Article

Analogical Syntax: Form and Association in Three Projects by Aldo Rossi

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Aldo Rossi’s analogical architecture uses elements from the history of architecture and the city, but erases and abstracts their historical accretion, through their reinterpretation in a modernist, purified language. Cubes, giant-order columns, slabs, gables, or square windows, once liberated from their historical urban context, are analogues that become interchangeable elements to be composed on axial, linear, square or central plans, repeated from project to project through operations of dislocating, doubling, distancing, crossing, scaling. The analogue is here proposed as a critical device toward a methodological and theoretical project of formal and associative syntax that transforms the history of architecture into material for a new architecture.

The following drawings close-read the formal and associative syntax of Aldo Rossi’s analogical architecture. Rossi’s buildings are normally understood as coherent wholes. Instead, the studies put forward a reading of their dis-articulation, cutting apart and highlighting the separation of elements and forms in three projects. The drawings develop a method of analytical de-montage, that separates the principle elements of each building and links the formal analysis to a series of images with wider architectural resonance, to suggest formal or conceptual associations and develop a dialogue across history.

The project for Scandicci Town Hall reads as an analogue of Cesare Beruto’s plan for the Castello Sforza in Milan, which arranges distinct elements along an axis similarly to Scandicci, where an elevated walkway connects a courtyard block to a domed hall via gable and giant order elements that intersect perpendicularly. In the Study of Gallaratese Housing, the separation of the slab is articulated by steps and four giant order circular columns, suggestive of Filarete’s column in Venice or Le Corbusier’s studies of the Parthenon. Meanwhile the Gallaratese shares an intensity of form that is present in the tenements of Milan, mixed with references to Le Corbusier’s Unité or Hilberseimer’s bar buildings. Finally, in the Study of San Cataldo Cemetery at Modena, the composition of the cemetery through separate elements, axially arranged and set within a colonnaded perimeter, recalls traditional Roman city planning; the central area is not unlike Piranesi’s studies of the Castel Sant’Angelo in his Campo Marzio project. The aerial perspective of the cemetery reads similar to Mantegna’s Dead Christ, a painting at Milan’s Pinacoteca di Breda.

1968-73 Housing Block, Gallaratese Milan

Study of Gallaratese Housing by Aldo Rossi, 1968-73

1972-84 Cemetery, Modena

Study of San Cataldo Cemetery at Modena by Aldo Rossi (with Giovanni Braghieri), 1972-84