Aldo Rossi: Architecture and Memory

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Abstract
Architecture has a long tradition of evoking memory, one that goes beyond the memory of shelter and dwelling. To imagine an architecture of memory is to understand the relationship that can exist between physical reality and mental meanings. Individual memory collects experience about the meaning of typology of fragments within a city. The memory shows a highly personal confrontation with the city, and the built form is an incredible example of how our lived experience in the city can be in one way a memory building. Rossi argues that the city has existed continuously through time as the basis for an attitude of exclusion that limits his formal repertoire to the most architecture of forms. Rossi employed memory as a valuable means, a starting point for creating architectonic structure rich with meaning and rich with potential which exploits thinking, reading, and responding. Based upon Rossi's projects and writings, this study shows how Rossi elaborated instruments of typology and analogy, and reinterpretation of memory for operating the formal autonomy of architecture and architectural meaning on the city. Finally this paper argues that type can be operated through memory, individual and/or collective, to convey meaning from the original context to the new site and situation.

Keywords: memory; fragments; analogy; typology; autonomy

Introduction
Life is a continuous flow of experience; each act or moment of time is preceded by a previous experience and becomes the threshold for the experience to come (Bacon, 1967). Every historical process is a dialectical one in which one form of life generates its opposite. In a city, it is intriguing to see a dialectic of manifestations of different eras. Thus, buildings, towns and cities are much more than physical artifacts, but also are reflections and incarnations of human aspiration and ontological meaning. Since a specific architectural form and style mainly depend upon the rate and pattern of human interaction in relation to environment, life-perspectives is deeply rooted in time-perspectives, and thus our society has dissected humanity and built for itself a mirror for its own reflection and architecture reflect a society's views of time and change.

Would a more severe emphasis on social context in the built environment from a reality with continuities of meanings beneficial to society? Can we justify the singular emphasis of a person or social attributes? Can the city have totality of formal allusions and devices from one needs to draw when designing in the city? The experience of the city is what permits the discovery of these elements, and identification of them as urban artifacts, having value in the whole as well as individually as form, in a particular place (Rossi, 1982). The primary elements in architecture become the means by which the city can be understood in terms of its significance. It is the relationships between architectural elements that becomes important, not simply the elements themselves. Here lies the essence of how to deliver and infuse meaning into architecture, and in turn, the city itself. The city has always occupied a privileged place in the architectonic dream—it is the place where all orders are possible (Agrest, 1991). It is within this set of ordering systems that the city takes form, reflective of those respective senses of order and representative of them.

One of the conditioning factors which effect an architectural intervention is locus. Aldo Rossi (1989) identifies locus as a relationship to the specific location. The locus is related to the memory—the memory of the society. The remembrance—the ability to reminisce selectively and to call to consciousness the significant biography and geography of one’s mind—is at the core of what makes us human. Through remembrance we can inhabit the imagination with a symbolic environment extending far beyond the spatial and temporal limitations of individual existence. The development of remembrance was not simply an inner mental event. It required the creation of artifacts—language, ritual, and artifacts.

Few theorists have investigated the formal nature of the city as extensively as Aldo Rossi has. Rossi described the city as an artifact that possesses its own history. This artifact leaves traces of its history; these traces embody
the memory of the city. As a diverse totality, the city is haunted by meaning which the collective memory extracts from the traces. These traces are called permanence by Rossi, the urban artifacts that preserve the history of the city as built form. The process, then, by which a city is imprinted with form constitutes its urban history (Rossi, 1982). The succession of events over time, usually represented by some form of permanences, hold the memory of the city (Rossi, 1982).

Time, and its associated memories, are an important piece of information in reading individual artifacts in a city. The past is a part of the antiquated equation affecting society. The futurist myth of historical process, which is sustained by forgetting what has happened, is in contrast to the construction of history that looks backward. Walter Benjamin sees the modernity by seeing the present in terms of events of the past (Buck-Moss, 1989). This is very critical to create and read an architecture of memory on the historically rich site, by constantly reconsidering the events of the past.

Sometimes critical, sometimes problematic, that history becomes an important part of the continuous and constant dialog with the past is considerably significant. History is a statement made by no one, but it is conceived as a statement, a discourse. The readers’ perception dissolves the author in favor of the reader, who approaches a prior external text and reconstitutes its meaning according to the culture’s or his own system or set of interpretive codes. The author acts and creates the text; the reader re-enacts to create his own text (Strozier, 1988). Consciousness is important because this is the means for shifts in theory as transformations from one era of theoretical analysis to another.

By considering the events of the past, we can better understand the future, create the vital form through the vast reservoir of memory, and transform the narrow boundaries of lived experience into wider environments of shared experience. The loss of most of buildings, which are in transition from the traditional homogeneity to a new way of architectural thought seems incoherent either in physical or metaphorical form. If the history of a building has some value to society and its citizens, its meaning is evoked by the contrast of each tectonic structure representing its own time. Memory propagates collective and individual meanings. Memory is accumulative and based upon past experiences. Our understanding of temporal meaning operates much more subtly, forming in advance our pre-reflective understanding of the significance of entities in the world. Inasmuch as life-perspectives and temporal meanings are so embedded in architecture, architecture can be read as a start to reinstate a collective memory into the built environment.

Based upon Rossi’s works and writings, this paper is to identify the continuity of thought represented in built manifestations, and to describe that the notion of memory is a major contributor to a continuity of images in a built setting and that this continuity of site conditions can lead to a site spirit and specificity that combines to a form a meaningful architectural intervention. In addition, the intention is to light some elements of our understanding of time and change as revealed, as well as to indicate further directions of enquiry regarding the significance of a temporalizing order in design. Through Rossi’s investigations and operations on the city, his instruments of typology and analogy, and reinterpretation of memory will be elaborated how architecture’s meaning is re-established through individual and/or collective memory, and how the formal autonomy of architecture constructs the world in which we live.

The Embeddedness of Time into Architecture

To imagine an architectural memory is to first understand the relationship that can exist between the two. Frances Yates(1966) argues how the memory imprints images onto built form, showing knowledge being transmitted. The memory is in the sense that it is a deliberate attempt at recollection. One learns to see the world in the detail only a designer would see as a result of the sudden consciousness of a new world, resulting in no perception being taken for granted. From this, architecture has a long tradition of evoking the memory, one that goes beyond the memory of shelter and dwelling.

According to Cicero(Yates, 1966), he described the mnemonic of places and images, and explained how the Roman rhetors utilized the technique of imprinting images on specific places in order to both recall, and provide an ordering system. Moreover, he describes the artificial memory in terms of the speech further: persons desiring to train this faculty (of memory) must select places and from mental images of the things they wish to remember and store those images in the places, so that the order of the places will preserve the order of the things, and the images of the things will denote the things themselves and we shall employ the places and images respectively as a wax writing-tablet and the letters written on it (Yates, 1966). This memory can be improved by long speeches with great accuracy.

If a specific building or space wants to be remembered, images derived from each space of building should be placed in a logical sequence so that the orator can literally walk through while he recites his speech. Therefore, the memory system can hold the knowledge in a logical sequence, and retain that knowledge for a long period of time, dependent mainly on the strength of the memory of the loci rather than the images. Yates(1966) argues further that the formation of the loci is the most important step for three reasons: the strength of the visual within memory, the ability of the loci to act like wax tablets that can be erased and written over again, and the ability to use any spatial construct, from the house, to a public building, to the city.

It was by this method of this artificial memory that is established from places and images, the stock definition to be forever repeated down the ages. A locus is a place
Images are forms, marks or simulacra (formae, notae, simulacra) of what we wish to remember. For instance if we wish to recall the genus of a horse, of a lion, of an eagle, we must place their images on definite loci (Yates, 1966).

Aristotle was interested in the mental picture for the understanding and thinking processes in association with knowledge and memory. He put memory in the same area of the soul as the imagination, in a sense that imagery is created for remembering new knowledge. The ability for the image to remain as a sense impression is described as memory, and is described in terms of movement, as in the movement of a ring imprinting a wax tablet. To disclose how human beings make intelligible the world within which they find themselves, Gaston Bachelard (1964) reads the world as it is spontaneously, and links memory to imagination. He describes the house, not as an abstract object, but in terms of the primary virtues, those reveal an attachment to be experienced immediately.

The range of loci seems very important to us in that the art of memory is a technique for a mental mapping system. Yates (1966) describes the increasingly elaborate memory systems created during the Middle Ages and Renaissance, leading to the creation of the memory theater. During the Middle Ages, Thomas Aquinas very much dominates the teaching of the artificial memory, and what Aquinas has recorded is a continuation of classical memory treatises, expounding the importance of memory loci, and images upon which attach to them. From this teaching, however, the Middle Ages seemed to move toward a tradition of icons as images, and the creation of a structure within which these striking images would active memory.

In the Venice of modern times, Aldo Rossi tried to grasp the highest reality through a magically activated imagination in his project, Teatro del Mundo (1979), where the mind and memory of man was considered divine. As Vidler points out in The Architectural Uncanny (1992), the notions of an architectural sublime and other notions of architecture's ability to evoke emotions can be linked to its ability to tap the hidden or repressed memory of the unconscious mind, often making the unfamiliar all to familiar. This architecture of uncanny is acting as a powerful memory device that is allied with that of the classical artificial memory, but which acts in a deeper way that is perhaps more closely related to our own conception of reality and our position within the universe. Rossi (1982) sees the city as the theater of human events, the locus solus that not only contains events but is itself an event; it constitutes an event. The locus Rossi (1982) defines is the intersection of space, time, form, and site of a succession of both ancient and more modern events. Rossi's theater was designed to be a floating structure to move through the canals of Venice, literally constructing situations within the city. As the progeny of sixteenth century floating pavilions, the theater was in the form of round canopies, and belonged both to a family of floating machines and to the genre of ephemeral festival structures like towers, gateways, and fountains built for special civic occasions. The Teatro is related to both to the tradition of the floating building and to the idea of a structure intended to temporarily alter the landscape of a city.

Rossi argues in his book, A Scientific Autobiography (1981), that his model, the Teatro, was Shakespeare's Globe Theater, revealing the similarity even in the common names of Theaters of the World. Rossi quoted Shakespeare's dictum, All the World's stage, and looked for the universal knowledge of the world in the Teatro, where it seems likely that the Globe would have searched for a way to express the space of theater. According to Rossi (1981), the Teatro was built at the Fusina shipyards and towered by sea to the Punta della Dogana that seemed a place where architecture ended and the world of the imagination or even the irrational began. In relation to memory, Rossi uses the Shakespearean Theater as a model to produce its intimate, using geometric configuration. The notion of floating images means literally wandering in the canals of Venice, constantly creating situations within the city. In addition, the nature of the theater works as a memory loci within the city.

Since there are no longer universal truths in Rossi's world, the position of the theater is reinterpreted, constantly creating reinterpretation of memory. A sketch by Rossi for the theater is quite related to the attempt to recall something within his personal memory. When we are asked to imagine some beautiful house, we each are free to attribute our own characteristics to this house at will. Someone may imagine this home as a historic mansion in downtown; others may imagine a modern mansion in downtown; others may imagine a modern one in suburbs. In both cases, we are totally free to conjure up specific images at will, as each such image remains wholly within our own individual control. Like this example, the memory represents a highly personal confrontation within the city. Thus, based upon the geometric spaces which can be consciously manipulated and measures, our lived spaces and experiences which engage our entire way of being can be a memory theater.
Analogy

Rossi argued that architecture should achieve formal autonomy, to gain identity, in order to meaningfully relate and to convey meaning. By establishing a unique, separate identity, each form could be read more easily in opposition to another. In relation to the discipline of architecture, Rossi accepted the visual form of the city, to a larger degree, of factors which operated outside. To Rossi, the discipline is very much autonomous, and thus he intended to put his attitude of operating within a given context from an interventionist point of view.

Rossi is very much concerned with the concepts of fragments and collage, disregarding scale and context, but searches for the relationship of memory to the city. His individual architectural fragments experience the city in the way of flaneur, attempting to observe and locate the traces of that truth within the context of the city. Rossi argues the city is the locus of collective memory, and by this means that the city acts as a wax tablet that gathers up the traces of lived experience in order to create its monuments. Monuments as a means of memory is to return to an idea of consciousness, to remind and hence restore a thought of life. Memory is not an exact science; it is never accurate and is often cumbersome if so. Monuments could be metaphors for events, places or spirits.

Rossi stated, the idea of analogy can never be fully possessed by the conscious and rational mind, this is what makes it real to the human psyche.

Over time, as I began to grasp this meaning (that analogies not only exist within the discipline of architecture, but are also the essence of its meaning), each project became extremely simple, substituting observation and study for construction. The task was no longer, as I had once thought, to describe architecture, to catalogue and order form. Thought still fascinated by what is unexpected in catalogues, from dictionaries and botanical tables to engineer’s manuals. I now saw how the cataloging was organized according to an analogical procedure in which the end of an operation differed from its means (Rossi, 1979).

The drawing of the Analogous City (1976) by Rossi shows how the city can be depicted, using the meaning that resided within the identifiable or referenced forms. For Rossi’s Analogous City, there is no real site existing. Michel Foucault’s (1974) type of history throws light on the analogous city: for he defines a history of ruptures, interruptions, and discontinuities, a history that searched among the strata and layers of time for the points where concepts were displaced and transformed, or the moments where history was moved. Tafuri (1988) explained the rule of describing city: “The law of assemblage was fundamental. And since the assembled objects belonged to the real world, the picture became a neutral field on which to project the experience of shock suffered in the city.” Hence the Analogous City allows collage of the city to be created through a typological memory of the city, thus haunting the city with meaning. Here the notion of collage as a means of representation finds itself very much aligned with the situation present in the comprehension of contemporary city. It provides a means of contending with a diverse sense of order by association and dependence on the relationships of disparate elements, not necessarily the elements themselves.

Rossi (1982) makes the observation that forms have an autonomous life which supersedes the functions for which they were designed. As proof he cites the existence of building types in the city that transform through history while retaining their vitality. Rossi applied his meaning-laden type-forms to the actual geography of the city, and thus suggested two kinds of transformation for further readings and imaginations: dislocation of place and dissolution of scale. In this sense, Tafuri (1988) argues that at the origins of the critical act, there always lies a process of destroying, of dissolving, or disintegrating a given structure. No criticism exists that does not retrace the process that has given birth to the work and that does not redistribute the elements of the work into a different order, if for no other reason than to construct typological models (Tafuri, 1988). Rossi’s process of analogically transforming typologies traced the memory of an artifact back toward its constantly removed origins.

In the Tetro theatre and Modena cemetery (1971), Rossi dissolved the subject/object dichotomy of the audience/actor relationship by housing both together in a floating stage that was at once a stage for the city to observe and observation point. In addition, the division of space between actors and audience was dissolved. Subject and object became integrated. Rossi (1982) defined the city: By architecture I mean not only the visible image of the city and the sum of its different architectures, but architecture as a construction, the construction of the city over time. As a process over time, the city represents multiple fragments and sedimentations. Rossi’s method of reading these fragments was to establish binary oppositions: type and program, part and whole, specific place and universal, and history and present.

This establishment of oppositions is constructed to highlight the relationships between forms and ideas (memory). It was not really a logical process of thought, but analogical one, following the comparison that was elaborated by Jung to Freud. Jung wrote: “Logical thought is thinking in words. Analogical thought is sensed, yet unreal, imagined, yet silent. It is archaic, unexpressed, and practically inexpressible in words (Moneo et al, 1985).” Rossi regarded the analogical process not as a discourse, but rather as a mediation, an interior monologue. In Canaletto painting in the Parma museum Rossi noted that the various works by Palladio and their removal in space constitute an analogue representation related to the history of both architecture and the city itself that could not have been
expressed in words (Moneo et al, 1985). According to Rossi, the collage showed aspects of memory, a memory circumscribed within the city, north Lombardy.

Tafuri (1988) argues that Canaletto’s painting and Analogous City were combinatory manipulations of real and ideal places. Rossi wanted to take in the whole of reality, object and subject, history and memory, the city as structure and the city as myth (Tafuri, 1988). These analogical, fragmented constructions of type-forms left the observer to play out the game proposed by the architect, throwing oneself into the deciphering and recognition of the elements of his puzzle (Tafuri, 1988).

In such readings, the meaning would come from motivations behind the architecture, individual or collective (Moneo et al, 1985). The fragmentation of the city emphasized on associations, correspondence, and relationships as the bases for an underlying order or structure.

Typology

Typology has been an evolving notion from the beginning of man’s construction of his environment. Peter Eisenman defines the idea of type in introduction to Architecture of the City (1982):

The new time of architecture is thus that of memory, which replaces history. The individual artifact for the first time is understood within the psychological construct of collective memory. Time as collective memory leads Rossi to his particular transformation of the idea of time. With the introduction of memory into the object, the object comes to embody both an idea of itself and a memory of a former self.

Typology becomes transcendent of form and allows memory to be carried throughout the history of architectural piece, connected rather to the events of the city. Plato describes the meaning of form between the abstract world of ideas and the sensible world of physical things. According to Plato (1992), the world of reality is composed of ideas while the world of experience is made of images which are only the shadows or reflections of the intelligible forms or ideas. Thus, if ideas are transcendent, intelligible, unique, immutable, eternal and non-spatial, then images are immanent, sensible, multiple, mutable, ephemeral and spatial. Rossi believes that the history of the built environment can be analyzed in terms of typologies. Rossi (1982) suggests that in architecture type is the product of the history, the spatial composition and the use of Building. This interpretation does not contradict the definition of type in Quatremère de Quincy’s treatise. Rossi’s interpretation of Quatremère’s type, however, is both literal and idiosyncratic. For Rossi, type is something that precedes the form; it is the principle that remains unaltered in spite of the changes of the form. In this sense, type is seen as an objective, logical principle. A type is suggestive and general, and thus architectural type has no precise form or content. To Rossi the buildings are architectural celebrities rather than characteristic examples.

Rossi (1982) recognizes historical process: type reacts dialectically with technique, function and style. As an example, he cites the house with a loggia: the basic plan of organization has existed for centuries, but changes in social customs, construction techniques, and family hierarchies have caused many variations in its actual design. In this sense, Rossi’s interpretation of building is both acultural and ahistorical. Type is the abstraction of memory to which will be referenced, and type is an abstract principle concerning basic needs and beauty while specific forms depend on historical circumstances and social context.

As a device, Rossi used type-forms to make a new kind of classification for interpretation, and to initiate design processes in the Teatro project and Modena cemetery. Type was operated through memory, individual and/or collective, to transport meaning from the original context from which Rossi adopted the form, to the new site and situation. No type can be identified with a particular form, but all architectural forms can be referred to types (Moneo, 1976). Similarly, Plato thought of ideas as generic concept which is assigned to a word. In the Republic Plato (1992) refers to form as follow: We have been in the habit, if you remember, of positing a form, wherever we use the same name in many instances, one form for each many. Rossi argues that architecture is constructed with known primary and intelligible elements.

For Rossi, within an urban environment there are some primary elements (monuments) with the collective memory of the urban populace. He interprets monuments as the vehicles of public images, rituals and myths. This capacity of primary elements is contrasted with the general fabric of the city, including residential and commercial buildings, places for everyday life which accommodate variable human activities over an extended period of time. Rossi (1982) mentions permanence and architectural forms through history and memory as follow:

When a project or a form is not utopian or abstract but evolves from the specific problems of the city, it persists and expresses these problems both through its style and form as well as through its many deformations. These deformations and alterations are of limited importance precisely because architecture, or the fabbrica of the city, constitutes an essentially collective artifact and derives from this its characteristic features.

Citing the Palazzo della Ragione in Padua, Rossi (1982) insists that one can still experience the form of the past in this monument and the physical form of the past has assumed different functions and has continued functions. Alan Colquhoun (1981) voiced the communicative value of type and exploiting tools to create new forms. He believed that a design should stem from the proper understanding of the problem at hand, and that the fact that a designer needs to rely on the Type—as inherited form, or mental picture of the final
design—is only a remedy. Moreover, he recognized that type, like language, fulfills a communicative and social role, linking tradition with the present. He thinks that while in the stage of craftsmanship, the form of an object was the carrier of message, i.e., the image that craftsman had, in a later stage the communicative value persisted in artistic forms, not as the expression of the artist’s idea but as a system of representation which embodies these values.

In the Modena cemetery, Rossi believed that type can be transformed, creating a dialogue that can be saturated with meanings and cross references, and hence he thought about the memory of type from personal experience of place rather than the historical formal memory of type. His typological reading of the cemetery is that of a city for the dead, and is meant to be read on the scale of the city. To Rossi, the necropolis is a memory system, utilizing the typological construction of the city to allow for the collective memory.

Fig. 1. Modena Cemetery

In relation to the recovery of typology, Moneo mentions Modena cemetery: death is in this way incorporated in the graveyard, to an artificial social milieu whose meaning is found in ritual (Moneo, 1981). Rossi performed the operations of dislocation of place and dissolution of scale on type-form to evoke new meanings from his own suggested readings. The columbaria which enclosed the cemetery were overscaled for a prominence and for a dramatic sense of closure. This insistence on built form to house the dead brought to full objectification Rossi’s underlying analogy of the cemetery as a house for the dead. Rossi employed the type that was well-established in the collective Italian memory and was in fact represented as a paradigm in the adjacent Costa Cemetery. The analogical operation upon this type involved an allusion to the house as a microcosm of the city, hardly a new concept. Rossi developed the Modena enclosed, complete, and autonomous in a relational manner by analogical reference. The intervention of an urban artifact in the larger urban scale is an analogous process acting through typology, and thereby memory, with which Rossi transcended from as merely archaeological artifact and brought the “process of architecture into the realm of the psychological, transforming both subject and object (Rossi, 1982).”

Each typological element is effective in the way that multiple readings of form and function can be made by individual. Having rationalized his own theory of typological dependence and autonomy of architecture, Colquhoun insisted that architecture never free from forms of the past and stressed the folly of theories that assumed so. Colquhoun established the place for the general physical or mathematical laws within the process of architectural problem solving. He argues: Because the general laws of physics and empirical facts are even less capable…in the world of architecture…of fixing a final configuration than in the case of an airplane or a bridge, recourse to some kind of typological model is even more necessary (Colquhoun, 1981). What he made clear was the importance of using the idea of type as apparatus, as Rossi prescribed, with which to operate on the city, creating new meanings. The ideas that took from the typological soup of the collective memory, Rossi confirmed, were to be the substance for analogical form.

Conclusions

Architecture is a part of the social history of man, and as such, can be associated with events, places, people, and ideals. With this association, time and space is infused into the medium of memory. An object, place, or event can become a richer experience for all who participate with it. Time and space can exist in a single architectonic structure in which past memories are integrated, interpreted, and modified through new eyes, or in a adjacent structure in which meaning is reinforced by the contradiction.

To Rossi, architectonic structure can be always reinterpreted, for in this world there seems to be no longer any universal truths, but rather a constant reinterpretation of memory, the continuous juxtaposition of the fragments from one to other fragments, the constant alteration of typology which invests the monument with its ability to hold a discourse with the city. The memory represents a highly personal confrontation with the city, and the built form is an incredible example of how our lived experience in the city can be in one way a memory building. Rossi employed memory as a valuable means, a starting point for creating architectonic structure rich with meaning and rich with potential which exploits thinking, reading, and responding. The validity of Rossi today, is about the use of type and memory as an instrument for operating in a city, offering tremendous interpretative flexibility, and allows the architecture to read as a poem within our collective imagination. His ability to modify the context and the system that the built environment reflects, is revealed in his projects and writings, and his autonomous architecture, in addition, is expressed in the development of a typology of relationships between architecture and the city.
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