The city in suspense, Aldo Rossi and the pathological permanence

In his book, *The architecture of the city*, Aldo Rossi defines permanence as “a past that we can still experiment in the present”. But Rossi is ambiguous on whether this permanence is inscribed in the present in order to assure the linear continuity between past, present and future, or it is a kind of eternal immobility encouraging the nostalgic belief in fundamental forms. A third possibility would suggest that permanence, rather than a simple continuity, obeys to the idea of suspense: a latent past which, in every single present moment, can occur as a new experience and take new forms of appearance.

A particularly unexpected adjective Rossi uses to qualify permanence is the term ‘pathological’. Borrowed from a psychoanalytical discourse, this term means to define the state of isolated elements in the flow of the city, a subversive resistance to its aesthetic, social and economical evolution. Rossi says that these specific elements have the capacity to either hold back or accelerate the urban process and are often related to revolutionary moments of social history.

We might therefore hypothesize that architecture is ‘pathological’ and revolutionary when it becomes the sign of a moment in which the relations of social and economical domination are suspended. And simultaneously, *revolutionary suspense* would be a question of architectural image: a freezing of physical and social reality within a resistant sign. Based on this, the question would be: what are the signs of revolutionary suspense of our times? What are the collective images of suspense in our contemporary cities? Are these images related to material constructions and individual buildings, as it is the case for the monuments in Rossi’s city? Or, do we have to seek new signs of different kinds, such as twitter messages and internet videos, to find the relevance of suspense?

In our times where most of the discourses on the city are about mobility, flow and continuity, our aim is to search for the politic and poetic relevance of the idea of *suspense* approached by Rossi in his first book.