

Autobiografia Científica – Aldo Rossi

Susana Brito, Arquitecta, Portugal

Critical review

Almost ten years have passed since I read and studied, for the first time, “Autobiografia Científica” by architect Aldo Rossi (1931-1997), a book published thirty-five years ago by MIT with a rather unique design, namely due to two facts: 1. life experience, wisdom and knowledge gained with age and training, deeply influence the way we interpret the masters and how the masters interpret themselves; 2. labeling this book limits and reduces the scope of its message.

This is a Postmodern, scholarly, informed and emotional work, written in the first person, which tells us about memory and language, written from two points of view: that of the individual and that of the architect. For the author, it is crucial that we understand how the choices and difficulties of the individual have influenced the architect and how the architect has influenced and guided the choices made by the individual. They are one and inseparable. That is why a book that collects personal notes after an accident in 1971 is more than a biography. It is a journey that takes us to the places, smells, shapes, people and buildings that were important for the individual and shaped the architect’s conceptual methodologies, as Rossi himself states “para mim o projeto de arquitetura, agora, identifica-se com estas coisas; há uma rua em Sevilha feita de galerias sobrepostas, pontes aéreas, escadas, de barulho e de silêncio que em cada desenho me parece estar a repetir. Aqui a pesquisa cessou é a arquitetura reencontrada faz parte da nossa história social; a invenção gratuita é recusada, forma e função estão agora identificadas no objeto; o objeto faça parte do campo ou da cidade, é uma relação de coisas; não existe uma pureza no

desenho que não seja a recomposição de tudo isto e o artista, no final, pode escrever como Walter Benjamin, «porém, eu sou deformado pelas conexões, com tudo aquilo que aqui me rodeia» (p. 45).

This illustrated narrative of about 100 pages calls on the readers' thought regarding several issues while, simultaneously, provides them with information on references, spaces, places and authors of different scientific fields which influenced Aldo Rossi. The beginning of the book may be considered a balance between professional and personal life (p. 21). Rossi also lists the references he used to write his "Autobiografia Científica", among which Dante's "Commedia" and Max Planck's "Scientific Autobiography and Other Papers", but, in particular, the link between scientific and autobiographic research on death (p. 22). Moreover, the book describes his architectural glossary for the first time (which would later be developed). Rossi makes us think about the importance of facts from a formal perspective and the issue of the fragment (a part of the whole, already unrecognizable and changeable (p. 33)), as well as the importance of osteology in view of the structural issue. Afterwards, the author discusses the issue of Time and Place, the first condition of architecture (p.87) and how these have led the architect to the concept of identity (p.43), thus reinforcing the importance of history-reality and of the individual's personal memories. Then, the text leads us to a more personal train of thought, between technique and fantasy, followed by an introduction to the Theatres (p.56). Noteworthy is also the issue of the symbols (the window, the scale, the wall, repetition and copy), the tools leading to the fantasy or to action, identifiable in almost all of Rossi's work, which are present throughout the text.

A crucial text to understand the architect, as crucial as architecture being the main element of life ("o elemento primário no qual se insere a vida", p. 46), because it tells us about his mode of architecture but it is not merely an essay, a treaty or even a manifest. Some recurring themes are present and inform us of Aldo Rossi's architecture: death, time, place, scenography, memory, fragment, fantasy, reality and symbol.



As we read the text, we (re)discover that the experiences of the individual are the architect's tools, materialized in his written and construction work. Therefore, “este livro poderia, indiferentemente, intitular-se Esquecer a Arquitectura, porque posso falar de uma escola, de um cemitério, de um teatro, mas é mais rigoroso dizer que falo da vida, da morte, da imaginação” (p. 119-120).

Aldo Rossi – Autobiografia Científica. Lisboa: Edições 70, 2013.