

the symmetry of Aldo Rossi's handrails

by eamon byrne

It would be another difference a building has from a “sculpture”. It would be something that even photographers would have difficulty in disguising, since many modern buildings, even many modern *photographs* of buildings, place such emphasis on symmetry. For both architects and photographers, because the geometry of cubes and simple curves leads the eye along lines of least resistance, it would seem natural to focus on this property of cubes and curves. So we notice the proportionate grid of windows, the curved roof, the patterned facade. Unfortunately this striving for perfect proportion can be a bit of a chimera. The perfect symmetry of the frontal facade of Aldo Rossi's tower placed so perfectly in the centre of that palazzo, led up to by those perfectly positioned granite steps, will be always just slightly satirised by that pair of polished steel handrails, not to mention that kiosk parked out front selling coffee. Sooner or later the steel handrails will have become scuffed steel handrails pushed slightly off-centre by people leaning against them while they pause to prise the lids off their paper cups. Admittedly this can't always be blamed on the architect. The handrails will have probably been a council add-on. Then again it can't be blamed on pictures either. Perhaps later, when you will look at the modern photograph you took, with your cellphone, on your notebook, when you are home, up high in your condo, overlooking the plaza, the handrails will look just a tad non-symmetrical because you had the camera just a tad too far to the left when you tripped the shutter. At least you had a camera. So you will have evidence — for when you want to look at it again, and think about it, the imperfect symmetry. For the rest of us, in real life our eyes aren't placed on a perfectly placed tripod. Those handrails will tend to look even more out of place as we walk by in real time, about 8 am, in the quiet morning, if we

were to notice them. But probably we don't notice them, the symmetry of the handrails coming, existing for a split second, then going again. At the very moment we should be noticing the perfect symmetry of Aldo Rossi's handrails, other things are undoubtedly on our minds. Although it's unlikely that one of them is that these handrails might be the council's handrails. For we are absorbed by the aroma of the coffee coming from under the lids of our paper cups. And anyway not many people tend to think of things like this — the symmetry of Aldo Rossi's handrails — this early in the morning. Unless for the sudden loudness. When then we see that the scuffed rail is running with someone's blood. And we drop our paper cups and now we are among the many running in all directions away from Aldo Rossi's handrails, across the plaza.

