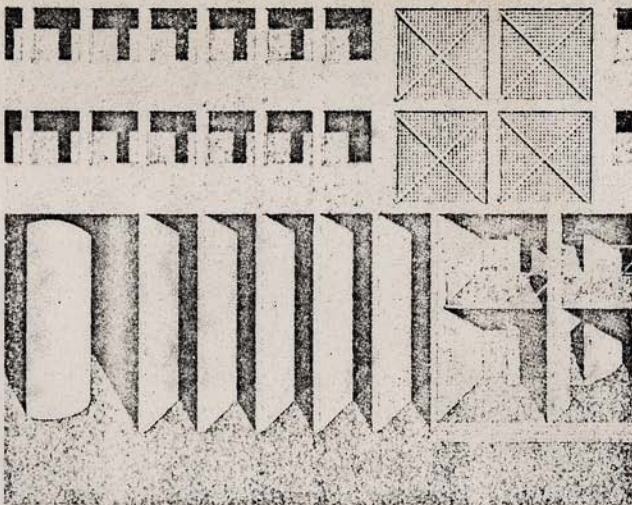
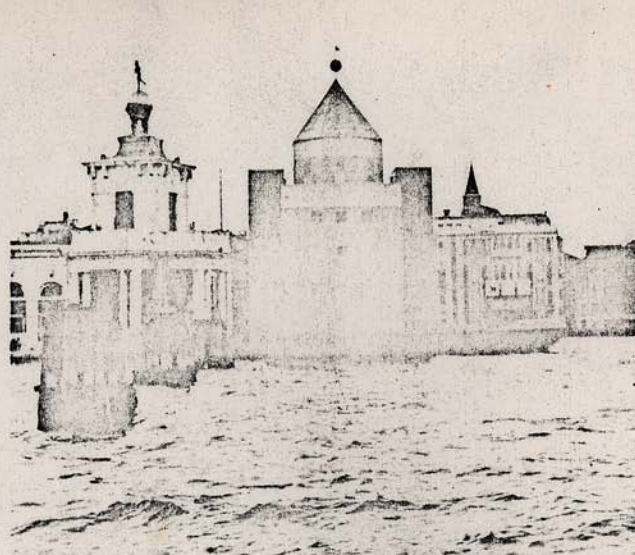


L'Architecture Assassinée or Architecture Abandonnée?



Above: Aldo Rossi, 'Città con cupola e torri' (1978) Left: Detail, elevation, housing, Gallarate, Milan (1970)



Review by Edward Jones

These two catalogues of the work of Aldo Rossi are similar in that both are beautifully produced and contain good reproductions of his work. However, as to their intention as documents, they are very different from each other.

Aldo Rossi: Projects and Drawings 1962-1979 is as close as we have come to an *oeuvre complete* of the architect – now published by Academy Editions, London, but originally a catalogue to an excellent exhibition of Rossi's work in the Galleria Pan in Rome in the spring of 1979. Apart from a rather convoluted introduction by Francesco Moschini – an introduction that further compounds the Rossi enigma – it remains otherwise an objective and essential document. *Aldo Rossi in America: 1976 to 1979*, a catalogue to an exhibition of drawings by Rossi shown at, and published by, the Institute for Architecture and Urban Studies in New York, is more didactic however, with the attempt not to catalogue but to penetrate the apparently hermetic Rossian imagination through the agency of his drawing as a form of writing. The drawings and images of Rossi have recently been accessible to students, often resulting in a superficial and instant pedigree of Rationalist respectability. Peter Eisenman's

important accompaniment to the drawings, and go some way to making this accessibility less superficial.

The work of Aldo Rossi is always polemical, reformist, and finally sardonic. As a founder member of the Italian neo-rationalist movement, or *Tendenza*, in the 60s, Rossi was responsible for one of its seminal texts, 'L'Architettura della Città' of 1966 (the absent English translation perpetuating the Rossian myth), in which he stresses the role of established building types in directing the structure of urban form. With Giorgio Grassi's 'La costruzione logica dell'Architettura', Rossi was to confront the tendency of modern architecture's pursuit of progress through positivism and centralized economics, and to assert instead the relative autonomy of architectural order. 'No type can be identified with a particular form, but all architectural forms can be referred to types.' To this end his work recalls historical architectural elements – the traditional Milanese tenement in the form of his Gallarate apartments; the archaic and ambiguous house form in his monument to the partisans at Segrate; the panopticon centrality of his elementary school at Fagnano Olona, and the 19th-century prison form in his project for a town hall in Trieste, and so on. As building groups they do not attempt to mediate their

immediate context, either physical or cultural; rather they stand polemically aloof, discouraging the visitor – however they remain provocatively in the mind.

These images of self-selected typologies recur in varying combinations in the drawings, which, as Eisenman suggests in his introduction, are a form of writing, always self-referential and replicable. The drawings are the architecture, rather than drawings of architecture. 'I could make an album of illustrations for my completed projects just by publishing things I have seen elsewhere – galleries, silos, old houses, factories, dairy houses, the great *Landhäuser* of the Bern countryside. The elements of my architecture would thrive within this selection, because it would be a description of all that I have wanted to design: that is it would represent my architecture.'

With the American appetite for the wholesale plunder of history, and the fabrication and consumption of myth above all, Rossi remains an uncomfortable enigma. The American drawings include the twin towers of Yamasaki's World Trade Center collaged into a composition of now familiar images, raising the question as to whether they are further self-selected typologies or whether they are more sardonically included as the abandoned state of architecture, prey

Resorting once again to his stripped vocabulary of dumb geometric forms, rude Lombardy vernacular, and festive Adriatic structures, Aldo Rossi has built this little floating theatre in 1979 for the Venice Biennale, mooring it beside the Point Salute. Sheeted in rough yellow pine boarding trimmed in bright blue, its black painted

structure of steel scaffolding rises to a cruciform at the internal apex of the roof. Symmetrically disposed about a central axis, two identical stair towers lead to three upper-level balconies overlooking the low-level stage and tiered seating – the top balcony opening out onto a terrace that looks back over the Piazza de San Marco.

to the forces of a pernicious, centralized economy. Eisenman's preoccupation with the year 1945 and the subsequent possibility of the Holocaust and atomic destruction prompts an existential conclusion: 'To live life merely as a potential survivor poses a new set of conditions for an architecture caught between the memory of a not forgotten past, and an unwanted present that promises nothing for the future. Rossi, conscious of this final irony, is unwilling to continue the past into the present and future, to prolong the heroic humanist fantasy . . . His drawings offer "nothing new" precisely because anything new which can be offered is, in the present condition, nothing. They simply ask, however anxiously, for the existence of choice between life as survival, and death.'

For those concerned with the crisis of representation in architecture, both publications are necessary reading; the reading of the writing of Peter Eisenman on Aldo Rossi, above all the reading of the writing, drawing, and

buildings of Aldo Rossi. Whether the structures be abandoned, empty, or incomplete, the work of Rossi communicates a profound anxiety through the presence of absence, or rather the absence of presence of the city existing in a purely architectural universe.

Aldo Rossi in America: 1976 to 1979
Catalogue 2, Introduction by Peter Eisenman; Institute for Architecture and Urban Studies, New York, 1979, b&w illustrations, 58 pp

Aldo Rossi: Projects and Drawings 1962-1979
Edited by Francesco Moschini; Academy Editions, London, 1979, b&w and colour illustrations, 163 pp