7. *Texts of Analogy*

Aldo Rossi, Cemetery of San Cataldo, 1971-78
“…Georges Bataille published a book titled *Le Bleu du Ciel*, which translates as ‘the blue of the sky,’ yet curiously enough it was published in English as *The Blue of Noon*…Its plot…is a metaphor for the hopelessness of the left’s ideology in the face of the oncoming war, with necrophilia as one of its central metaphors…Aldo Rossi’s competition project for the Cemetery of San Cataldo in Modena was entered under the title ‘The Blue of the Sky.’“
Ossuary – a chest, building, well, or site made to serve as the final resting place of human skeletal remains

“Its ossuary is an empty walled cube reminiscent of the stark geometries of a De Chirico painting or those of Ernesto Lapadula’s Palazzo della Civiltà Italiana at the Esposizione Universale di Roma planned for 1942.”
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“Rossi’s project is also a metaphor for the futility of the redemption in the sanctuary; instead the only hope is the ever-present but mockingly distant and unachievable blue of the sky.”

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“…the metaphor not only derives from the typological explorations of Rossi’s analogical drawings, but also emerges as a polemical statement drawn from postwar literature signaling the political exhaustion of modernism.”

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"…the Cemetery of San Cataldo is both a political and architectural critique of modernism in which the ideas broached in Rossi’s book *The Architecture of the City* ultimately take physical form in the partial realization of the cemetery.”

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Rossi’s critique of modernism is located in the grim reality of postwar Italy and its multiple reactions to the fascist monumentality in aspects of Italian modernism. One such reaction took form in the escapist aesthetic of the neoliberty style, referring to Italy’s ties to England in the late nineteenth century and adopting the name ‘Liberty’ after the English manufacturer of Art Nouveau fabrics.”

Why would the Italians’ want to refer to their ties to England? Why would this be relevant in the mid 20th century?
“A second reaction was manifest in Italian neorealist film of the same period. A documentary attention to everyday life and an abundance of details were among the mimetic techniques used to produce the ‘realistic’ effects of neorealism.”

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“Neorealism involved a double mimesis is architecture… the rebuilding of the Tiburtino district in Rome during the early 1950s produced buildings that were new by necessity but also needed to resemble the product of historical sedimentation… whose neorealist effect was marked by a nostalgic quality.”

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“Rossi initiates a critique of the scenographic effects of neorealism by pointing toward a more structuralist notion of realism in architecture that is grounded in typological studies.”
“The Cemetery of San Cataldo at Modena, and perhaps to a similar degree his Gallaratese housing complex, are among the few of Rossi’s realized buildings in this period that integrate his critique of abstraction with his interest in typology, analogy, and scale.”
“Another critique of modernism in architecture was represented at the time by the magazine *Casabella*... included many of Rossi’s early articles on Adolf Loos and Louis Khan, as well as on modernist buildings such as Mies’s Seagram Building and Le Corbusier’s La Tourette.”
“...regional government center in Turin...a giant four-sided square, a megabuilding on giant columns spaced 100 meters apart with a vast square courtyard in the center...a new kind of over-sized civic marker.”
“...the juxtaposition of scales becomes important. These early works also deploy pure geometrical forms...exemplify his interest in forms reduced to their geometric archetypes.”

Archetype – an original model or type after which other similar things are patterned.
“Rossi published The Architecture of the City before any of his work had been built, much like Robert Venturi’s publication of Complexity and Contradiction in Architecture, published the same year, before Venturi completed any major built work.”
"Venturi and Rossi also shared an interest, new at the time and expressed in theoretical postulates, in describing the irreducibility of the city to any of modernism’s totalizing visions."
“Yet, where Venturi’s populist embrace of the city and its hallmark strip includes its temporary signage in the city’s symbolic language...”
"…Rossi instead adopts an analytic method to isolate what he considered the city’s urban artefacts. Such urban artefacts include elements of the city whose continuities, be they functional, such as housing, or symbolic, such as monuments, account for their permanence within the history of the city. In Rossi’s analysis, these artefacts can also be considered catalysts for new buildings.”
“This dialectic of permanence and growth defines Rossi’s understanding of the city as occupying different moments in time and suggests that the urban artefact records diachronic moments and histories.”
“...Rossi’s The Architecture of the City shares some similarities with Colin Rowe’s book Collage City...yet it is their differences that are important.”
“A fundamental premise of Collage City is that what existed—the buildings embodying the history of architecture—had an intrinsic value and could be considered truthful as well as foundational. Rowe gave a value of origin, and therefore any urban project had to respond to these pre-existing or, in Rowe’s terms, ‘set pieces’ of the city.”
“Rowe selected such set pieces…and inserted them into other contexts in a strategy that resembles Piranesi’s Campo Marzio project. Rowe’s idea of set piece, taken out of its original context and reinserted into a new context, linked contextualism to the idea of collage.”

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“Yet Rowe’s and Piranesi’s strategies differ in respect to origins... Rowe assigns an a priori value to what exists... Piranesi assigns no value to the existing context... Rowe’s method of collage reuses preexisting meaningful fragments, while Piranesi maintains the juxtaposition of elements without being beholden to an idea of the whole.”

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“Rossi’s approach could be likened to that of Piranesi in terms of retaining a tension between urban elements, denying a singular narrative, meaning, or origin…Rossi conceived of the city as an ensemble of typological elements, whose simple geometries could be read as the result of removing their layers of historical accretions.”

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Discuss the different ways typology is explored and how are Rossi's typological studies different?

“This produced geometric figures with a level of figuration unlike the abstract entities of modernism and unlike the contextual character of Rowe’s urban fragments. In this operation, Rossi rethought the entire notion of typology developed in the nineteenth century by J.N.L. Durand as a series of type conditions for certain buildings.”
“...Rossi used type as an analytical instrument with which to generate form as well as to generate a critique of modernist abstraction. He reintroduced instead a typology which dealt not only with the problem of scale but also with the problem of meaning. Rossi envisioned typology as standard elements that were scaleless and only meaningful when understood in a particular context..”

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“This idea of typology raised the issue of repetition, suggesting that the city is given form by a repetition of certain archetypal elements or urban artefacts. The issue of repetition was also important in minimalist sculpture as a critique of narrative - the repeated series lacks a beginning, middle, and end - and as a critique of origin, as the individual or starting unit is subsumed by other identical units.”

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“Rossi uses iconic forms but strips them of their iconicity through repetition, a technique that undermines the aura and uniqueness of architectural elements…they can potentially be deployed as textual elements.”

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“Rossi achieves shifts in scale in several different ways, in both drawing and building – for example, architectural elements such as pilotis.”

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“Rossi’s drawings are also a locus for his critique of contextualism. His drawings, for example, register both the dislocation of place through the repetition of typological elements, and the dissolution of scale through the introduction of domestic objects into the urban environment.”

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“…when the top is removed from the pot, the domestic object becomes an architectural form that reappears as Rossi’s Teatro del Mondo, his floating theater for the 1980 Venice Biennale… Rossi suggests that familiar objects have their own autonomous condition inscribed in their type, yet his concept of typology remains resolutely open-ended.”

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“One of Rossi’s first buildings to deploy this shift of scale and repetition of elements is his Gallaratese housing project, whose colonnade is less a classical organization than it is a repetition of typical elements.”

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“Rossi’s drawings also combine aspects of the Modena project into new relationships with the city: Modena’s conical shrine resembles an industrial tower, and occupies the same landscape as an archetypal Tower of Babel.”
“In Rossi’s painting of the courtyard of Fagnano, Modena’s square cruciform window forms the backdrop for an arcade reminiscent of the Gallaratese housing block.”
“Other drawings equate the punched-out square windows of Modena’s cubic ossuary to those of a house. It is when these elements are take out of a real or built context that they become both analogic and textual, in that they do not conform to a single idea nor to any manifestation of reality.”

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“While the deep shadows, black windows, and while surfaces of structures within Rossi’s drawings have De Chirico-esque characteristics, Rossi’s drawings are analogic as well as textual; they are a critique of architecture that cannot be made in the medium of architecture itself.”

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How is The Cemetery of San Cataldo a different type of city?

“The Cemetery of San Cataldo project focuses the energy of Rossi’s drawings and the ideas in *The Architecture of the City* to render the cemetery as another type of city.”
“In the drawings that Rossi submitted for his competition entry, the conception of the cemetery as a series of parts becomes clear: rows of columbaria and objectlike ossuaries are the locus for the symbolic burning of the bodies.”
“The ‘town square’ occupying the center of the cemetery houses the artefacts culled from the interchangeably urban and domestic realms; the conical shrine recalls the coffeepot as well as the industrial tower....”

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“...and the columbaria and ossuaries blend the typologies of house and memorial. Rossi’s cemetery also draws on Enlightenment models such as Fischer von Erlach’s cemetery and Boullee’s funerary monuments, yet transposes the themes of life and death through the symbol of the house.”

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“Rossi maintains the formal condition of the house through the use of a pitched roof and windows, yet strips the windows of the elements which signify occupation. As an emptied opening, the windows of the columbaria instead register absence.”
“Rossi’s project for the Cemetery of San Cataldo engages aspects of its context without resorting to a contextualist strategy...”

S. Hambright

De Chirico and Rossi

What is the difference in these two types of contextualism?
Lecture 8: Aldo Rossi, Cemetery of San Cataldo, 1971-78

“One of Rossi’s decisions involved using a wall to join the cemeteries, which sets into play the vertical and horizontal axes of the traditional Roman town, which grids the cemetery complex.”

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“The plan of Rossi’s cemetery can be read as a diptych with the existing Costa cemetery, and bears both symmetrical and asymmetrical relationships to this context, aligning and slipping out of alignment with different portions of the plan...its multiple misalignments further disrupt the classic idea of a part-to-whole relationship.”

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“...The cemetery project can be seen to take the theme of the enclosure of figured objects from Le Corbusier’s Mundaneum project. Yet Rossi’s plan rethinks Le Corbusier’s utopian gesture within the context of a more problematic relationship of drawing to building.”
“These reappear within the context of the cemetery project, but have nothing to do with religious symbolism, and instead become urban secular symbols brought into a sacred burial ground. The confusion of symbols between the sacred and profane is part of the textual nature of the project.”

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“The context of the idea of Le Corbusier’s plan as generator is called into question as Rossi puts both sectional and perspectival elevations into the plan...”

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“Another relationship presented at Rossi’s Cemetery of San Cataldo relates to scale, both of the city and of the individual building. This critique is proposed through a single element: the window.”
“…more akin to Adolf Loos’s house projects, in which the exterior of the house was conceived as different and separate from the interior. The façade in Loos’s case was a double-sided membrane that articulated the urban scale of the city on one side and the domestic scale of the house on the other.”

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“The window functions as both the outside and inside of urban scale: the exterior scale of the window differs from that of its interior, from which one can read the slightly smaller frame of the exterior window.”
“The multiple scales at which the square operates are legible as a honeycombed effect, with the square window as an insert, reproducing the windows at many different scales.”
“The square punched into the wall is a traditional type of window, yet in this context the window becomes a register of a space of absence and emptiness.”
“Many of the drawings are partial plan views rendered as flattened, one-point perspective views, similar to a cubist still life.”
“The drawings are diagrams and the buildings, in many cases, are built as illustrations of the drawings…The shadows become important as the sole indicator of relief…As in the work of John Hejduk or Daniel Libeskind, or perhaps even Palladio, who redrew all of his buildings late in life, it is possible to say that building is a representation of an idea first proposed in drawing..”
“The Modena project, especially the drawings, also points toward the development of what Rossi would call his *Citta analoga* or *Analogous City* of 1976... The analogical method attempts to understand the city from its urban artefacts, which are elements from different places and different times...”

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How is Modena ‘sited between drawing and building? What does this mean?

“The movement from Modena’s competition drawings to its built components and subsequently to the *Citta analoga* drawings suggests that the relationship from drawn idea to built form is recursive, and ultimately textual, thus undecidable.”