ONTE VARESE, CHAPEL
S, EARLY 17TH CENTURY.
CO SILVA (SCULPTOR),
E BERNASCONI (ARCHITECT).
ING WANG.

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Type–Silence–Genre

Type

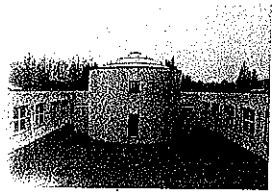
For many architect-theorists during the 1970s, and for the *architettura razionale* boys in particular, once one has rejected modernism for its personalized, expressionist tactics, then architecture's most promising communicative link with culture – meaning, of course, not only with diverse societies but also with diverse systems of cultural production that include, quite probably, architecture's own past – would seem to be the idea of "type."

But where is type located? Is it to be found somewhere in or along or throughout the timeline of architecture's history? Is it secreted in various planimetric organizational strategies? How featureless – or feature-full – is a type? What are its distinguishing characteristics? And what are the minimal characteristics needed for transference to another work in order for the new work to be considered as *belonging* to a type?

Since Aldo Rossi's architecture was apparently the most corporeal and certainly the most regulated of the work being produced under the banner of architettura razionale, it constituted arguably the most cogent experiment into notions of typology as generated from within architectural practice. But rather than the rationalist banner, the banner that flew above Rossi's work was made of unyielding metal, not cloth, and he delighted in the fact that it creaked. Not surprisingly, the types with which his work seems to be affiliated are not always easy to discern. Alan Colquhoun said it quite well when he described Rossi's school at Fagnano Olona as a "pure type that has not yet entered the history of which it is a model."[1]

Rossi frustrated the search for a cogent lexicon of architectural typologies by his continuous evasion of the empirical, the enumerative, and anything that might be considered resolutely serviceable. His writing was as much of a poetic work as the architecture that it was, ostensibly, clarifying. Rossi's signs are always poetic signs. That is, they are poetic in the sense that their signification is never direct but is inevitably displaced, only distantly connected to its nominal significant. Rather than explicating his architecture, Rossi's

1. Alan Colquhoun, "Europe and America: Rationalism and its Effects" (lecture, Harvard University, Cambridge, Massachusetts, October 17, 2000).



... Rossi, School at Fagnano ...a, 1972–1976. Photo: Emmet ...per.

... discussions of this concept, see ... Bakhtin, "Discourse in the Novel," ... *Dialogic Imagination*, trans. Caryl ... on and Michael Holquist (Austin: ...sity of Texas Press, 1983); ... Problem of Speech Genres," and ... Problem of the Text in Linguistics, ...ogy, and the Human Sciences: An ...ment in Philosophical Analysis," ...ch Genres and Other Essays*, ed. ... Emerson and Michael Holquist, ... Vern W. McGee (Austin: University ... Press, 1986).

texts tended to parallel it. Rather than writing rationalism, Rossi's silence served to unwrite it.

Silence

It is unhelpful to consider the silence advocated by Rossi as a form of muteness: instead of a disability, it is an act of restraint. Rossi's "silent architecture" was nonintervening – aloof even – and at the same time unrelenting and a bit narcissistic. (In works such as the San Cataldo Cemetery, one can catch Rossi's architecture rapturously regarding its mirror image.) Rossi's deceptively onerous "silence" seems to have an equivalence in Mikhail Bakhtin's equally knotty concept: "unfinalizability."[2] Fundamental to unfinalizability is a work's open-endedness, which initiates the dialogic opening of a work so as to provide an addressee with the opportunity to join the author in effectively coauthoring a work, if not an opportunity to create another work. Unfinalizability should not be confused with incompleteness, which usually indicates that an utterance, such as a work of architecture, is unprepared for a response, possibly even resistant to any response. Therefore, the ideal condition for the aesthetic utterance is one whereby it accomplishes a state of perceivable completion that still manages to sanction further utterances by means of an elemental open-endedness.

The oft-noted repetition of forms within his work – concatenated as well as mirrored – seems to be evidence of Rossi's urge for unfinalizability. At one point, Rossi even laments, "But always this possibility of conclusion has escaped me." He believed that repetition within a work – of an element or a bay or a building unit – challenged users to develop identity, and that it was human nature to necessarily individualize repetition. Irregularities artificially instituted in a housing block or market building for the purpose of disrupting redundancy could only suppress genuine individuation, initiating artificial hierarchies.

Sacri Monti

Rossi's formulation of architectural silence proposed corollaries in motionlessness and contamination. Perhaps the best exposition of these themes can be found in the *sacri monti* of Rossi's native northern Italy.

The sacri monti, or sacred mountains, seem to have instigated a number of Rossi's more problematic interests (problems, that is, for his colleagues and apologists; essential to Rossi's own problematic). These devotional sites, with their narrative sequences of late-Renaissance chapels/pavilions

3. The most notable exception being, of course, Rudolf Wittkower, in his "'Sacri Monti' in the Italian Alps," in *Idea and Image* (Over Wallop: Thames and Hudson, 1978), and in the recent work of Medina Lasansky at Cornell.
4. Aldo Rossi, *A Scientific Autobiography*, trans. Lawrence Venuti (Cambridge, Massachusetts: MIT Press, 1981), 2.
5. See Gérard Genette, *The Architext: An Introduction*, trans. Jane E. Lewin (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1992).

(the blur is significant), were usually distributed over a hillside and contained three-dimensional dioramas composed of plaster, terra-cotta, paint, cloth, horsehair, and even real vegetation. It's not surprising that they have rarely been discussed in art or architectural histories.[3] Their elements of popular address and high mimeticism – not to mention the possibility that they're the precursors to such low cultural entities like wax museums and animatronic parks – have led them to be most often considered *Kitschwerk* rather than works of art. And the local artists and architects who contributed to them were not all considered to be among the upper echelon, thereby guaranteeing that, in the 18th century, when art historians began divvying up the teams into "high" and "low" art, the sacri monti were benched.

Despite the stigma, Rossi proclaims his enthusiasm for the works of Tanzio, who worked on a few of the most important chapels at the sacro monte in Varallo; Rossi even used some of Tanzio's images in his *Analogous City* collages. In the typical chapels of the sacri monti, Rossi finds "history . . . in . . . plaster figures," whose "motionless gesture" and expressions are fixed in the act of permanently "telling an otherwise impossible story."[4]

The sacri monti occupy liminal categories, both in medium and typology, posing problems of historiography. In his prolegomenon to the subject, Rudolf Wittkower, equally fascinated by these "monstrosities," links the reluctance of "sophisticates" to engage these constructions to the fact that one never knows whether to observe a sacro monte or to live it.

In other words, the sacri monti exemplify a condition of Rossian contamination. They blur theatrical witnessing with carnivalesque participation. They infiltrate the concept of the archetype – which seeks a determinate pedigree somewhere between history and nature – with the concept of the "archi-genre,"[5] which is content to flitter somewhere between history and culture. One may perhaps trace the internal contradictions of Rossi's conception of type to these corruptions by genre, and with Rossi's problematization of type, one might uncover the unraveling of the catechism of typology.

Teatri

The Teatro del Mondo is a good example of Rossi's determination to subtly frustrate any attempt to identify a typological purity: the theater mixes elements of the amphitheater, theater-in-the-round, gallery, and various canonical Venetian villas. Add to this the omnipresent, hypertrophic bathing cabana. What seems to be assiduously avoided is

ROSSI, TEATRO DEL MONDO, ED IN VENICE, 1979. PHOTO ESY THE AUTHOR.

traditional maritime architecture, the architecture of choice for the canonical modernist: the Teatro del Mondo seems to revel in its unseaworthiness, tilting precariously at the slightest ripple in the water, the creaking of the metal banner on the peak of its roof being the only suggestion of its maritime duties. Inside, the staircases are visible, and the stage is itself part of the entry sequence for the lower tiers of seating: the audience cannot avoid being the performance. This melange of what is traditionally considered to be types is validated by the Teatro's chameleonic traits: regardless of its context, the Teatro locates and iterates some condition of its surroundings.

Rossi's *Scientific Autobiography* is itself a promiscuous collapse, again, of scientism (with all the empirical objectivism implied by the term) and autobiography, described by Philippe Lejeune as a relatively recent genre, "a retrospective prose narrative [and therefore intrinsically subjective] produced by a real person concerning his own existence, focusing on his individual life, in particular on the development of his personality."[6] Put together, "scientific autobiography" produces a subgenre that had been used by Max Planck to disclose the effect events had had on his research in physics, and by Robert Schofield, who used the form to edit the memoirs and correspondence of Joseph Priestley, an 18th-century scientist.[7] In his autobiography, Rossi initiates a discussion regarding his interest in the freedoms associated with the use of typology, only to veer immediately into a discussion of the taverns (a type to which he often returns) constructed within the arches of the S-Bahn viaducts in Berlin.[8] But a tavern could assume the form of a grotto, a crypt, a cabin, a library . . . virtually anything can give identity to a tavern. Therefore, assuming these viaducts belong to a type, and that that type might be named "viaducts," how can a "tavern" – a category of use with considerably less formal stability than "arcade" or "amphitheater" – also be a type, much less a type named "tavern"? It seems that when Rossi finds that typology insufficiently identifies the specific attributes he wishes to associate with a place, he begins to describe the place in terms of its genre.

Rossi frequently presents as a type something to which he then assigns attributes of genre: "Visit an asylum: pain there is something concrete. It is to be found in the courtyards, in the walls, in the rooms."[9] While there is no morphological regularity to "asylum," the description clearly locates the asylum somewhere between Dickensian bleak and Dante-esque *purgatorio*. In other words, Rossi suppresses *cortile*

ippe Lejeune, *Le Pacte autobi-ique*, (Paris: Seuil, 1975), 13.
Robert Schofield, *A Scientific graphy of Joseph Priestley, 1733-lected Scientific Correspondence*, idge, Massachusetts: MIT Press,

3, *Scientific Autobiography*, 75.
Rossi, *The Architecture of the City*, Diane Ghirardo and Joan Ockman idge, Massachusetts: MIT Press, 112.

10. Rossi, *Scientific Autobiography*, 42.
11. See Genette for a compelling discussion of these events.
12. Some of the most promising research into typology was initiated during the 1970s by Jorge Silvetti, whose Barthesian take in "The Beauty of Shadows" suggested a workable, internally critical mode of operating through typology. I suspect that, had typology remained a project of the architect-theorists, it would not have been hampered by this sort of latent creationism. One goal of genre investigations – as inspired by Silvetti himself – might be to introduce some Darwin into this theory of "kinds." *Oppositions* 9 (Summer 1977).

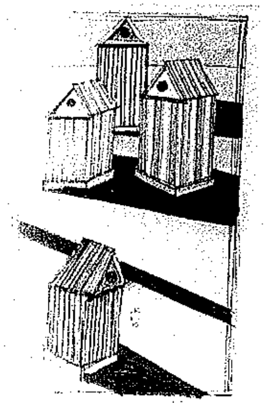
as a subtype, proposing instead a genre of "asylum." (Similarly, one might say that a reference Rossi makes to Louis Kahn's Roman-ness consigns that architect's fundamental modernism to an index of a genre one associates with common perceptions of Rome.)

This propensity to veer from type to genre is quite clear in his discussion of the cabin (or, at times, cabana). Rossi argues that the architecture that is the most reliable index of pleasure is the architecture one encounters on a holiday. He describes an example of such architecture – the cabin – as being composed of four walls, a tympanum, and colored stripes, which he describes as "an integral and determining part, perhaps the most obviously architectonic part of the structure. This part, above all, makes us aware that there has to be some event in the interior, and that somehow in the acting out of the event a performance will take place."[10]

QUATREMÈRE

Rossi's work didn't represent architecture's only foray into typological research. Pinning their hopes for finding architecture's meaning system in a science of "type," most architects in the 1970s entrusted research to the historical branch of the field, which, perhaps intuitively, began to look for archetypes – the consummate, overarching types – as they might have originated in some historic past. In other words, type became historicized. This search for origins led most notably to Quatremère de Quincy, whose late-18th-century theories of type – undoubtedly founded on Abbé Charles Batteux's earlier and highly influential misinterpretation of Aristotle's *Poetics* (whereby Aristotle's two poetic modes were reconstrued into what has come to be known as the romantic triad of the lyric, epic, and dramatic)[11] – attempted to legitimize an origin for the types, to christen their archetypes. Embroiled in a theory of origins, typology, and all that it could (or would) stand for, seems to have become mired in a theological swamp.[12] Therefore, despite the desire to desert an architecture considered to have degenerated into the sometimes personalized, sometimes impressionistic reproduction of early-modernist forms and techniques, typology as a design method neither guaranteed a universality of forms nor removed the capriciousness of the architect as a contingent element of the design process.

As proposed by the theorists of architettura razionale, typology would fundamentally reaffirm architecture's autonomy. Genre, however, intrinsically a socio-historical phenomenon, seems to be capable of connecting architecture



Rossi, *Cabine dell'Elba*, 1979.

to multiple modes of cultural production. It is genre rather than type that allows Rossi, in his *Scientific Autobiography*, to locate his source for a villa in the novels of Raymond Chandler, a source for student housing in Fellini's *Satyricon*, a source for a single-family house in the green paint of the Hotel Sirena, a source for public space in the La Fenice scenes in Visconti's film *Il Senso*. If architecture's elemental forms are typologically autonomous to architecture, their representational capabilities can be found in genres, which, far from being autonomous, spread throughout an indefinite number of media and modes.

For Rossi, it's not just within the range of architectural production that we find an autonomous system. We find autonomous systems everywhere: in literature as well as in music, but also in engineering, in the structuring of political systems, and even in human behavior. In fact, it seems that Rossi's universe is a constellation of autonomous systems, each orbiting endlessly about its own nucleus of expressive modes, each system held in its relation to other systems by the subtle gravitational tugs administered by genres.

History, Realism

Returning to history: for most architects in the 1970s, including the rationalists, history was not only the source of research into type, but the writing of history was also considered to be the model of realist representation. For Rossi, however, even history was susceptible to the exigencies of the poetic sign. In this regard, Rossi was using a technique initiated by several renowned postwar Italian poets: Attilio Bertolucci, Mario Luzi, and Pier Paolo Pasolini, who saw that history, both in the events leading up to World War II and in its postwar role as a revisionist teller of events, was consistently speaking "in an ungrounded voice [whose] elusiveness forms the very stuff of poetry."[13] They used the genres of elegy and lament (especially Pasolini, who wrote a lament to the disappearance of fireflies due to industrial pollution), novel in verse, and pastoral (Bertolucci, for example, who might use strikers and strikebreakers in place of bellicose satyrs) – genres wholly unbecoming to history's realist pretenses – in order to tell a history while reflecting on the intrinsic unreliability of such a telling.

And Geography

Perhaps the closest analogue for history, as Rossi understood it, is geography.[14] In this slightly unusual associaton, Rossi approaches the observations made by Mikhail Bakhtin, who described the history/geography nexus via Dante's map:

This is what characterizes Dante's map of the world, with its coinciding geographical, astronomical, and historical centers – centers of value as well as of events: the earth, Jerusalem, the event of redemption. Strictly speaking, geography knows no far or near, here and there; it is devoid of any absolute axiological standard of measurement within its chosen totality (the earth). And history, likewise, knows no past, present, and future; it knows no long or short time, no "long ago" or "recently" – as absolutely unique and nonconvertible moments. The time of history is itself nonreversible, of course, but within it all relations are fortuitous and relative (and reversible), for there is no absolute center of value. History and geography are invariably aestheticized to a certain degree.[15]

Similarly, maps by the Pavian Opicinus de Canistris, dating to the 1330s, combine nautical charts and standard cartographic silhouettes in an ostensible explanation of the world, but they use the apparent mimeticism of cartography to host Canistris's social and religious theories, introducing various anthropometric figures, sexual fugues, mnemonic motifs, and so on. These maps fascinated Rossi, both as duplicates of history and as representative of his ideal form of writing: something midway between drawing and handwriting.[16] With Rossi's descriptions of this cartography of ideology, Rossi erases history's realist pretensions.

These undoubtedly are some of the reasons Rossi teases us throughout *Scientific Autobiography* with alternate titles like "Forgetting Architecture" and "The Geography of My Projects": in most of his work, it is precisely architecture's immutability that many of Rossi's colleagues had hoped to demonstrate, but that Rossi wished us to forget. In the end, it is the potentialities of the work's generic associations with other media that he hoped to commemorate.

…io Luzi, as quoted in Keala Jewell, …esis of History: Experimenting with …in Postwar Italy (Ithaca: Cornell …sity Press, 1992), 246.
…ssi contemplated alternate titles for …tific *Autobiography*, including "The …aphy of My Projects."

15. M.M. Bakhtin, *Art and Answerability: Early Philosophical Essays by M.M. Bakhtin*, ed. Michael Hoquist and Vadim Liapunov, trans. Vadim Liapunov (Austin: University of Texas Press, 1990), 208.
16. Aldo Rossi, *A Scientific Autobiography*, 44. His intrigue with Canistris may also explain Rossi's fascination with Stendahl's semi-autobiographical *Life of Henri Brulard*, a hybrid text with marginal drawings throughout.

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