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The New Urban Scale in Italy: On Aldo Rossi's "L'architettura della città"

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The New Urban Scale in Italy

On Aldo Rossi's *L'architettura della città*

The publication of Aldo Rossi's *L'architettura della città* in 1966 marked the conclusion of several years of research and writing on architecture and urbanism. Rossi wrote the book as a treatise for a science of urbanism in an attempt to establish the principles and terms for analyzing existing urban conditions. His thesis responded to a polemical debate within Italian architecture of the early 1960s over the future form of the city brought about, in part, by unprecedented transformations in the postwar city. In this essay, I chronicle the cultural context of the debate over urbanism in Italy that motivated Rossi to establish objective principles for a new urban theory, distinguishing between "the architecture of the city," autonomy, and the concept of *la nuova dimensione*.

Introduction

In Italy, the mid-1960s saw the publication of several book-length studies and numerous articles by architects offering critical interpretations of the contemporary city. Most of these texts took the radical social and physical transformations of the Italian postwar city as the point of departure for assessing the legacy of modernist urbanism and for speculating upon the city's future form. Within this intellectually lively and contentious field of inquiry, Aldo Rossi's *L'architettura della città* (*The Architecture of the City*) of 1966 stands apart for the clarity of the author's intentions (Figure 1). *L'architettura della città* was written in the mode of a treatise in which the author strives to put in place the principles for a science of urbanism. The thesis of his book was informed by and responded to a polemical debate over the scale and form of the city within Italian architectural discourse of the early 1960s. In other words, the architect's thinking about the city evolved within a specific historical context identified in the first instance as postwar Italy. It responded in part to the perceived dissipation of urbanism as a discipline within an interdisciplinary field of study. The following essay

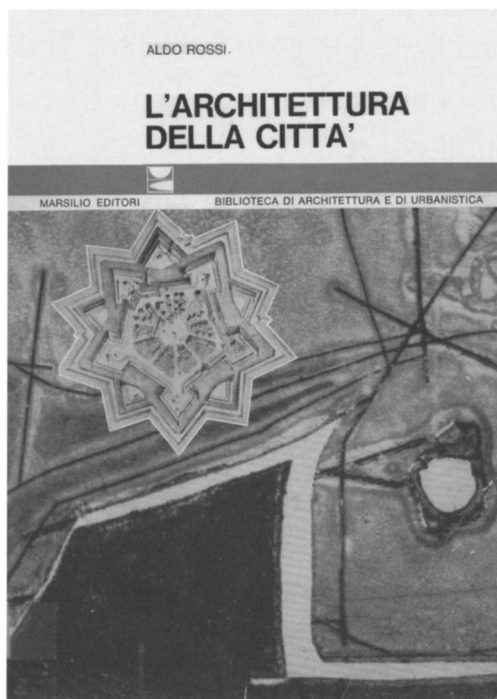
examines the events that compelled Rossi to undertake the task of defining the terms for analyzing the city and situates his thesis within the contours of the urban debate during this period.

Despite the fact that Rossi states his purpose quite clearly in the first chapter, the reception of the book, particularly in the Anglo-American world, tended to translate his theory for an autonomous urban science as evidence supporting preoccupations with architectural autonomy. For example, when in 1976 the American architect Peter Eisenman introduced Rossi to a select-reading audience, he claimed that the publication of *L'architettura della città* played an influential role in the evolution of the concept of autonomous architecture.¹ The context for this claim was provided by the English language translation of the Spanish architect Rafael Moneo's essay on Rossi in *Oppositions* magazine. It was an interpretation already once removed from the original source. Autonomous architecture was again the subject of a monographic issue of the *Harvard Design Review* of 1984 in which Claudio D'Amato published an article on *L'architettura della città*. Celebrating the fifteen-year anniversary of the Italian publication,

D'Amato situated the book historically within the architectural milieu of the early 1960s. His effort to retrieve Rossi's book from the proponents of architectural autonomy was overshadowed by the numerous articles on autonomy and the publication of architectural drawings from the *Autonomous Architecture* exhibition held at the Fogg Art Museum in 1981. On the other hand, Mary McLeod's review of the English translation of the book acknowledged the Italian sociopolitical context and importantly presented the book as a set of parameters for research that "in no way dictate his specific formal choices."² While the fortune of Rossi in the architectural culture of the 1970s and 1980s has yet to be fully examined, suffice to say that in its initial North American reception, the book reflected the concerns and theoretical propensities of a milieu foreign to its inception and purpose.

The reception of *L'architettura della città* can, in part, be attributed to a set of straightforward circumstances beyond the interests extended in the secondary literature on Rossi. It is a simple fact that the book made its English language debut in 1982,

1. Aldo Rossi, *L'Architettura della città* (Padua, Italy: Marsilio Press, 1966).



reversing the order of sequence in which it appears in the development of Rossi's architectural thought and design. Rossi's early career comprised jointly authored competition projects and texts as well as a professional profile based largely on teaching, researching, and writing about architecture and urbanism. While pursuing research on the city, he built very little. In contrast, by the time *L'architettura della città* appeared in English, Rossi the architect had acquired an international reputation and was well established as the front man for *la Tendenza* (the tendency). It should also be noted that the English translation was preempted by the publication of *A Scientific Autobiography*, a book of substantially

different intentions, written from a distinctly personal point of view, and reflecting a completely different period in his life and career.³ Adding to the confusion is the fact that Rossi's earlier publications were for the most part unavailable to non-Italian reading audiences. Given this, the city book reads as a singular statement representing an overarching theoretical proposition distinct from and even set against his later more personal writings. Overlooked in the favorable reception of his drawings and the promotion of architectural autonomy is the book as a thoroughly researched and learned response to very specific events. Rossi was well aware of the disconnection between the book's conception and its later reception outside of Italy. In a lecture given to an American audience in the mid-1970s, he acknowledged that the book had been written in response to a polemic within Italian architecture and he admitted that time had since "liquidated" that debate.⁴ This paper steps aside from the reception of *L'architettura della città* in foreign contexts to track the debate that motivated Rossi to write a book defining the principles for a science of urbanism.

It is worth repeating the well-known fact that *L'architettura della città* was published by the Padua-based Marsilio Press in 1966. Its English translation appeared some sixteen years later, well after the historical context and the debate motivating the architect had passed. Rossi's notes and published writings from the mid-sixties confirm his goal to write a treatise for a theory of urbanism, a treatise that, following those of the enlightenment, assigned classifications that described specific urban phenomena and posited precise terms for analyzing changes in urban structure. Rossi's focus on urban form, particularly its history and the complex totality of forces, exemplified the construct of the urban artifact, as well as his critique of naive functionalism evolved within the contours of the reformulation of architectural modernism in Italy during the 1950s. Perhaps most significantly, *L'architettura della città* is evidence of the transition within elite, meaning

largely academic, architectural debate in Italy during this period. In general, this transition can be characterized as a turn from investigating the continuity and tradition of architectural modernism and the critique of modernism as a style toward the problems of the city and town planning. The book illustrates Rossi's belief in the continuity and progressive evolution of modernism and elaborates a concept of function that includes broadly construed criteria such as societal, psychological, and historical. Rossi attempts to establish a method of analysis inclusive of such criteria. Rossi's thesis also responded to specific points of debate integral to the polemic over the expanding scale of the Italian city and the emerging discipline of urbanism.⁵

Within Italian postwar architecture, the shift to urban issues and the problems of the contemporary city has a distinct profile that tracks the repositioning of the architect's role. During the 1950s and early 1960s, Italian architectural discourse turned from questions about the expressive potential of architecture and concerns with the object to the querying of the architect's contribution to the field of urbanism. While the formation of urban design as a discipline is a history yet to be written, it can be stated that the Italian debate about urbanism paralleled the growing pains of the new discipline during these years. It was further motivated by the perceived failure of postwar reconstruction to stem the unruly development of Italian cities and to provide adequate housing for the influx of workers from rural areas, particularly from the poverty-stricken south to cities of the industrial triangle of Milan, Turin, and Genoa. Although the expansion of the city had been a concern prior to the war and during the reconstruction, by the late 1950s exponential population increase and problems attending the geographic reorganization of the city exacerbated the social transformations wrought by Italy's economic miracle (ca. 1957–1963).⁶ For example, during the height of the boom years, the population of Rome increased by more than a million inhabitants putting pressure on city infrastructures,

particularly on the historic center. The swollen peripheries of cities such as Milan, Turin, and Rome comprised an uncontrolled mix of developer- and state-sponsored housing quarters and commercial and industrial buildings.⁷ Subject to rampant land speculation and building practices largely unregulated by law, the accelerated rate of change profoundly affected the configuration of Italian urban centers. It changed ways of life and places of living, catapulting largely traditional social forms into an urbanized society of mass consumption. The forces of change accompanying the boom sponsored the emergence of a mobile mass society, transforming Italian cities into centers and peripheries of uneven development. In the early 1960s, architects viewed the challenge of this unwieldy sociogeographical configuration as a call to reassess professional responsibilities and the discipline of architecture.

Aligned with the shift to the city in critical architectural discourse was a subtle transfer in influence from Ernesto N. Rogers to educators and architects such as Giuseppe Samonà, Dean of the *Istituto Universitario di Architettura di Venezia* (IUAV), and Ludovico Quaroni, an architect-urbanist who taught at several universities during this period.⁸ As editor of *Casabella continuità* throughout the 1950s until 1964, Rogers profoundly influenced Italian architectural culture. He also mentored a whole generation of young architects at *Casabella's* Centro studi (study center) and through his teaching at the Polytechnic of Milan. At *Casabella*, the promotion of Aldo Rossi and Francesco Tentori to editors in 1961 signaled the changing of the guard. Quaroni and Samonà were, on the other hand, contemporaries of Rogers who had worked at the urban scale and were active members of the *Istituto Nazionale di Urbanistica* (National Institute of Urbanism). Samonà authored the influential book on modern urban development titled *L'urbanistica e l'avvenire della città negli stati europei* (Urbanism and the Future of the City in the European Countries) published in 1959. During the 1950s, Quaroni had

co-coordinated several of the most important postwar housing projects such as the Tiburtino Housing District (1949–1954) in Rome and the new town of La Martella (1951–1954) near Matera in southern Italy. Although the received configuration of postwar Italian architecture typically pits the North, specifically Milan, against the so-called Roman School, this geographic description does not stand up to close scrutiny in this case.⁹ The affiliations between Romans, Milanese, Venetians, and others involved in the polemic over the new scale of urbanism were not drawn by local associations. For example, one of Rossi's key collaborators and staunch supporters was Carlo Aymonino, an architect associated with the Roman School in postwar years who taught in Venice as well as in Rome during the early 1960s. It was Samonà and Giancarlo De Carlo who were invited from Venice and Milan to participate in the seminars discussing the idea of *la città territorio* held at University of Rome in 1963. Between 1959 and 1965, the debate over urbanism escalated into a polemic that crossed two generations of architects. The publication of Rossi's *L'architettura della città* in 1966 demarcated the conclusion of a wide-ranging debate in Italian architecture about the form, the history, and the future of the contemporary city.

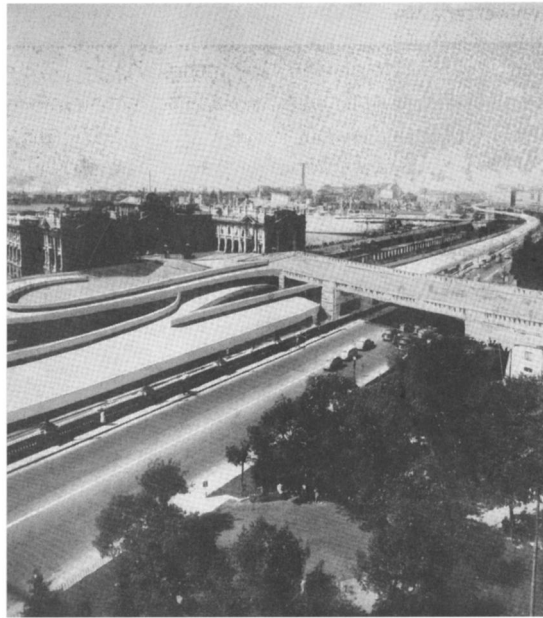
Italy Circa 1962: The Dynamics of Urban Scale

Of the many articles Rossi published in the early 1960s, "Nuovi problemi" (New Problems) of 1962 most succinctly captures the conditions of urban change confronting Italian architects. In this article, Rossi characterizes the previous ten years of urban growth as having radically transformed Italian cities to such a degree that the physical distinctions between the city proper and its surrounding countryside no longer existed.¹⁰ Confirming a widely held view, Rossi stated that the word "city" insufficiently described the emerging amorphous nature of urban form. From this, he concluded that

the economic, social, and spatial factors governing urban form should be interpreted as a "metropolitan area" that functions largely as a job market. The identification of the emerging urban dynamic as dependent on employment referred to a key force propelling city growth, the mass immigration from rural Italy to the city (Figure 2). Over the next four years, Rossi sought to identify the specific nature of the forces acting upon the city, and this goal stood in contrast to architects preoccupied with describing the effects of population growth and the unraveling of the city's periphery. For Rossi, the emerging city form and its social and physical configurations presented architects with precise new tasks.¹¹

It was a well-repeated observation during this period that the consequences of urban expansion challenged architects to define their role within the field of urbanism. For example, at the seventh meeting of the *Istituto Nazionale di Urbanistica* in 1959, participants argued for a conceptual shift in the relation between architecture, urbanism, and town planning.¹² The title of the conference *Il volto della città* (The Face of the City) identified two aspects of the contemporary city that concerned architects. The first suggests that the visual impact of architecture had altered due to changed perceptual modes brought about by new means of mass communication and increased mobility. The spatiality and temporality of the new urban dimension rendered irrelevant a frontally viewed architecture. Second, the structure of the postwar city had developed according to fundamentally different necessities; roadways, commuters, and consumers' desires, for example, now dictated urban development and architectural form. Architects were advised to think in terms of "architectonic planning" and to consider architecture at the scale of planning. As one participant suggested, architects should conceive of an *architettura della città* or an architecture at a scale that would confront the expanded visual and physical dimensions of the Italian city.¹³

In postwar Italy, rapid urbanization and its accompanying social changes spawned theories



2. Photograph from Francesco Tentori "Quindici anni di architettura Italiana," *Casabella continuità* 251 (May 1961): 54.

about the future of the traditional city as well as speculation about the appropriate scale and means of intervention. At a seminar on urbanism held in the spring of 1959, Giuseppe Samonà coined the term *la nuova dimensione* or "the new dimension" to describe the dynamic between the city, its socio-economic formation, and the surrounding countryside.¹⁴ In Italian architectural literature of the early 1960s, the term referred to the various forces propelling urban growth and its ungainly distribution. For some, *la nuova dimensione* evinced an uneven and pathological development, while for others, it signaled the organic emergence of a new city form. Samonà described the future urban form as connecting the city center to the periphery to the region in a dynamic social and economic exchange. Increased mobility and communication on all levels would equilibrate imbalances in social and economic distribution between the center and the periphery

enabling a fairer distribution of wealth and services. This utopian interpretation was in part influenced by Garden City theory and those planners and theorists, mostly British and American, advocating regional government and various forms of decentralization over state-centered administration.

Rossi's *Nuovi problemi* appeared in a special issue of *Casabella continuità* dedicated to the *centri direzionali italiani* (Italian directional centers). The *centro direzionale* referred to a planning program that played a role similar to the American Central Business District (CBD) in the restructuring of large city centers. Various examples the CD, as it was termed, proposed a concentration of services and businesses to be located at a juncture between the historic center and the city's periphery. The program answered the need to reorient urban development and traffic away from overburdened historic centers, while in theory it would link isolated areas of the

periphery to the center and facilitate the orderly development of the city's extended territory. In competition proposals, the CDs frequently took the form of large-scale infrastructural buildings—towers, parking structures, and container-like buildings—efficiently connected by roadways, highways, and interchanges. The *centro direzionale* was bound up with town-planning issues of zoning and economic planning, but for architects, it also leveled a critique at town-planning techniques since it offered a model that moved beyond mere policy to architectonic organization. Reflecting the optimism of the moment, Manfredo Tafuri, writing in the same issue of *Casabella continuità*, argued for the necessity "to move from static planning to dynamic planning based on the examination of the reciprocal influences of the city and the territory."¹⁵ At this early stage in his career, Tafuri was an active member of the Rome-based collaborative *Architetti e urbanisti associati*.¹⁶ He was not alone in supporting an administrative and infrastructural approach to *la nuova dimensione* that would link the city and its region, thereby integrating, as he put it, two very different organisms.¹⁷

While it was easy to describe the effects of rapid development, it was less easy to agree upon the terms of analysis or techniques for dealing with the new dimension. In January 1962, architect Giancarlo De Carlo convened an interdisciplinary seminar to discuss the relation of *La nuova dimensione della città* and *La città regione* (The New Dimension of the City and The City Region). The conference was sponsored by the Milan-based organization *Istituto Lombardo per gli studi economici e sociali* (Lombard Institute for Economic and Social Studies, or ILSES) formed in 1958 to study the impact of development upon Milan and the region of Lombardy. De Carlo, director of urbanism for ILSES and a proponent of *la città regione*—the city region—brought together a group of international experts such as William Holford, director of the British Institute of Town Planning, as well as representatives from the French and German planning sectors. With hypotheses

backed up by statistics and examples borrowed from the United States and European countries, the group debated the future of decentralization in an attempt to define the idea of the city region. De Carlo characterized the city region rather ambiguously as a “multiplicity of interests that differentiated themselves within a territory,” or more plainly put, urbanism exhibiting the behavior of a self-organizing system.¹⁸ As such, the city would be permanently in a dynamic state, its growth and form determined by changes in economic and social forces over time. He compared the interpretation of the city region conceived as an open structure to the traditional city described negatively as a hierarchical, static, and closed structure. Unlike the formal canons and the presuppositions of style that organized the traditional city, the city region expressed itself in nonstylistic configurations.¹⁹ The notion of the city as a nonformal open structure—however vague a concept—was reinforced by a viewpoint that privileged participation on various levels of use, at the same time interpreting decentralization as evidence of its spontaneous and nonauthoritarian evolution. The city conceived as an open structure would enable new social forms to emerge and thus pave the way to a fairer form of society.

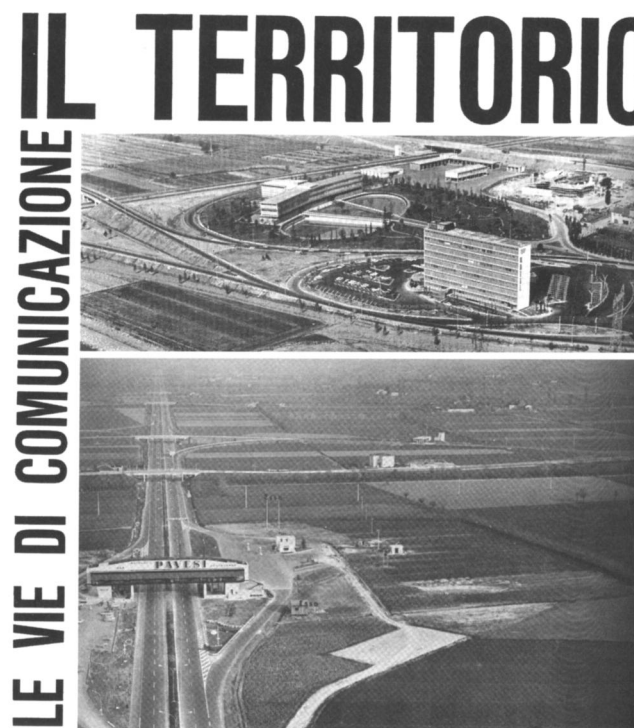
De Carlo’s position, resolutely opposed to Rossi’s, can be traced in part to his early intellectual formation and experiences of World War II. At least two sources of influence are worthy of brief comment. The first significant influence on his political thought informing his urbanism came from his affiliation with the resistance movement during the war and his staunch rejection of ideological positions of either the Left or the Right. During this period, he came into contact with anarchism, and although he never claimed to be an anarchist, aspects can be traced to his conception of open structure and participation.²⁰ Italian sociologist Carlo Doglio, also associated with anarchism and a proponent of the Garden City, influenced De Carlo’s thinking very early in his career. Later, De Carlo participated in the Congrès internationaux d’architecture moderne

(CIAM) and Team 10 meetings. In fact, at a Team 10 meeting held in 1962, De Carlo proposed the city be considered as an elastic system comprising fixed points or hinges that would allow any form to emerge in given conditions.²¹ A key factor in the formation of such an urbanism is the notion of forces of participation. Rossi on the other hand questioned the overprivileging of the forces of change—users, economics, sociology, and highway systems—as key to planning the future form of the city. In *Nuovi problemi*, Rossi complained that the ILSES conference celebrated planning as an end when in fact it was only a means to realize one city instead of another.²² He concluded that for urbanism to acquire the dignity of a scientific discipline, it must offer

more than administrative techniques and be more than a state of mind (*stato d’animo*) or a feeling about urban change.

In 1962, a group of young architects at the University of Rome conducted an experimental design studio under the banner of *la città territorio* (the city territory) (Figure 3).²³ With a strong allegiance to the Italian Left, the group mounted a critique of, among other issues, the imbalance in economic and political power between the center and the periphery of the contemporary city as they simultaneously sought to address the conditions of the new urban dimension. Students proposed projects for a new directional center for Centocelle on the periphery of Rome that bypassed the scale

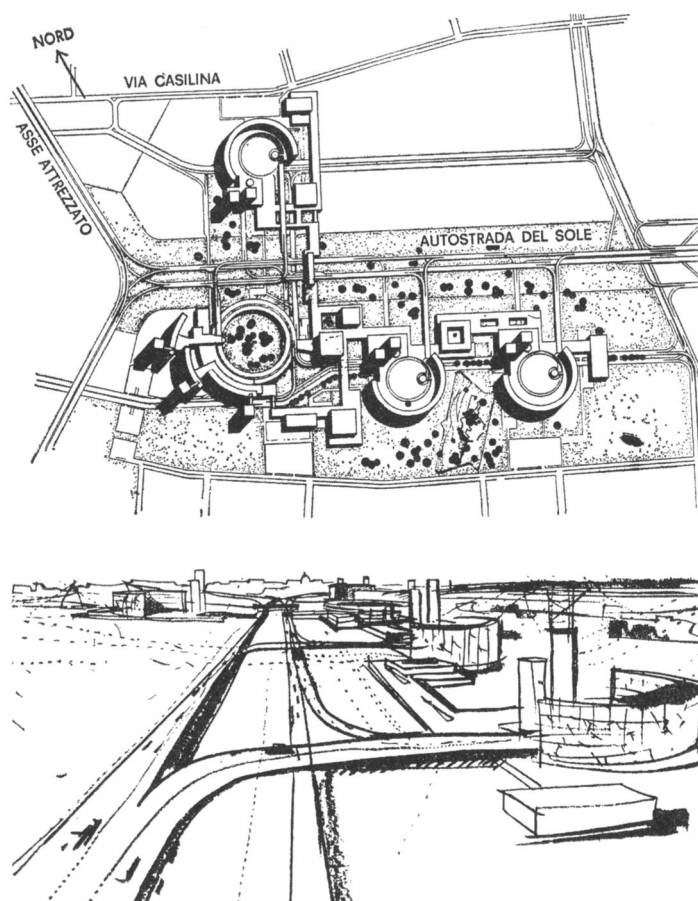
3. Giorgio Piccinato, Vieri Quilici, and Manfredo Tafuri, “La città territorio. Verso una nuova dimensione,” *Casabella continuità* 270 (December 1962): 22.



of architecture for infrastructures comprising parking bridgeheads, highways, and off-ramps connecting the city and the CD to the territory beyond (Figure 4). In the spring of the following year, discontented architecture students at the University of Rome occupied the architecture faculty protesting against the “academicism” of their education and demanding courses that addressed urban problems, specifically, the need for housing. From a political standpoint, 1962 is perhaps most significant for the fact that the first postwar center Left government took power with promises of reforming the laws for land development and the hope of dismantling the state-centered bureaucracy for regional governments. It was this short-lived opening to the Left that encouraged architects to speculate upon urban strategies in conjunction with administrative procedures that could solve existing urban problems and enable the transition to a more democratic society.²⁴

Although real events propelled the debate over the new urban scale, the terms of reference were often academic in nature. Although opinions were registered with little resolve or effect, the debate was not lacking in intensity. According to one observer, the differences between Rossi and De Carlo neared hostility at an experimental course on urbanism held in 1963.²⁵ Ludovico Quaroni and De Carlo were among six architects appointed to direct a design student seminar on the city held at Arezzo and sponsored by the Olivetti company. Rossi, Tafuri, and Paolo Ceccarelli—an architect who would eventually study at Massachusetts Institute of Technology (MIT)—were among eight assistants enlisted to oversee teams of students representing the major schools of architecture across Italy. Architects, urbanists, and guest speakers discussed the usual topics of planning regulation, the effects of mobility and consumption, and the consequences of land speculation and *Piano regolatore generale* (City Plan) on city development. A participant recalls Ceccarelli promoting the theories of Kevin Lynch, Tafuri acting as the voice of urbanism on the Left,

4. Project for Centocelle centro direzionale by students F. Barbaresi, G. Bellateccia, G. Colucci, F. De Micheli, and G. Nigro published in Francesco Tentori, “La città territorio. Un esperimento didattico sul centro direzionale di Centocelle in Roma,” *Casabella continuità* 289 (July 1964): 51.



and Rossi asserting that a new objectivity be brought to urban analysis.²⁶ While the disparate lines of allegiance prove challenging to sort out, it seems that the main dispute arose between architects privileging sociological and economic analysis and those privileging the material conditions of the city itself. Many years later, Rossi complained that one of the bleaker moments in postwar Italian architecture was the invention of terms borrowed from foreign

disciplines (economics, sociology, or linguistics) and their ambiguous application to urban studies.²⁷ By 1963, Rossi’s resolve to put in place precise classifications for describing the concrete relation between architecture and city form was set against the ambiguities and antiformal positions launched in support of *la nuova dimensione*.

While a detailed discussion of the array of responses to *la nuova dimensione* is beyond the

scope of this paper, articles included in the proceedings of the tenth meeting of the *Istituto Nazionale di Urbanistica* in 1965 give some indication of the breadth of debate. As expected, De Carlo spoke on the organization of the territory, Vittorio Gregotti speculated on the architectonic form of the landscape, while other architects discussed topics such as the relation of the anthropogeographical landscape to design. Tafuri gave a critical paper on architecture, urbanism, and utopia that was prescient of later work but as of yet not marked by the stringent Marxian critique of the profession he adhered to from the late 1960s onward. Rossi presented a paper jointly authored with colleagues from IUAV that mounted a vehement attack against recent theorizing of the new urban scale.²⁸ The architects criticized the return of the Garden City model and its progeny, such as British New Towns and the city region, as well as Jean Gottman's concept of the megalopolis, for overvaluing the intangible vagaries of the economic region and undervaluing the concrete realities of the city. Likewise, they argued that architects had been distracted from the real problems at hand by issues of demographics, mobility, and speculation on the psychological effects of visual immediacy as proffered by Kevin Lynch or British Town Design. They accused Kenzo Tange—a popular reference during this period—of exaggerating technical facts and mystifying the old functionalist theme of circulation. The notion of the city as an open work was, in their view, a refurbishing of the modernist trope of the open plan dressed up in a politicized notion of the plan as process. Rossi and his colleagues insisted that the city had specific dimensions and that only closed forms could provide continuity in urban development and sponsor the kind of activities that produced new urban forms.²⁹ Perhaps most importantly, they argued that architecture—as the key to a city's socioeconomic life and its history—was the concrete measure of the city.

Although Rossi's articles of the early 1960s were often coauthored with colleagues from *Casabella* or

IUAV, it is possible to trace the maturing of his position on the new urban scale. For example, in *Il problema della periferia nella città moderna* (The Problem of the Periphery in the Modern City), he argues that architects should work where the ruptures between the old and the new are most legible.³⁰ Declaring that the periphery needed to be “dequarantined,” he acknowledged the negative effects of the city's segregation into geographic and economic centers and peripheries. Elsewhere he leveled criticism at the continuation of rationalism in postwar planning and showed little sympathy for the pseudovernacular motifs of so-called Italian neorealism. An article coauthored in 1960 dismissed Le Corbusier's urban theory as the imposition of academic and a priori visions upon the city.³¹ In *La città e la periferia* (The City and the Periphery) of 1961, Rossi again drew attention to the degraded conditions of the periphery. In a statement prescient of *L'architettura della città*, he asserted that housing was the most significant element in the social life of a city. This article signals the specificity of Rossi's

thinking to the northern Italian situation. Photographs accompanying the text depict the desolate landscape of the Milanese periphery comprising substandard housing and factories lining roads lacking any signs of social life (Figure 5).

By 1963, Rossi backed up his articles with independent and collaborative research undertaken at IUAV and ILSES in Milan. An outline for a book from 1963 titled *Manuale urbanistica* (Manual of Urbanism) treats in a rather technical way what Rossi terms urban science.³² A new outline of approximately a year later differs substantially in composition and theme. Notes and articles from 1963 onward indicate a deepening of his research and the accumulation of references familiar to readers of *L'architettura della città*. To classic readings on the city, such as Carlo Cattaneo, Max Weber, and Lewis Mumford, Rossi added studies on contemporary European cities. This knowledge was further elaborated by learning acquired from a wide range of sources such as Werner Hegemann, Giovanni Astengo, Maurice Halbwachs, Marcel

5. Aldo Rossi, “La città e la periferia,” *Casabella continuità* 253 (July 1961): 23.



Poète, and George Chabot on the idea of the urban landscape.

Scale and Form

Rossi's critique of architectural infatuation with urban scale and the purportedly interdisciplinary modes of *la nuova dimensione* is not surprising. In notes for a book on urbanism, he admonished architects against the overly optimistic interpretation of city expansion as an indication of the leveling of the economic imbalances or as evidence of socioeconomic progress. He was critical of slogans such as *la città-regione* for emphasizing, as he put it, "gigantism."³³ Rossi debunked the myth of scale in the fourth chapter of *L'architettura della città*. He countered notions about the spontaneous formation of the city with examples, such as Maurice Halbwachs's analysis of the various forms of land expropriation, to demonstrate that economic forces are indeed a major impetus within the urban dynamic and that they can be analyzed in terms of urban structure. Rossi's point was twofold. The first aspect underscored the book's aim to delineate techniques for inquiry rooted in the material facts of the city, its architecture, and land ownership among other things. These techniques should not merely describe effects but produce concrete knowledge on the myriad forces—economic, social, political, and historical—acting upon city form. His second point argued that the unprecedented expansion of the postwar city did not significantly alter the terms of analysis or the "substance of the urban artifact."³⁴ Rather, Rossi argued that whether the forces were propelling or retarding, they were universal and yet not generic in effect. Rossi stated unequivocally that the "analysis of the city also allows us to see how these forces are applied."³⁵ Understanding the specific historic factors behind land speculation, for example, revealed its effect upon the structure of one city and not another. Against merely recognizing the forces brought to bear on the city—economical, political, social, natural, or man-made disasters—against utopian or apocalyptic predictions about urban

change, Rossi asserted the necessity of understanding the nature of the city and how forces acting upon the city produce changes in form.³⁶ Different scales of development would certainly elicit different results, but scale itself did not effect the accuracy of the methods of inquiry.

Rossi's analysis of the structure of the city pivots about the concept of the urban artifact. In the last chapter of *L'architettura della città* titled *Evoluzione dei fatti urbani* (translated in the English edition as "The Evolution of Urban Artifacts"), Rossi returns to the urban artifact as a descriptive classification that identifies a key element—individual or composite—in the complex dynamic of the city. Introduced in the first chapter, the concept of *fatto urbano*, as has been well acknowledged, was borrowed from the French *fait urbain* and is difficult to translate into either Italian or English.³⁷ While the problem of translation is salient particularly with regard to Rossi's reception in the English-speaking world, a description of the role of *fatto urbano* is more useful for the present investigation. Rossi dedicates a good portion of the book to describing the various ways that urban artifacts accrue value, that is, how they change and produce changes within the physical structure and sociohistorical imagination of a city over time. Not limited to the object-centric focus of architecture in its most reduced definition, the urban artifact is complex and dynamic in formation and structure. For Rossi, the urban artifact was a mental and physical construct that exceeded the notion of the functional as merely organizational. Moreover, Rossi attributes to the urban artifact the aesthetic quality of significant form. The claim to the aesthetic added yet another dimension to the idea of function. It also raised the question of autonomy in terms of the urban artifact as ultimately self-justified and distinct from necessity. The substance of the urban artifact, both tangible and intangible qualities, was historically constituted through its active participation in the structuring of the city over time. The complex articulation of the urban artifact, its role in the city as a totality—by means of sociohistorically

determined forces—pitted Rossi against the contingency-oriented suppositions of the new urban scale, such as *la città regione* or *la città territorio*.

In *L'architettura della città*, Rossi sought to stabilize the principles and analytic tools grounding a discipline of urbanism. With colleagues at IUAV, he pursued typological and morphological studies as techniques for objectively documenting and assessing the economic, political, and social (thus historical) forces proving consequential in the evolution of urban form.³⁸ The concepts of typology and morphology, in part influenced by Roman architect Saverio Muratori's studies of typology, were broadly construed as analytical tools enabling the study of form as a dynamic fact.³⁹ In *L'architettura della città*, Rossi argued that building typology expresses forms of human living and produces factual information on the construction that physically sustains the city. Studies in urban morphology elicit information on social morphology, economics, demographics, anthropogeography and, in Rossi's view, some aspects of social medicine and collective psychology.⁴⁰ While he acknowledged the contribution of Lynch's research on the visual aspects of the city, Rossi regarded his methods with skepticism. In contrast to Lynch's technique of interviews and loose categories of observation, studies in morphology and typology gather up all the questions of urban organization within a structural logic.⁴¹ Rossi's contribution went beyond mere methodological techniques; rather, concepts such as the urban artifact or the monument provided general descriptive categories that were conceived in response to his understanding of the city as a totality. What architects should do with these principles, that is, how one might proceed to design, was not articulated. *L'architettura della città* constituted a treatise that secured the parameters of urbanism as an autonomous discipline, that is, an area of expertise distinct from yet utilizing knowledge from economics, sociology, and town-planning practices.

Italian reviews of *L'architettura della città* acknowledged Rossi's intent to formulate an "objective science" of urbanism as a response spe-

cific to critical academic discourse of the early 1960s. The reviews welcomed Rossi's erudition and recognized the integral relation between his use of history, city form, and politics. Giorgio Grassi characterized the book as a product of debates internal to the teaching environments at the School of Architecture at the Polytechnic of Milan and IUAV and judged it slightly provincial in focus.⁴² As one might expect, he applauded Rossi's attack on organic and functionalist theories as well as on the more recent behaviorist readings of the city. Vittorio Gregotti welcomed Rossi's use of urban geography and the political analysis that, as he put it, established the *autonomia scientifica della scienza urbana* (the scientific autonomy of urban science).⁴³ However, he warned readers against Rossi's rigid point of view, too focused on a limited idea of architecture. Carlo Aymonino championed Rossi's political agenda and commended his attempt to disentangle various ideologies—functionalist, naturalist, and preservationist paradigms, for example—from the social groups, laws, and politics that actually determine urban form.⁴⁴ Less enthusiastic was a review published in *Città-società* that judged Rossi's prose turgid and, misconstruing the aim of the book, complained that it failed to deal with the problem of urban scale or to deliver guidelines for design.⁴⁵

In 1966, Rossi's book replied to the Italian polemic over the new urban scale. The book was not, as some interpreters would have it, a broad-brush rejection of modernism or the Modern Movement, nor was it a pitch for an autonomous architecture. It countered naive functionalism with the complex functions—sociopolitical, economic, and aesthetic—of the urban artifact and made an important contribution to the critical reappraisal of the urban propositions of the Modern Movement. Rossi articulated an analysis of the structure of the city that stemmed from "the recognition that the city is constructed in its totality."⁴⁶ He objected to modes of interpretation brought about by increased specialization—sociological, functional, and economic—that by ignoring the primacy of form, relegated the

city as a physical entity to a secondary role. The book contested the emptying out of the specificity of urban form and its deep connection to history for abstract analyses pursued in so-called interdisciplinary studies. Rossi privileged architecture as a key aspect of the city as an urban artifact and as the primary physical evidence of the complex forces acting on the city. Architecture as a concrete fact or as an artifact, in the full cultural sense of the word, not only produced knowledge about the city but, by means of detailed analysis, it also evidenced the forces acting within and upon the city. Other disciplines could only describe or theorize the city, while architecture was the physical evidence of myriad forces acting upon the city. For Rossi, no other discipline could lay claim to such tangible authority. It rendered urbanism the status of an independent discipline comprising the architecture of the city.

Within postwar Italian critical discourse, the year 1966 undoubtedly demarcates a watershed. The one side is characterized by tumultuous debates about the city and the future of modernism, polemics galvanized by experiments within schools of architecture and played out in journals, seminars, and competitions. Rossi's book was one among many signaling the summation of the debate over the contemporary city and its new urban scale. Publications by architects such as Vittorio Gregotti, Carlo Aymonino, Alberto Samonà, Manfredo Tafuri, and Giancarlo De Carlo confirmed the intensity of research activity and, perhaps more significantly, the theoretical propensities Italian architects brought to their querying of architecture and the city.⁴⁷ After 1966, the issue of the city dissipated as architects turned their attention elsewhere, becoming caught up in political upheaval and the transformation in Marxist thought that would influence, on one hand, an intransigent ideological critique of architecture and, on the other, feed the pop radicalism of the neo-avant-garde. Meanwhile, Rossi's book became a major influence in architecture schools such as the Polytechnic of Milan or Eidgenössische Technische Hochschule (ETH) in Zurich as well as abroad where it was translated into

several languages. More famously, the book supported a strand of Italian architectural inquiry fundamental to the emergence of *la Tendenza* on the international scene in the 1970s. The publication of the book, despite its formation within a highly specific context and its much later reception within Anglo-American circles, marks a significant moment in and contribution to the history of critical architectural discourse. As a theory of urbanism, it put into motion the querying of architecture and urbanism as inextricable as well as a conception of disciplinary autonomy fundamental to architecture theory from the 1970s onward.

Epilogue

At forty years following the publication of Rossi's *L'architettura della città*, one is compelled to ask if his research and thesis hold any value for current urban and architectural discourse. Is his pursuit of the principles for an urban science an outdated task? Are Rossi's regard for the significance of form as evidence of historical processes constructing the reality of the city and his skeptical view of gigantism in scale as primarily concerned with abstraction, conceits that have no place within current processes of globalization, or the academic discourse celebrating emergent urbanisms? These latter are frequently evidenced by examples of decentralization, the documenting of large-scale urbanized areas underpinned by the pretense of the positive outcome of self-organizing systems, and informed by the cross-pollination of the various design disciplines, particularly landscape and urbanism. I believe that there are some parallels to be drawn between the preoccupations that galvanized *la nuova dimensione* and current modes of describing emergent urban conditions and its search for alternatives to motivate design invention. Notions such as the plan as process, the privileging of systems, and infrastructure, thought to liberate form and enable open and non-predictive evolution of urban potentials, are comparable to the current description of the attributes of urbanization sponsored by complex adaptive sys-

tems. Given this, perhaps there is something to be learned from Rossi's critique of *la nuova dimensione*. To be clear, my purpose is neither to redeem Rossi for the present nor to advocate a return to his interpretation of the city. After all, his thinking was construed by the forms and processes affecting the postwar European city. In the short space of the epilogue, I am limited to a single observation. The point rests with the current use of language that adjectivizes design and describes urban conditions as, for example, flux or flows, and lauds self-organizing nonhierarchical protocols in the effort to avoid the static, the linear, the totalizing, and the prescriptive in design. These terms of description attempt to capture the real forces and the open dynamic at work in the built environment. They indicate a desire to merge the natural and artificial, techniques and fluid processes. Commendable as these aspirations are, one is often hard pressed to find purchase on substantive data produced by the descriptive terms or the graphic diagramming of complex forces—statistics on populations, immigration patterns, plantings, highways, for example. What is the nature and limitations of these concepts and their new graphic means? The descriptive language and the representational techniques are welcomed for they open our imagination to potentials within formative environments and, supposedly, free the designer of formal constraints and design presuppositions. Yet, it could use a few analytic tools that would produce specific knowledge about the forces acting upon and within urban conditions. Perhaps it is time to reassess and update Rossi's tools of description and analysis such as typology and morphology in order to pursue a more discrete understanding of landscape-architecture-urban interactions and the dynamic underpinning their formations. In *L'architettura della città*, Rossi goes to some length to avoid the instrumental, the predictive, and the imposition of form to put in place the means for understanding the "nature" of the city as a complex dynamic of competing forces and processes of change. While the challenge launched by current theories against totalizing narratives of his-

tory, prescriptive forms, predictive outcomes, and the formal preoccupations of so-called postmodernism is welcomed, I would suggest an unprejudiced rereading of *L'architettura della città*. Skip the introductions and begin with the last chapter.

Notes

1. Peter Eisenman, *Oppositions* 5 (Summer 1976): 1. All translations are by the author unless otherwise indicated.
2. Mary McLeod, "The Architecture of the City," reviewed in *Design Book Review* 3 (Winter 1984): 50.
3. See Aldo Rossi, *A Scientific Autobiography* (Cambridge, MA: MIT/Oppositions Books, 1981).
4. Aldo Rossi Papers, Getty Research Institute Special Collections and Visual Collections Accession 880319, Box 9, File 132.
5. See Aldo Rossi, *L'architettura della città* (Padua, Italy: Marsilio, 1966), p. 37.
6. See Paul Ginsborg, *A History of Contemporary Italy. Society and Politics 1943–1988* (New York: Penguin Books, 1990), pp. 210–254.
7. There is a close connection between transformation of the postwar Italian city and the subject matter of Italian films during this period. See the use of the city, buildings, the periphery, and borgate in Pier Pasolini's *Accattone* (1959), Michelangelo Antonioni's *La notte* (1961), or Vittorio De Sica's *Rocco e i suoi fratelli* (1963), for example.
8. Samonà began teaching at IUAV in the mid-1930s, where he was chair from 1945 to 1971. Quaroni taught urbanism at several universities from the mid-1930s onward. From 1955 to 1964, he taught at University of Florence, and from 1964 to 1981 he held a position at University of Rome.
9. For example, Bruno Zevi is not recorded as having participated in any of the major events associated with the urban debate during this period. Although he had been a key contributor to Italian architecture particularly during the immediate postwar years, he had little to do with the encounter between architecture and urbanism in the late 1950s and early 1960s. However, Tafuri later credited Zevi with coining the term *urbatecture* in the mid-1960s.
10. Aldo Rossi, "Nuovi problemi," *Casabella Continuità* 264 (June 1962): 3.
11. Ibid.
12. "Il volto della città," VII Convegno nazionale dell'Istituto nazionale urbanistica, *Urbanistica* 32 (December 1960): 5–8.
13. Ibid., p. 6.
14. Giuseppe Samonà, "La nuova dimensione della città," in D. Andriello, ed., *Urbanistica Conversazioni* (Napoli, Italy: Università di Napoli, Istituto di tecnica urbanistica, 1959), pp. 65–70.
15. Manfredo Tafuri, "I centri direzionali italiani," *Casabella Continuità* 264 (June 1962): 27.
16. The members of the Roman collaborative *Architetti e urbanisti associati* were proponents of the idea of *la città territorio* and participated in the experimental design studio held at University of Rome in 1962–1963. By 1965–1966, Tafuri chose to pursue a career in architectural history rather than practice.
17. Tafuri, "I centri direzionali italiani," p. 27.

18. *Relazioni del seminario. La nuova dimensione della città—La città regione* (Milan, Italy: ILSES, February 1962), p. 189. See De Carlo's contribution to the concluding round table discussion.
19. *Relazioni del seminario. La nuova dimensione della città—La città regione*, pp. 189, 183.
20. See Franco Bunčuga, *Conversazioni con Giancarlo De Carlo* (Milan, Italy: Elèuthera, 2001), pp. 55–57, 63–65 passim.
21. Alison Smithson, ed., *Team 10 Meetings. 1953–1984*. (New York: Rizzoli, 1991), p. 82.
22. Rossi, "Nuovi problemi," p. 4.
23. See various essays in *La città territorio. Problemi della nuova dimensione. #1 Un esperimento didattico sul centro direzionale di Centocelle in Roma* (Bari, Italy: Leonardo da Vinci Editrice, 1964).
24. See my "Architectural Utopias and La nuova dimensione. Turin in the 1960s," in R. Lumley and J. Foot, eds., *Italian Cityscapes. Culture and Urban Change in Contemporary Italy* (Exeter, UK: University of Exeter Press, 2004), pp. 77–89.
25. *Corso sperimentale di preparazione urbanistica. "Fondazione Adriano Olivetti," Fondo Dardi, Archivio progetti* (Venice). n.d., unpaginated.
26. Lucio Barbera, *Cinque pezzi facili dedicati a Ludovico Quaroni* (Rome: Edizioni Kappa, 1989), pp. 22–23.
27. Aldo Rossi, "Architettura per i musei," in *Teoria della progettazione architettonica*. Introduction by Giuseppe Samonà (Bari, Italy: Dedalo, 1968), p. 128.
28. Emilio Mattioni, Gian Ugo Polesello, Aldo Rossi, and Luciano Semerani, "Città e territorio negli aspetti funzionali e figurativi della pianificazione continua," in *Atti del X convegno dell'Istituto nazionale di urbanistica*, vol. 1 (Trieste: Istituto nazionale di urbanistica, October 14–16, 1965), pp. 49–62.
29. Mattioni et al., "Città e territorio negli aspetti funzionali e figurativi della pianificazione continua," p. 52.
30. Gian Ugo Polesello, Aldo Rossi, and Francesco Tentori, "Il problema della periferia nella città moderna," *Casabella continuità* 241 (June 1960): 40.
31. Aldo Rossi and Silvano Tintori, "Aspetti urbanistici del problema delle zone arretrate in Italia e in Europa," in Centro nazionale di prevenzione e di difesa sociale, *Problemi sullo sviluppo delle aree arretrate* (Bologna, Italy: il Mulino, 1960), pp. 243–293.
32. Rossi Papers, Box 6 (June 1963).
33. Rossi Papers, Box 20, File 186.
34. Rossi, *L'architettura della città*, p. 186.
35. Ibid., p. 162.
36. Ibid., p. 162.
37. The difficulty in translating the phrase *fatto urbano* is worthy of examination. See Aldo Rossi, *The Architecture of the City*, trans. D. Ghirardo and J. Ockman (Cambridge, MA: MIT/Oppositions Books, 1982): p. 22. In the context of the present essay, it is important to acknowledge that Rossi's use of the term was diametrically opposed to ideas such as plan as process, user participation, or the emphasis on transitory perceptual experiences as producing meaning and structuring experience of the city.
38. For example, *Aspetti e problemi della tipologia edilizia, documenti del corso di caratteri degli edifici 1963–1964*. Istituto universitario di architettura di Venezia (Venice, Italy: CLUVA, 1963).

39. For a discussion of Rossi’s conception of typology see my “That Obscure Object of Desire: Autobiography and Repetition in the Work of Aldo Rossi,” *Grey Room* 8 (Summer 2002): 38–61.

40. Rossi Papers, Box 2, File 36.

41. Rossi Papers, Box 5, File 68.

42. Giorgio Grassi, Review of *L’architettura della città*. *Architettura libri* no. 2/3 (July 1966): 98–99.

43. Vittorio Gregotti, “Aldo Rossi: “L’architettura della città,” 23 *il Verri* (1967): 172–173.

44. Carlo Aymonino, “Per la formazione di una scienza urbana. L’architettura della città. Chi sceglie in ultima istanza l’immagine di una città? Qual è il ruolo della politica?” *Rinascita* 27 (July 2, 1966): 21–22.

45. Piero Bulgheroni, “L’architettura della città,” *Città-società* (December 1966): 108–11.

46. Rossi, *L’architettura della città*, p. 50–51.

47. For example, Vittorio Gregotti published *Il territorio dell’architettura* (The Territory of Architecture), Carlo Aymonio *Origini e sviluppo della città moderna* (Origins and Development of the Modern City), and Alberto Samonà *La nuova dimensione urbana in Francia. I “grandi ensembles” e la modificazione della forma della città* (The New Urban Dimension in France. The Grand Ensembles and the Modification of Form of the City). Through the early 1960s, Giancarlo De Carlo published among other writings the proceedings from several of his seminars on urbanism such as *La pianificazione territoriale urbanistica nell’area Milanese* (Planning Territorial Urbanism in the Milan Area) of 1966.