arkady, Warszawa 1989, p.188.

<sup>4</sup> Co-author of a monograph of Aldo Rossi: M. Adjmi ed., *Aldo Rossi. The Complete Buildings and Projects 1981 - 1991*, Thames & Hudson, London 1992 (1<sup>st</sup> ed. Princeton Architectural

Press, 1991). In the introduction Rossi thanks Karen Stein for her wonderful promotion of his architecture in America.

<sup>5</sup> K. Stein, *Il Celeste Della Madonna*, in: M. Adjmi ed., op. cit., p. 269.

<sup>6</sup> M. Adjmi ed., op. cit., p.161.

<sup>7</sup> A. L. Huxtable, *The Troubled State of Modern Architecture*, New York Review of Books, 1980, no. 1, p. 22-29.

<sup>8</sup> Postmodernist architecture reached its pinnacle in 1980, when it was accorded a separate exhibition at the Venice Biennale, entitled “The Presence of the Past”, curated by Paolo Portoghesi and Robert AM Stern. Its motto was: “Again one can learn from tradition and connect one’s work with the valuable and beautiful works of the past”: B. Gadomska, A. Gliński, *Obecność przeszłości*, in “Architektura”, 1982, no. 2(408), p. 25. The Biennale in Venice occasioned controversy as to how to define the tendency of returning to history in architecture. A variety of options for the title of the exhibition were proposed: “The Architecture of Post – Modern”, “Dopo l’architettura moderna”, “Postmodern Architecture”, “Postmodern”, “La Mostra sul Postmodernismo”, “POSTMODERNISM”. Finally, the name “The Presence of the Past” was decided on. In 1981, in France, the exhibition was held under the title “The Presence of History: After Modernity”: L. C. Szacka, *Historicism versus Communication. The Big Debate at the 1980 Biennale*, in “Architectural Design”, September 2011, s. 98-105.

work differs as much as American Hollywood Postmodernism differs from the more restrained Postmodernism of Europe.

One of the classic texts on the theory and philosophy of contemporary architecture is Robert Venturi's well known book *Complexity and Contradiction in Architecture* (1966)<sup>9</sup>. In it he encourages readers to study historical styles, appreciate multivalence, complexity and heterogeneity in architecture; he negates the restraint of Mies van der Rohe, insisting that "more is not less"<sup>10</sup>. In his spectacular work he made use of historical motifs in a playfully ironic manner, introducing them into a new context. At the same time, in Europe, Italian architects were the forerunners in the search for new architectural paradigms, something emphatically stressed by the brilliant architect and theorist Paolo Portoghesi<sup>11</sup>. In Italy, both in the interwar and postwar period, there were specific conditions in favour of an architecture which combined history and modernity. In the 1920s, when functional architecture took on a totally abstract form, Italy was in the throes of Fascism. This was one of the reasons why functionalism did not dominate the Italian avant-garde, associated with Giuseppe Terragni and called "Italian Rationalism"<sup>12</sup>,

to differentiate it from the abstract rationalism of international architecture.

In the postwar reconstruction of Italy there was a continuation of the prewar traditions<sup>13</sup>. Paolo Portoghesi considered it quite natural that in a predominantly agricultural country such as Italy was in the first years after the war, the old masters maintained a dialogue with history<sup>14</sup>. The rapid development of the Italian economy in the second half of the 1950s, aided by the Marshall Plan, accelerated industrialization, especially in the northern part of the country. Migration from the rural south to the cities of the north intensified the urbanization process, growth of towns and large housing estates, built according to the principles of functional architecture. The ensuing problems became the subject of a debate on the relations between avant-garde architecture, functional and tradition.

Since the 1950s, as a result of numerous publications which touched upon the importance of context in urban and architectural planning and theoretical studies on the subject, the theoretical foundations of architecture based on traditional values developed in Italy. In 1953, Ernesto Nathan Rogers<sup>15</sup>, an architect and member of the BBPR<sup>16</sup>

<sup>9</sup> Vincent Scully, a well-known American art historian and teacher of architectural history, in the foreword to the first edition (1966) called it probably the most important writing on the making of architecture since Le Corbusier's *Vers Une Architecture*: R. Venturi, *Complexity and Contradiction in Architecture*, The Museum of Modern Art, New York, 2 ed, 1977, p. 6.

<sup>10</sup> R. Venturi, op. cit., p.16.

<sup>11</sup> P. Portoghesi, *After modern architecture*, New York, Rizoli 1982.

<sup>12</sup> Progressive architects from Gruppo 7, in their creative manifesto "Note", published in 1926 in "Ressegna Italiana" proclaimed: "The is no incompatibility between our past and our present. We do not want to break with tradition; it is tradition which transforms itself and assumes new aspects by which few may recognise it. (...) The new architecture, the true architecture must result from a rigid adherence to logic, to rationality": T. Kirk, *Italian Rationalism: Gruppo 7 & Giuseppe Terragni, MIAR & Adalberto Libera*, in *The Architecture of Modern Italy*, vol.2, Princeton Architectural Press, New York 2005, p. 74.

<sup>13</sup> Just after the war, one of the most urgent tasks was the building of housing. In 1947, at the VIIIth Triennale in Milan, the idea was conceived of building a prefabricated housing district, the QT8. The chief designer was Piero Bottoni, a prewar Italian rationalist, member of the Gruppo 7 and, together with G. Terragni, a delegate of the Italian section of CIAM in 1929 r. The district was built partly on an artificial hill called Monte Stella, created using the debris of houses destroyed during the war.

<sup>14</sup> M. Sabatini, *Pride In Modesty. Modernist Architecture and the Vernacular Tradition In Italy*, University of Toronto Press,

Toronto, Buffalo, London 2010, p. 168. One instance of such a dialogue could be the vernacular architecture of the "Villaggio" (village) of La Martella, Matera (1951), built under the direction of Lodovico Quaroni.

<sup>15</sup> Ernesto Nathan Rogers continued the ideas of the prewar Italian Rationalists and in this way instilled in the young generation of architects a respect for Italy's cultural heritage. He is a cousin of Richard Rogers, the well-known English architect of late modernism and high-tech.

<sup>16</sup> Its initiators were young architects, among them: Franco Albini, Roberto Gabetti, Ignazio Gardella, Vittorio Gregotti, Aimaro Oreglia D'Isola, Giuseppe Raineri, who were later joined by Ignazio Gardella and BBPR. BBPR was formed in 1932 by Gianluigi Banfi, Lodovico Barbiano di Belgiojoso, Enrico Peressutti, Ernesto Nathan Rogers. During the interwar period they favoured the assumptions of Italian Rationalism. After the war, they continued their architectural activity as BBPR, despite the death of Banfi in a concentration camp. An interesting example of the confrontation of various tendencies in Italian architecture is the Torre Velasca building (1954-58) in Milan, designed by BBPR as a polemic with the modern Pirelli office building, designed by Gio Ponti (1950). The former building referring in form and detail to the medieval Palazzo Vecchio in the Piazza della Signoria in Florence, is considered one of the first examples of architectural citing historical forms after the period of mature Modernism, and was criticized for eclecticism and regionalism. Reyner Bahnam accused Italian architects of "infantile regression": M. Sabatini, op. cit., p. 167.

group, architectural critic and journalist reactivated the prewar magazine “Casabella” under the new name “Casabella Continuità”<sup>17</sup>. Six years later, in 1959, Giuseppe Samonà, one of the foremost Italian architects, town planners and theoreticians of the twentieth century, published a pioneering book about the planning and future of the city *L’urbanistica e l’avvenire della città*<sup>18</sup> and, at the Istituto Universitario di Architettura in Venice<sup>19</sup>, typological studies were initiated.

From the middle of the 1960s, Italian architecture developed along two tracks, the avant-garde, for instance Superstudio and Archizoom Associati, and the conservative, e.g. La Tendenza<sup>20</sup>. The La Tendenza movement united Italian architects writing for “Casabella” and the students of E. Nathan Rogers, whose name became in some measure the mark of the movement<sup>21</sup>.

In the second half of the 1960s, three works were published in Italy which widened the postulates of La Tendenza: *L’Architettura della città* (1966) by Aldo Rossi, *Il territorio dell’architettura* (1966) by Vittorio Gregotti and Giorgio Grassi’s *La costruzione logica dell’architettura* (1967). At the XVth Triennale in Milan, in 1973, Aldo Rossi was the director of Sezione Internazionale di Architettura and co-author of the exhibition “Architettura-città”<sup>22</sup>, which, together with a commentary, appeared in

publications entitled *Architettura Razionale*<sup>23</sup>. The exhibition and catalogue brought international recognition to the Italian design theory, which, to differentiate it from Italian Rationalism and the rationalism of the Age of Enlightenment, was named Neo-Rationalism. The theory was accepted by young European architects, among others the brothers Robert and Leon Krier, Mario Botta, Giorgio Grassi, O. Mathias Ungers. In fact, thus was formed the first decidedly antimodernist movement of the second half of the twentieth century originating in Europe<sup>24</sup> and becoming an alternative for the ironic postmodernism inspired by the creations of Venturi. Among the numerous diffuse trends active in the 1970s, this movement had a direct influence on the world avant-garde, also in Poland<sup>25</sup>. The theory of Neo-Rational architecture was popularized by Aldo Rossi in his writings, teaching and designs and that is why he is generally considered the originator of Neo-Rationalism in 20<sup>th</sup> century architecture.

### Aldo Rossi – the early days

Aldo Rossi was concerned with the theory of urban planning and architecture in the 1950s, when he was still a student at the Department of Architecture of the Milan Technical University (Politecnico di Milano)<sup>26</sup>. In the first years of study he was more

<sup>17</sup> An architectural magazine founded in Milan in 1928 roku, identified with Italian Rationalism. Closed down in 1943 by decree of the Ministry of Culture.

<sup>18</sup> G. Samonà, *L’urbanistica e l’avvenire delle città negli stati europei*, Laterza, Bari 1959.

<sup>19</sup> Institute founded in 1926 (from 2001 Università Iuav di Venezia). Giuseppe Samonà was active at the institute from 1936 and, after, the war, until 1971, was its director (replaced by Carlo Scarpa, and in the years 1974 – 79 by Carlo Aymonino). In the teaching and research work of the institute, Samonà tried to combine architectural and urban design. At the Istituto Universitario di Architettura in Venice, considered the second most important school in Italy, many known Italian architects and architectural theorists were active. Among them were: from 1949 Franco Albini, Ignazio Gardella, Bruno Zevi (taught history of architecture and history of art), from 1950 Saverio Muratori, 1954 Ludovico Belgioioso, Carlo Scarpa, 1954 Ludovico Belgioioso, Giancarlo De Carlo. In the years 1963 – 68, among the new arrivals were Carlo Aymonino, Leonardo Benevolo, Manfredo Tafuri.

<sup>20</sup> La Tendenza is often equated with Neo-Rationalism: K. Frampton, *Modern Architecture, a Critical History*, Thames and Hudson Ltd, 3<sup>rd</sup> ed., 1992. Aldo Rossi defines La Tendenza as “a movement which, in the years 1960 – 70, was opposed to modern architecture”. See K. Broner, *Metafyzysen rationalism in arkkitehtuurista* in “Arkkitehti”, 1984, no. 5, p. 24 - 35.

<sup>21</sup> La Tendenza was compared to Neo-Realism in film (Antonioni, Visconti, Pasolini), a new art created basing on the history of the country.

<sup>22</sup> Together with Ezio Bonfanti, Rosaldo Bonicalzi and Massimo Scolari.

<sup>23</sup> A. Rossi, *Architettura Razionale*, in: „XV Triennale di Milano, Sezione Internazionale de Architettura”, Franco Angeli, Milan, 1973, (English version *Rational Architecture* in: P. Keogh, S. O’Donnell, S. O’Toole, *Aldo Rossi*, Gandon Editions, Dublin 1983, p. 54-57. The co-authors of the exhibition catalogue were: E. Bonfanti, R. Bonicalzi, G. Braghieri, F. Raggi, A. Rossi, M. Scolari, D. Vitale. At the exhibition were shown the works of both Italian architects and of sympathizers of Neo-Rationalism from outside Italy – the brothers Leon i Robert Krier from Luksemburg and the New York Five. The exhibits were supplemented by a presentation of the European avant-garde of the 1930s. On the occasion of the exhibition Rossi, together with Gianni Braghieri and Franco Raggi directed a film with the same title as Adolf Loos’ essay “Ornamento e Delitto”. The film was a collage of fragments of architecture with fragments of films by Fellini and Visconti, an effort to present architecture in the context of human existence.

<sup>24</sup> Young Neo-Rationalists were also sometimes referred to as “rats”.

<sup>25</sup> In Polish architecture, A. Rossi’s influence was especially evident in the 1990s.

<sup>26</sup> Aldo Rossi began his studies in 1949. In 1955 he continued them in Prague and travelled around the Soviet Union, a country which, as he later often stated, made a great impression on him. In the same year he began to write for “Casabella Continuità”. In 1956 he began work at the design studio of Ignazio Gardella

interested in Neoclassicism but under the influence of his charismatic tutors Ernesto Nathan Rogers and Giuseppe Samonà, he turned his attention to the problems of Italian urban planning, housing and town development. Years later, when remembering his studies, he notes that the crisis of the modernist movement caused genuine confusion in the area of design and teaching of architecture. Avant-garde functionalism based the theory of design on several fixed notions, such as “method” and “function”. When the Modernist movement broke down, the “recipe” for design also failed. According to Rossi, an aid in the search for new foundations for designing was Giuseppe Samonà’s book<sup>27</sup>. Its author, countering the evident stagnation of architectural techniques, pointed to a new basis for design inspiration and studies – the city, perceived for the first time in its entirety, as an unceasing process of evolution<sup>28</sup>.

For Aldo Rossi and the development of theoretical studies of the new architecture, an important period was his cooperation with “Casabella Continuità”<sup>29</sup>. The writing of articles meant that he needed to find out about the social and political realities of the country and provided him with a theoretical basis for his later

research and creative work. The middle of the 1960s saw a culmination of Rossi’s interest in the mutual relations between the typology and morphology of cities. The architect began to utilize the results of his research both in his journalistic writings and in his teaching work. First, in 1961, invited by Hans Schmidt, he went to East Germany to give a series of guest lectures at the Berlin Deutsche Bauakademie. Next, in 1963, as assistant to Lodovico Quaroni, he participated in workshops on urban planning at the Scuola Urbanistica in Arezzo. At the same time, he was an assistant to Carlo Aymonino at the Istituto Universitario di Architettura in Venice, where, until 1965, he conducted research and gave seminars on the typology and morphology of cities<sup>30</sup>. Rossi presented the results of his research in many publications<sup>31</sup>, of which among the best known today is the essay *Architettura per i musei*<sup>32</sup>, where Rossi declares “the search for a real, useful theory of design (...), as an integral part of the theory of architecture”<sup>33</sup>. After ending his cooperation with Carlo Aymonino, Rossi was appointed professor at the Department of Architecture of the Milan Technical University<sup>34</sup> and shortly, in 1966, published his creative manifesto

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and Marco Zanuso. In 1959 he defended his diploma work and graduated and, at this time, also began his cooperation with the journal “Il Contemporaneo” in Milan.

<sup>27</sup> G. Samonà, *L’urbanistica e l’avvenire...*, op. cit.

<sup>28</sup> A. Rossi, *Architecture for Museums*, in: P. Keogh, S. O’Donnell, S. O’Toole, op.cit., p. 14 – 25 (1<sup>st</sup> ed.: *Architettura per i musei*, 1966).

<sup>29</sup> From 1955-58 he occasionally wrote articles for the journal (no. 208 - 219). From 1958-60 he was part of the research team (no. 221-284), from 1961 - 64 was a member of the editing board (no. 249 - 294). After publishing 31 articles, he ended writing for “Casabella” in 1964 when Rogers left (nr 294-295). The journal stopped coming out in the same year; see: P. Keogh, P; O’Donnell, S. O’Toole, op. cit.

<sup>30</sup> M. Bandini, *Typological Theories in Architectural Design*, in *Companion to Contemporary Architectural Thought*, B. Farmer, H. Louw, Routledge, London, 1993, p. 385–395. Rossi’s mentors when he was conducting this research were Giuseppe Samonà i Saverio Muratori. His theoretical foundation was based on the theory of Giulio Carlo Argan, a well-known Italian historian and art critic, an advocate for the protection of the environment and the historic context of Italian cities. Especially important were the notions referring to typology published in the encyclopedia of art: G. C. Argan, entry: *Typologia* in *Enciclopedia Universale dell’Arte*, no. 1, vol. XIV, Fondazione Cini, Venice 1958. See. M. Bandini, op. cit., p. 390. As to his interest in typology Giuseppe Samonà writes in the introduction to the book: G. Samonà, *L’unità Architettura urbanistica. Scritti e progetti 1929-1973*, P. Lovero, Franco Angeli, Milano 1978. Severio Muratori, architect and theoretician specialized in studies of the typomorphology of the city, mainly Venice. His early publications were of great importance for the development

of Neo-Rationalism: S. Muratori, *Vita e storia delle città*, w „Rassegna critica d’architettura”, 1950, nr 11-12, s. 3-52; S. Muratori, *Studi per un operante storia urbana di Venezia*, Poligrafico dello Stato, Roma 1959. Considered the “spiritual father” of Aldo Rossi and Carlo Aymonino.

<sup>31</sup> Material for classes for the academic year 1963/64 were published in *Considerazioni sulla morfologia urbana e la tipologia edilizia* and *I problemi tipologici e la residenza w Aspetti e problemi della tipologia edilizia*, Libreria Cluva, Venezia 1964, p. 15 -31.

<sup>32</sup> A. Rossi, *Architettura per i musei*, 1966, w: G. Canella, M. Coppa, V. Gregotti, A. Rossi, A. Samonà, G. Samonà, L. Semerani, G. Scimemi, M. Tafuri, *Teoria della progettazione architettonica*, Dedalo Libri, Bari 1968, s. 122-13, on the basis of material from the school year of 1965/66. Edition cited in the article: *Architecture for Museums*, translation by Luigi Beltrand in: P. Keogh, op. cit., p. 14 – 25.

<sup>33</sup>A. Rossi, *Architecture for Museums*, op. cit, p. 15. The issues discussed in this essay are developed in: A. Rossi, *La città come fondamento dello studio dei caratteri degli edifici*, in *Raporti tra morfologia urbana e tipologia edilizia*, Cluva, Venice 1966 (English version *The City as the Basis for the Study of the Characters of Buildings*, translation by J. Landry, in: P. Keogh, op. cit. p. 27-33.

<sup>34</sup> At the same time, he kept up contacts with Catalonian architects. In 1971 the Ministry of Education barred Rossi and seven other teachers from the Department of Architecture in Milan from teaching in Italy because of their political and cultural convictions. This did not stop him giving lectures from 1972-75 at the Department of Architecture of the Zurich Technical University. In 1975 he was again allowed to teach in Italy but he returned to the Department of Architecture in Venice, not Milan.

*L'Architettura della città*<sup>35</sup>, which is often compared with Robert Venturi's *Complexity and Contradiction in Architecture*, published the same year. The book is a collection of the basic principles shaping the theory of Neo-Rational architecture and was compared by the prominent architect Peter Eisenman to the theoretical treatises of the Renaissance<sup>36</sup>. As a supplement to this work, in 1981 Aldo Rossi wrote his famous poetic *A Scientific Autobiography*<sup>37</sup>, basing on his travel notes, kept since 1971, and on personal contacts with writers and poets. Only by becoming acquainted with both these publications, is it possible to appreciate the poetic dimension of his ascetic architecture. Therefore, to know more it is necessary to take a closer look at both *L'Architettura della città* and *A Scientific Autobiography*<sup>38</sup>.

### The theory of architectural design according to Aldo Rossi

In the introduction to *L'Architettura della città* Aldo Rossi settles accounts with the modernist movement in the architecture of the first half of the twentieth century, criticizing it primarily for its lack of esteem for the natural development of historic cities, especially evident during the reconstruction following the destruction of wartime and during the modernization of historic districts of towns. Though he expresses criticism, he nevertheless respects the determination with which the theorists of Functionalism formed principles regulating the development of architecture and urban planning in the age of mature Modernism. Rossi begins his defining of the basic concepts with a definition of the city, the main theme of his book: "The city, which is the subject of this book, is to be understood here as architecture. By architecture I mean only not only the

visible image of the city and the sum of its different architectures, but architecture as construction, the construction of the over time"<sup>39</sup>. The city undergoes a double process: first of all it is an object which was created as the labour of human hands (manufatto); secondly it is subject to changes resulting from the passing of time and, as a result, an autonomous work is created, an artifact<sup>40</sup>.

The book contains four subject areas. In the first, Rossi describes and classifies the structure of the city, concerns himself with issues of typology and the theory of permanence; in the second he analyzes the structure of the city understood as a group of different elements; in the third, he considers the architecture of the city, which is made up of singular places (locus solus) and "collective memory"; in the last he discusses the dynamics of city development and political decisions concerning its development<sup>41</sup>.

Aldo Rossi understands architecture in categories of science, and typology as one of its tools. In *L'Architettura della città* he pays special attention to the Enlightenment theory. Among others, he analyzes the views of the architect and theoretician Antoin Quatremère de Quincy, author of the definition of the word "type", published in the *Dictionnaire historique d'architecture* (1832). Rossi defines *type* as the basic, logical principle of building form. He writes: "The word 'type' represents not so much the image of a thing to be copied or perfectly imitated as the idea of an element that must itself serve as a rule for the model. (...) The model, understood in terms of the practical execution of art, is an object according to which one can conceive works that do not resemble one another at all. Everything is precise and given in the model; everything is more or less vague on the type. Thus we see that the imitation of

<sup>35</sup> A. Rossi, *L'architettura della città*, Padova: Marsilio 1966. The next Italian edition of the book appeared in 1970 with a new introduction. Translations into Spanish, German and Portuguese were also published. In 1978 the fourth Italian edition appeared, with new illustrations. The first English edition came out in 1982 and contained drawings and texts produced over a period of fifteen years. Thus, the English version is a witness to the developing of Rossi's ideas. This article examines the English version of the book: A. Rossi, *The Architecture of the City*, translated by D. Girardo, J. Ockman, Oppositions Books, 1992.

<sup>36</sup> A. Rossi, *The Architecture...*, op. cit., introduction.

<sup>37</sup> A. Rossi, *A Scientific Autobiography*, The MIT Press, Cambridge, Massachusetts and London, England 1981.

<sup>38</sup> The further part of the text contains many quotes. The Author is of the opinion that Rossi explains his architectural theory and practice best himself.

<sup>39</sup> A. Rossi, *The Architecture...*, op. cit., p. 21.

<sup>40</sup> In the English translation the term "artifact", is used. This is a narrowing of the Italian "fatti" which denotes facts, actions, deeds, achievements. The Italian "fatto urbano" comes from the French "faite urbanie". The English translation "urban artifact" is not adequate for the many meanings of the original which refers not only to physical objects in the city but to their history, geography, structure and connections with the life of the city. Rossi uses the term in the much broader Italian sense. See. P. Eisenman, in: *Aldo Rossi*, op. cit., p. 5. The article uses the terms "artifacts" and "urban artefacts".

<sup>41</sup> A. Rossi, *The Architecture...*, op. cit., p. 27.

types involves nothing that fillings or spirit cannot recognize...<sup>42</sup>. As an example he gives the “central type” of a church which is fixed and constant, though the form of the temple changes with time because architectural style changes, as does the construction, the function and the community taking part in religious life. Typology is the study of elements of a city and of architecture that cannot be further reduced. On the architectural scale types manifest themselves in the mutual relations of the spaces within the building; on the urban scale, the city is made up of spatial elements, among which can be distinguished historically determined types of layout: a block of houses surrounded by open space, a block of houses facing the street, a deep block of houses that almost totally occupies the available space, houses with closed courts and small interior structures. The basis of classification of a type cannot be a functional analysis, because type would depend on the organization of a function which changes over time, and because there exist features which lack a concrete function. From this Rossi concludes that the main criteria for analyzing a city should not be issues of function, as practised by avant-garde modernists, as then issues of urban landscape and the form of the city are relegated to the background. In the conclusion to his discussion of typology Rossi states that it is useful not only for classification but also for creative inspiration.

Rossi also stresses the importance of time in the process of shaping the city. Invoking Marcel Poète’s point of view, sharpened by Bergson’s philosophy, he constructs a concept of continuity, permanence. He writes: “These persistences are revealed through monuments, the physical signs of the past, as well as through the persistence of a city’s basic layout and plans”<sup>43</sup>. So, though the plan of the city is sometimes deformed, its foundations remain unchanged. He is of the opinion that “contextualism” treated only as adapting to the historical urban plan can lead to inhibiting the dynamic development of the city. He writes: “...so-called contextual preservation is related to the city in time like the embalmed corpse of a saint to the image of his historical personality”<sup>44</sup>. Peter Eisenman, in the introduction to the English edition of the book, assesses that, considering the contextual urbanism which dominates fifteen years

after the first publication of the book, Aldo Rossi’s text can be seen as an anticipatory argument against “empty formalism” of context, understood only as a relationship of figures on the plan of the city<sup>45</sup>.

Aldo Rossi devotes considerable attention to the concept of “space” and cites the theories of Andrea Palladio, Francesco Milizia, Viollet - le - Duc, and Maurice Halbwachs. He explains that “The *locus* is the relationship between a certain specific location and the buildings that are in it. It is at once singular and universal”<sup>46</sup>. “Locus” is what allows urban artifacts to attain the possibility of existence, it expresses both the physical reality and the history. “Locus” is determined by space and time, topography and form, events ancient and contemporary<sup>47</sup>. “Singular places” (*locus solus*) are recognizable through architectural forms, signs whose task is to date events. Architecture creates the singularity of “place” and owing to its specific form, it can survive many changes, especially changes in functions. Historic buildings often change their function, so Rossi recognizes that “function follows form”, in contrast to the functional theories of Modernism in which “form follows function”<sup>48</sup>. The issues Rossi discusses in his book aim to explain notions connected with the principle of “analogy”, such as “analogous city” and “analogous design”, important components of the Neo-Rational theory of design. Rossi argues that the principle of “analogy” can be a helpful tool both in creating the theory and in practice, that a book can come into being analogically to a building or drawing<sup>49</sup>. He introduces the concept of time and place of analogy, which do not refer to the real time of the city. The time of an analogy measures both history and memory, similarly the place of an analogy refers to a historic place and memory associated with it.

In Rossi’s theory the principle of analogy evokes two kinds of transformations: dislocation of place and dissolution of scale. The inspiration for the first idea was the caprice of Giovanni Antonio Canaletto “Capriccio con il ponte di Palladio” (1753 – 59) (ill. 3). This fanciful painting depicts three designs by Andrea Palladio: the unrealized design of the Venetian Ponte di Rialto, and the Basilica Palladiana and Palazzo Chiericati in Vicenza, placed in an unreal setting above a Venetian canal with gondolas. The three different places for which these designs

<sup>42</sup> op. cit., p. 40.

<sup>43</sup> op. cit., p. 58.

<sup>44</sup> op. cit., p. 60.

<sup>45</sup> P. Eisenman, in: op. cit., p. 6.

<sup>46</sup> op. cit., p. 103.

<sup>47</sup> op. cit., p. 107.

<sup>48</sup> Before Rossi, such a thesis was proposed by L. Kahn.

<sup>49</sup> op. cit., p. 8.

were prepared have been reduced to one – the scenery of Venice. This way Canaletto created a view so typical of Venice that the Venetians themselves were convinced that such a place exists somewhere in their city. The idea of an “analogous city” was born of the hypothesis that certain primary artifacts exist, around which others are situated, functioning according to an analogous system<sup>50</sup>. So the “analogous city” (ill. 4) is not a real, true city but is analogous to the real one.

The inspiration for manipulating scale in the “analogous design process” was Leon Battista Alberti’s metaphor referring to the city and home: “the city is like a large house and the house in turn like a small city” and as an example Rossi gives Diocletian’s Palace at Split. “Split discovered in its own typological form an entire city, and thus the building came to refer analogically to the form of a city. This example is evidence that the single building can be designed by analogy to the city”<sup>51</sup>. Applying the “analogy” principle in the whole of his work, Rossi transfers various elements from one design context to another, arbitrarily changing their scale.

Greatly simplifying, the main principles of design practice resulting from the theory presented in *L’Architettura della città* can be summarized as follows:

- the architecture of the city is not only the visible image but an autonomous, collective work subject to changes resulting from the passage of time,
- „type” is the basis, the logical principle of building form,
- functional analysis cannot be the basis for classifying type,
- typology consists in studying the elements of a city or architecture, which cannot be further reduced,
- though the plan of a city is sometimes deformed, its essence is constant,
- “place” is what allows urban artifacts to exist; it expresses both the physical reality and the history; “singular places” are recognizable through architectural form,
- the principle of “analogy” means that there exist certain primary artifacts, around which others situate themselves according to an analogous system, the consequence of which are two kinds of transformation: change of place and change of scale,

- the principle of “analogy” can be a helpful tool both in the creation of a theory and in practice.

Years later, Rossi assessed his treatise on the architecture of the city in his autobiography “Around 1960 I wrote *L’Architettura della città*, a successful book. At that time, I was not yet thirty years old and (...) I wanted to write a definitive work: it seemed to me that everything, once clarified, could be defined (...) I searched for the fixed laws of a timeless typology. (...) I read books on urban geography, topography and history, like a general who wishes to know every possible battlefield – the high grounds, the passages, the woods. I walked the cities of Europe to understand their plans and classify them according to types. (...) I often ignored the secret feelings I had for those cities; it was enough to know the system that governed them”<sup>52</sup>. Later on he admits that with time he learnt to see architecture in more depth: “Actually, I was discovering my own architecture. A confusion of courtyards, suburban houses, roofs, gas storage drums comprised my first exploration of a Milan that seemed fantastic to me. The bourgeois world of villas by lakes, the corridors of the boarding schools, the huge kitchens in country houses – these were the memory of a landscape. (...) Yet their insistence on things revealed a craft to me. (...) Thus typological and functional certainty were extended”<sup>53</sup>.

In *A Scientific Autobiography* Rossi writes very personally about architecture. He does not avoid the context of his own experiences. His memories of his youth spent in Como explain the simple form of his designs and his penchant for sketching ordinary objects in the context of architecture “(...) drawing the coffeepots, the pans, the bottles. I particularly loved the strange shapes of the coffeepots enameled blue, green, red; they were miniatures of the fantastic architectures that I would encounter later. Today, I still love to draw these large coffeepots, which I liken to brick walls (...)”<sup>54</sup> (il. 5). Observation, memory and repetition are present in his work, about which he writes: “I particularly love empty theatres with few lights lit and, most of all, those partial rehearsals where the voices repeat the same bar, interrupt it, resume it. (...) Likewise in my projects, repetition, collage, the displacement of an element from one

<sup>50</sup> op. cit., p. 165-166.

<sup>51</sup> op. cit., p. 174.

<sup>52</sup> A. Rossi, *A Scientific...*, op. cit., p. 16.

<sup>53</sup> op. cit.

<sup>54</sup> op. cit., p. 2.

design to another, always places me before another potential project which I would like to do but which is also a memory of some other thing”<sup>55</sup>. And later: “Perhaps the observation of things has remained my most important formal education; for observation later becomes transformed into memory”<sup>56</sup>.

Some dozen years later, after having written his scientific autobiography, in a conversation with the French architect and urban planner Bernard Huet, he again accented the importance of observation in an architect’s work: “I always tell my co-workers and students that they should, above all, look at things, because it is through observation that one can learn the most. Someone visiting Paris can, for example, go to a museum, or simply go for a walk, and this view of the city can be enough to enrich his individual style of architecture”<sup>57</sup>. The mood of Rossi’s designs, especially in his early work, reminds one of the metaphysical paintings of Giorgio de Chirico from the *Pittura metafisica* period, or the projects of Étienne-Louis Boullée, the 18<sup>th</sup> century classicist architect – visionary, about whom Rossi wrote „Boullée explicitly asserts that he has discovered the architecture of shadows, and hence the architecture of light. With this insight he taught me how light and shadow are nothing but the other face of chronological time, the fusion of that atmospheric and chronological tempo which displays and then consumes architecture (...). . Towards the end Rossi says: “So I continue my architectural activity with the same persistence, and it seems to me that my vacillation between a rigid and historical geometry and the quasi – naturalism of objects may be a precondition for this type of work”<sup>59</sup>.

Aldo Rossi’s designs were the result of his Neo-Rationalist theories of architecture. When we analyze his architectural work, we can see that, in spite of an evolution of form, his way of designing basically remained unchanged. In his first period Rossi used simple “puristic” spatial solids, devoid of detail, like the design “manifestoes”<sup>60</sup> which characterized his work in the 1960s. From 1980, he “softened” their

form, reaching for regional and classic motifs, and from the 1980s stressed the monumental features in shaping architecture, especially evident in the unrealized projects of the nineties and later.

### **Aldo Rossi’s Neo-Rational projects manifestoes”**

The architecture of the years from 1960-1980, characterized by restraint and simplicity, Aldo Rossi called the “puristic” period of his early work when, in imitation of Enlightenment architects, he reduced the form of his architecture to simple abstract geometric solids: cubes, cylinders, cones and spheres<sup>61</sup>. His favourite shape was the equilateral triangle because, as he explained later in his autobiography he liked a certain kind of disorder within the boundaries of order and the triangle made possible such a joining of three different points with straight lines. He said that the geometric character of much of his architecture, to a large extent, was the result of his obsession with the triangle during his studies at the Milan Technical University, where he carried out real triangulation measurements for his classes in topography. For him the triangle was the Holy Trinity, it was Professor Gavinelli who taught geodesy and topography in Milan<sup>62</sup>.

His first project after graduating was an attempt to apply this idea, which he later developed in his theoretical works. Together with the architect Gianni Braghieri, he carried out a conceptual study for the modernization of the degraded historical complex along Farini street in Milan (1960). The concept on the urban scale was to conform to the historic fabric of the city, and on the architectural scale to retain the characteristic architectural style of the buildings of the district, without copying its historic form. This was the rule he advised for historic cities several years later in *L’Architettura della città*, recognizing that the permanent code of the city is its topography, its plan and type of build.

From among the dozen or so architectural projects made before 1970, only a few were built. All have

<sup>55</sup> op. cit., p. 20.

<sup>56</sup> op. cit., p. 23.

<sup>57</sup> A. Rossi, B. Huet, *A conversation*, in A. Rossi, H. Geisert, *Aldo Rossi, architect*, Academy Editions, London and New York, 1994, p. 18.

<sup>58</sup> A. Rossi, *A Scientific...*, op. cit., p. 47.

<sup>59</sup> op. cit., p. 83.

<sup>60</sup> Puristic architecture is understood here by the Author as geometric in form, clear in composition. The term purism

should not be associated with the purism of Le Corbusier and Ozenfant from the period 1916 – 25, or with the purism meant as the aspiration to give all historic buildings a unified stylized character.

<sup>61</sup> A. Rossi, *La città analoga*, “Lotus”, 1976, n.13, p. 4-7 (English edition. A. Rossi, *An Analogical Architecture*, in P. Keogh, 1983, op. cit., p. 58 – 64, translated by David Stewart).

<sup>62</sup> A. Rossi, P. Portoghesi, op. cit., s. 14.

in common a simplicity and economy of form. Probably the most characteristic examples are the designs for an unbuilt Monument to the Resistance, in Cuneo (1962)<sup>63</sup> and a second, partly completed design in Segrate (1965), as well as the projects for revitalizing the Piazza della Pilotta in Parma (1964), the Paganini Theatre and the Edmund Amicis school in Broni (1969/70).

The monument in Cuneo was to stand at the foot of the Boves mountains, where heroic battles were fought during the war. It consists of a reinforced concrete cuboid with 12m walls and an interior viewing platform, from which a long slit cut in the wall allows observation onto the field of battle. Rossi will use an identical form in 1988 when designing his urban monument at the entrance to the Via Croce Rossa metro station, on the city square in Milan (ill. 6). The Monument to the Resistance in Segrate is part of the development of the square in front of the town hall (ill. 7,8). Around the square, surrounded by a wall, columns stand, like ruins (ill. 9). The focal point is the monument to resistance fighters, built of enormous blocks: a cylinder and a cuboid on a triangular base with straight walls. As in Cuneo, the interior of the monument has stairs and a viewing platform. Light and shade fall sharply on the severe concrete blocks – the chiaroscuro effect is a symbol of passing time. The simple solids used here were often made use of in other projects. Repetition of the same motifs in various conditions exemplifies the principle of analogy formulated in his design theory.

In 1964, Aldo Rossi was one of seven architects<sup>64</sup> invited to participate in a competition project – the rebuilding of the 18th century Paganini Theatre and revitalization of the Piazza Della Pilotta in Parma<sup>65</sup> (ill. 10, 11). Concerning this project Rossi wrote: „The theatre in Parma induced me to consider the monument. I had always thought of architecture as monument, irrespective of the function it was to serve. (...) A theatre can be the place for performances but it must first and foremost possess its own specific architectural style. (...) The Greek theatre was an urban issue, as it was a meeting place for all the city’s inhabitants. (...) In Parma I made use of these principles. I designed a cylindrical

form resting on columns, a roofed promenade on a simple colonnade which could be a type of portico. I intended to create urban architecture, to give the building a public character”<sup>66</sup>. Rossi approached the task in accordance with the assumptions of Neo-Rational architecture, first deciding on the type of build. In comparison to the other designs, Rossi’s proposal was extremely simple.

In his project for the modernization and extension of the Edmund Amicis school in Broni near Padua, completed in 1970, Aldo Rossi defined his position concerning the relationship between the new build and the historical. The extension of the school, built in 1900, on the plan of a horseshoe, was designed with an inside courtyard surrounded by galleries on two floors, with slim columns (ill. 12). The background for the columns was to be the original wall of the old school, so that „that reference to the past could be seen by comparing the materials”<sup>67</sup>. About his project Rossi said: „This work, despite its small scale, is particularly important because of the meaning my work assumes through direct confrontation with the old building. Most of all I tried, from the very first, to stress the contrast between two separate bodies, one taking form inside the other. (...) The same method can serve as an approach to the conservation of ancient buildings and the renovation of historical town centers. In such cases, each new addition, however independent in its conception, exists physically within a predetermined context. Not only is this context different in formal terms, but also it has its own dimension in time, which must be taken into account whenever the context is to be modified. (...) The recent tendency towards environmental improvements, preservation, maintaining old facades – a sort of false embalming process - leads to the eventual decomposition of both architecture and townscape”<sup>68</sup>.

Among the most important design “manifestoes” of Neo-Rationalist architecture are undoubtedly the Gallarate 2 estate on Monte Amiata in Milan and the cemetery in Modena. The residential building completed in 1974, on the Milan estate, was the first of Rossi’s designs noticed by the architectural critics and public opinion. During the XVth Triennale in Milan (1973), it was shown as an example of the practical application of the theory of

<sup>63</sup> Competition project together with L. Meda and G. U. Polesello.

<sup>64</sup> Beside Carlo Aymonino, Luigi Caccia-Dominioni, Roberto Gabetti, Vittorio Gandolfi, Luigi Pellegrin, Paolo Portoghesi.

<sup>65</sup> „L’Architettura”, 1966, no 129, p. 168 - 176.

<sup>66</sup> G. Braghieri, *Also Rossi*, Verlag für Architektur Artemis, Zürich, München, 1984, p. 36.

<sup>67</sup> op. cit., p. 69.

<sup>68</sup> A. Rossi, *Thoughts about my Recent Work*, in “Architecture and Urbanism”, 1976, no. 5, p. 83.

Neo-Rationalist architecture<sup>69</sup>. Professor Geoffery Broadbent, a researcher who was studying at the time the application of modern trends in architectural and urban design, defined the building on the Gallarate estate a paradigm of the Neo-Rational design theory, similar to Marc-Antoine Laugier's model of a "primitive cottage" – considered a paradigm of Rationalist architecture of the second half of the 18<sup>th</sup> century<sup>70</sup>. Aldo Rossi worked on the design of the building from 1967 to 1969 as part of the team of Carlo Aymonino, author of the whole urban layout which consisted of four oblong blocks of flats, situated radially around an amphitheatre<sup>71</sup> (il. 13). Rossi was the author of a four storey block of flats<sup>72</sup>, situated parallel to the central building designed by Aymonino. For Aldo Rossi's design theory, the "moment of typological choice" was the most important moment of the "formal choice"<sup>73</sup>, that is why for the building in Gallarate he chose the gallery type, which he explained as follows: „In my design for the residential block in the Gallarate district of Milan there is an analogical relationship with certain engineering works that mix freely with both the corridor typology and a related feeling I have experienced in the architecture of the traditional Milanese tenements, where the corridor signifies a life-style bathed in everyday occurrences, domestic intimacy, and varied personal relationships"<sup>74</sup>. In the context of Aymonino's tall blocks, Rossi's building has a much more human scale, in spite of its very reduced solid shape. The façade of the building is a straight columnade and the dark square frames of windows

contrast with the light walls, creating a monotonous architecture, in accordance with Rossi's intention that they should only be a background for the various manifestations of the life of residents (ill. 14, 15). As he watched the house being settled, he wrote: „Only very recently, walking in front of it, I saw the first open windows, some laundry hung out over the balustrades to dry...those first shy hints of the life it will take on when fully inhabited. I am convinced that the spaces intended for daily use - the front portico, the open corridors meant to function as streets, the perches - will cast into relief, as it were, the dense flow of everyday life"<sup>75</sup>. When analyzing the architecture of the house in Gallarate, it is easy to see that the same elements have been used but on a different scale. There are also new forms, such as the division of square openings into quarters, or the St Andrew's cross, motifs which will be used often in future projects.

The second of the great "manifestoes" – the cemetery of San Cataldo in Modena was designed in 1971<sup>76</sup>. Aldo Rossi won a two stage competition for the extension of the 19<sup>th</sup> century cemetery of Andrea Costa. Designing the necropolis "L'azzurro del cielo", together with Gianni Braghieri, he called it a "fundamental work" for the understanding of Neo-Rational architecture<sup>77</sup>. The winning design stood out not only in the quality of the drawing but also in the masterly incorporation into the urban context, while most of the other designs referred only to the historic details of the cemetery, ignoring its spatial layout<sup>78</sup> (ill. 16).

<sup>69</sup> A. Rossi, *An Analogical Architecture*, op. cit., p. 58-64.

<sup>70</sup> G. Broadbent, *Emerging Concepts in Urban Space Design*, Van Nostrand Reinhold, New York, 1990, p. 186.

<sup>71</sup> See "L'Architettura", 1971, p. 182–187. Carlo Aymonino designed three eight storey buildings of a brutal architecture, comparable to the Marseille Unit or the Centre in Chandigarh by Le Corbusier. When designing the flats Aymonino based on the "existenzminimum" type of flat, he also proposed a consistent colour code for the whole complex. An analysis of types of flats is given in: C. Aymonino ed. *L'abitazione razionale: atti dei Congressi C.I.A.M. 1929-1930*, Padova, Marsilio 1971. See: G. Broadbent, op. cit., p. 172–175.

<sup>72</sup> The building is situated on a rising, is 182m long and 12m wide. On the ground floor there is a double row of columns which level the height differences of the ground. The columnade on one side comprises reinforced concrete posts 1m in diameter, on the other – shields 3m long and 20cm wide, the spacing between axes is 1.45 m. Where the ground begins to dip, there are four massive columns 1.8m in diameter. The space between the shields on the ground floor is designated for trade. Five groups of staircases lead to the level of open galleries

– passages, 1.85m wide, leading in turn to the entrances of the flats. 1.5m square apertures are cut out in the wall of the gallery. The staircase is lightened by a huge square opening divided into four smaller squares with 2.8m sides, covered by a metal grid. The openings and the balustrades of the loggias have divisions in the shape of the St Andrew's cross. The windows are also square and divided into four parts. The basic flat has two rooms, a kitchen and bathroom.

<sup>73</sup> C. Aymonino, V. Gregotti, V. Pastor, G. Polesello, A. Rossi, L. Semerani, G. Valle, *Progetto realizzato*. Venezia: Marsilio 1980, pp. 156-157.

<sup>74</sup> A. Rossi, *An Analogical...*, op. cit, p. 62.

<sup>75</sup> A. Rossi, A. Rossi, *Thoughts about...*, op. cit.

<sup>76</sup> In 1967 the Modena authorities decided to extend the historic cemetery by announcing a competition but the idea was only put into practice in 1971. The basic assumption was that the new cemetery should refer to the historic cemetery of Andrea Costa and the neighbouring Jewish cemetery. The cemetery was only partly built according to the original design.

<sup>77</sup> A. Rossi, *An Analogical...*, op. cit., p. 61.

<sup>78</sup> B. Taschen ed., *Architectural Competitions*, Köln 1994, p. 102 – 109.

Also in the case of the cemetery, Rossi preceded his plans for the extension with typological studies, in accordance with the theory of Neo-Rationalism. Referring to Italian tradition, he designed the cemetery as a “city of the dead”<sup>79</sup>. When describing the design, he gives the Roman tomb of Eurysaces near the Porta Maggiore (1<sup>st</sup> c. BC) as a model. The Costa cemetery, built on an oblong plan, is surrounded by a roofed colonnade. Rossi also designs the new cemetery on a rectangular plan and links it with the historical axis of the composition. The interior, like a town square, is surrounded by a two storey gallery, with a double row of columns on the ground floor, typologically connecting with the colonnade of Costa’s cemetery. The neoclassical columns have been replaced by reinforced concrete shields between which, as in the street, flowers can be bought. The upper floor of the gallery contains columbaria. Within the cemetery Rossi also planned a cone-shaped morgue, columbaria, tombs and a mausoleum of war casualties, only partially completed (ill. 17-21). The rows of tombs arranged on the plan of a triangle, are sometimes compared to the skeleton of a fish – the symbol of Christianity or of man.

When looking for inspiration for this project, Aldo Rossi mentions in the *Scientific Autobiography* his stay in hospital after a serious car accident<sup>80</sup>: “Perhaps as a result of this incident, the project for the cemetery at Modena was born in the little hospital of Slavonski Brod and, simultaneously, my youth reached its end. I lay in a small (...) near a window through which I looked at the sky and a little garden. Lying nearly immobile, I thought of the past, but sometimes I did not think: I merely gazed at the trees and the sky. The presence of things and my separation from things – bound up also with the painful awareness of my own bones – brought me back to my childhood. During the following summer, in my study for the project (of the cemetery), perhaps only this image and the pain in my bones remained with me: I saw the skeletal structure of the body as a series of fractures to be reassembled. (...) I had identified death with the morphology of the skeleton

(...) I now realize, however, that to regard death as a kind of fracture is a one-sided interpretation<sup>81</sup>. The gabled roofs of the columbaria are a “sky-blue” colour, like the design’s title “L’azzurro del cielo”, or like the sky seen by Rossi in the Slovenian hospital. The Mausoleum for victims of the war is a red cube without ceiling or roof, with regular square empty voids as windows – this is the “House of the Dead” resembling the tomb of Eurysaces. In Rossi’s imagination it is like “deserted houses on the river bank, abandoned for years in the wake of the great floods. In these houses one can still find broken cups, iron beds, shattered glass(...)”<sup>82</sup>.

The design for the cemetery in Modena is probably the most discussed of Rossi’s works. It brought him fame, popularity, but also many critical comments about which he wrote: “I remember how this project provoked ferocious attacks on me which I did not comprehend; attacks were even directed at my entire architectural activity. Yet what had a greater impact on me was the critics reduction of the project to a sort of neo-Enlightenment experiment. I believe that this reaction occurred above all because it was seen as a translation of the work of Etienne-Louis Boullée, not because of any critical intention”<sup>83</sup>. This design, as usual, has much repetition, elements which Rossi used there and would use again in later work. The colonnade of straight shields is identical with the one in the arcades in Gallarate, the cube of the “House of the Dead” is empty inside like the monument at Cuneo, etc. Rossi wrote: „In like fashion I could put together an album relating to my designs and consisting only of things already seen in other places: galleries, silos, old houses, factories, farmhouses in the Lombard countryside or near Berlin, and many more – something between memory and an inventory”<sup>84</sup>.

Aldo Rossi designed many structures of various sizes and functions, constructing architecture from simple blocks, as on the Gallarate estate and in the Modena cemetery. Some characteristic examples are: the buildings of the primary school in Fagano Olona (1972-76) and the secondary school in Broni

<sup>79</sup> H. G. Hannesen, H. Gerhard, *Cara Architectura!*, in *Aldo Rossi: i architect*, op.cit., p. 43. Early Etruscan or Roman tombs in appearance resembled houses.

<sup>80</sup> On the way to Istanbul, between Belgrade and Zagreb.

<sup>81</sup> A. Rossi, *A Scientific...*, op. cit., p. 11. Today this text has an added, symbolic meaning, On September 4, 1997, Aldo Rossi

died in a Milan hospital, as a result of injuries sustained in a car accident.

<sup>82</sup> op. cit., p. 15.

<sup>83</sup> op. cit., p. 15.

<sup>84</sup> A. Rossi, *An Analogical...*, op. cit., p. 62.

(1979), the floating Teatro del Mondo (1979) (ill. 22,23), or the travelling stall at Yatai in Naygoya, Japan (1989).

In the 1980s, when Rossi, still faithful to his theoretical principles of Neo-Rational architecture “softens” the once puristic forms, he shows a competition design of a hotel (1980) in the Venetian district of Cannari, in form analogous to the building in Gallarate, with a classic detail in the form of a crowning cornice.

Aldo Rossi gained international fame when he won an international competition in 1981, organized on the occasion of the IBA in Berlin (1980-1987), for the project of the Südliche Friedrichstadt housing complex (il. 24). Rossi incorporated his building into the historic fabric of the city and related its architecture to the German tradition, at the same time giving it his own characteristic detail. The ability to join regional elements with his individual style will be utilized in future projects. In later years, in much of his work there will be more stress placed on monumental architectural forms<sup>85</sup>, as in the town hall complex in Perugia in 1982 and, especially, the design of the Palazzo dello Sport in Milan from 1988 (ill. 1, 25).

## Finally

During his career Aldo Rossi published several tens of texts on the subject of architectural theory, made about two hundred different designs. In the

essay written when Rossi received the Pritzker Award in 1990, we find the following words: “One can wear a Rossi wristwatch, sit in a Rossi chair sipping espresso from a Rossi coffee pot, don clothes from a Rossi armoire, promenade through a Rossi mega-shopping center near Parma, see an opera in his Genoese theatre, and even reserve a plot in the giant Rossi cemetery at Modena”<sup>86</sup>. Rossi was also the author of tens of architectural, painting and graphic sketches, executed in various techniques which, published in journals on architecture, the city and art were most inspiring for the young generation of architects. Today, when the work of the prewar moderns is more and more appreciated, the most important achievements of Postmodernism, such as respect for the natural development of the city, utilizing the historical heritage and regional traditions and freedom of choice are still valuable. Though it is fifty years since Aldo Rossi began his creative work, also his design theory, losing nothing of its currency, with the passing of time gained in significance, while his easily recognizable architectural features, especially from the early period of his work, continue to arouse emotions and interest.

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<sup>85</sup> The term “monumental” when referring to architecture, means a building of great size, huge, massive, powerful, of permanent value. Among the permanent values are undoubtedly the classical elements based on models taken from Greek and

Roman antiquity: the layout along an axis, simplicity of form, straight lines of cornices, monumental columns, arcades.

<sup>86</sup> “The Pritzker Architecture Prize” 1990, [www.pritzkerprize.com/1990/](http://www.pritzkerprize.com/1990/)