

SPACE, PLACE AND LIVING WORLD

Discussion on Architectural Phenomenology and Typology

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Thesis: Activate the old residential blocks



FIGURE.01 RESIDENTIAL BLOCK IN SPECIAL CLINTON PRESERVATION AREA, PHOTO BY CHENGPEI JIN

I INTRODUCTION

In the past courses during my bachelor study, I did not attach too much importance to systematic research methodology and thinking from its theoretical basis. The research methodology series lectures have improved my understanding of architectural research, including some discussions related to philosophy. Needless to say, architectural research is essential because the increasing practice of architecture includes many unknown fields, which are beyond the scope of architectural knowledge and traditional professional experience, such as design to meet special target groups, non-traditional aesthetic concepts and so on. James Snyder believed that research is a systematic search for the purpose of knowledge innovation.¹ This research is systematic, and it shows that there is a clear difference between our experience and the special knowledge that we extract from it. Research must extract a great deal of knowledge from our experience and observations, then classify and express it in some form.

Theoretical research and design practice are discussion on two different levels. Design exploration eventually forms the building itself, and research work eventually forms a text form, like our research book; design is usually based on a specific topic of time and place, while theoretical research would not be bound by an actual place or a period of time, and it can often be applied to various places. Design research needs a specific type of method, similar to special case studies, focusing on the study of each single case, and each case has a unique context, while theoretical research is universal, with the focus on universal laws, which we hope will apply to all or most situations. It can be seen that on the one hand design practice needs theoretical research support, but on the other hand, any idea that hopes to logically deduce building design based on general theory is not desirable.

The Complex Project Studio pays attention to Manhattan Midtown this year. Today the famous Midtown opposes new challenges, many old residential buildings have reached or overreach their lifespan and greatly influenced by Airbnb; new developments in Hudson Yards cause shift of gravity in central business district; Slow traffic is another problem. My design project locates in the so called 'Special Clinton Preservation area' which is one of the few remaining Manhattan residential neighborhoods, particularly in the midtown area, to still feature primarily low-rise architecture. My thesis topic is activating the old residential block and make it a stable community. I will focus on the senior co-living due to the demographic research and government report which calls for seniors first.² The existing living units and properties cannot satisfy the elderly's needs and there is not enough public open space for them to gather and engage them into social contact. Based on that, my research question is How to design a living complex with outdoor space in order to create an active community for seniors.

II RESEARCH-METHODOLOGICAL DISCUSSION

From the studio group research which really took a long time, we already have a basic understanding of our site through both hard data like mapping, government report, and soft data like movie, interview or something like that. But for my personal research question, I had not defined clearly before the field trip. In order to find out what exactly my research is, I adopted two main research methods since the field trip. Phenomenology played an important role especially during site visit, when I genuinely experienced the place. Heidegger believes that spaces come to appreciate their existence from place, not from the so-called 'space'.³ In his opinion, construction means living, and living is the foundation of the existence of a building, while place is the core of the existence of a building. The structures constructed by the places are called buildings. As Heidegger said, when you think about these buildings, you can recognize their construction with the essence of building. The inherent connotation and expression of the building interact with the idea that the architect is trying to inject into the place, and ensure that the association, recall and reflection of the relevant subject of knowledge are triggered, which is different from the same idea given to the building by the architect. Therefore, the

details of the observation and experience of the building and site should be the issues that the architect should consider in the conception and design. And in fact I really have quite different feeling when coming to the site compared with what hard data shows, which leads me to my research question.

Typology is very useful in the second stage, when targeting at the research question about what type of space appeals to the elderly. Quincy believes type is not an object that is exactly copied or imitated, nor is it an element that serves as a prototype rule.⁴ From a production point of view, a model is an object that is copied in the same way, but the type is the opposite, and people can imagine completely different works based on it.⁵ To understand Quincy's words from a simplified way, type is the rule, which ensures the unity of the city and architecture in different historical stages. As a result, the first step I took was to conclude typology of open space in residential blocks in the midtown area, other than just finding a nice typology as reference. After all, these blocks are in the same context.

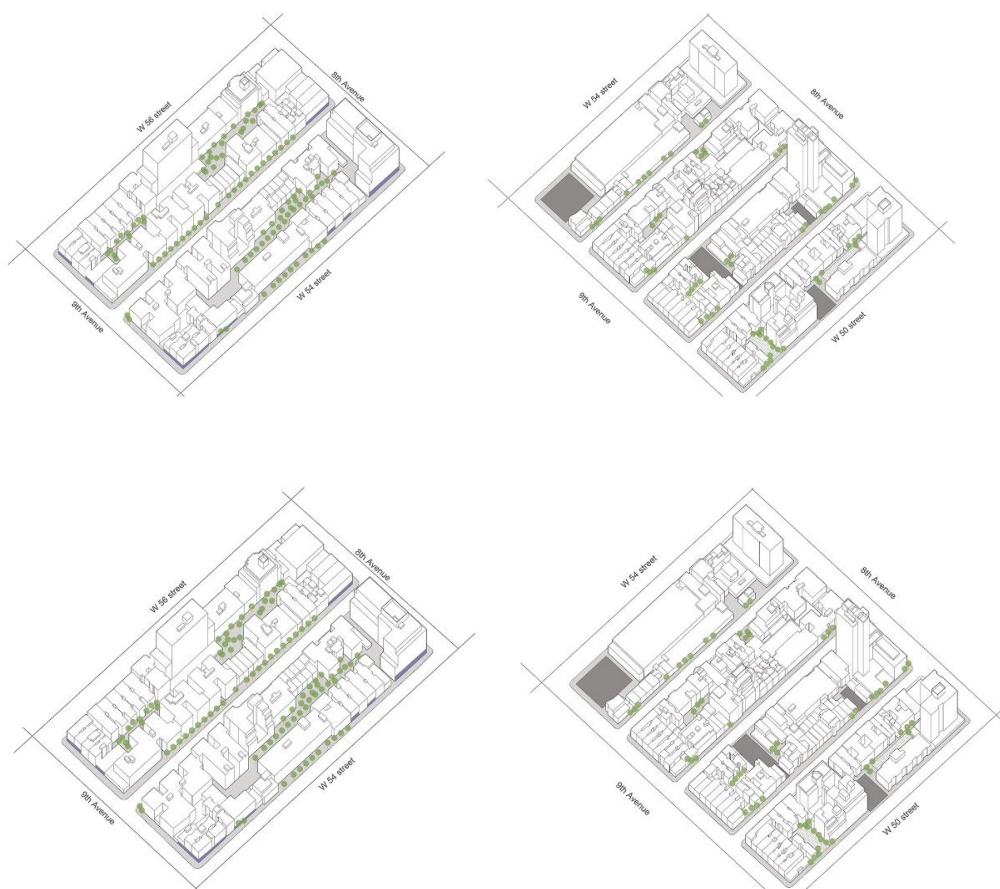


FIGURE.02 TYPOLOGY RESEARCH ON OPEN SPACE IN RESIDENTIAL BLOCK, DIAGRAM BY CHENGPEI JIN

According to Rossi, Architectural Typology is mainly manifested in that city is as the highest organizational layer of the building; building has diachronicity and synchronicity; and building has 'collective memory'.⁶ Through these three main aspects, it is possible to analyze the applicability of building types to outdoor space in residential areas. Modernist architecture ignores the city's historical culture and form, and loses its roots of growth and places for future survival. Therefore, the question about the type of building must be from the perspective of the historical context of the city.⁷ The outdoor space of the residential area is a place for people's daily activities. It contains both people's living memories and the regional cultural memories of the past and present of the urban area.

Together, it forms the potential memory of the residents for the urban living places in the future. The container contains people's daily memory, carries the regional culture, and uses the loss of function to form the authenticity of the collective memory, which can increase the sense of belonging of the residents to the living space. From the perspective of history, region, and memory, the method of building typology is also applicable to outdoor spaces design in residential areas.

III RESEARCH-METHODOLOGICAL REFLECTION

The study of architectural phenomenology is roughly divided into two approaches. One is based on Heidegger's existential phenomenology, focusing on theoretical studies of architecture. This approach focuses on the centralization of the building's place, the formation of space, the unity of the heavens and the earth, and the layered world.⁸ The static analysis and reflection on the building are the main philosophical methods. Norwegian architectural theorist Norberg-Schulz's architectural phenomenology is in the same vein as Heidegger. He mainly explores architectural philosophy from the perspective of existential philosophy.

Another approach takes Merleau-Ponty's perception phenomenology as the theoretical background and focuses on the practical analysis of architecture. This approach emphasizes architecture and environment, atmosphere, human vision, sense of hearing, touch, smell, taste, and body-centric experiences.⁹ Steven Holl, the main successor to his theory, is the representative of a new generation of American masters of architecture. His architectural works are unique in his studies of space and light and the tangled experience of architecture. Based on the two main approaches to the study of architectural phenomenology, It is interesting to analyze the architecture from aspects of epistemology and value theory, and discuss the inherent elements of space, place and other architectural elements in the living world to reveal the philosophical connotation and essence of architectural phenomenology.¹⁰ As Holl said, the 21st century has pushed architecture into an era where historical vocabulary does not fully express the semantics we want to describe, and phenomenology, as a way of thinking and perception, is forming a new Architecture concept.¹¹

The development of architectural typology has gone through three stages: from prototype to paradigm to the third typology. Regarding the prototype typology, the architectural theorist Laugier borrowed the forest metaphor, and try to restore the architectural prototype from the most essential needs of human beings. This is called the 'primitive hut' theory.¹² And Durand split the structure of the building and combined it with geometric schema methods to establish a vocabulary of the schema to push the building towards standardization.¹³ These two primitive and rustic ideas about archetypes of building types turned the attention of the building structure to the building structure, and the prototype typology initially constructed the architecture typology framework.

The second industrial revolution has further developed typology, and the focus on efficiency has shaped products. Architecture has also become a living machine box, and the type has changed to a 'model'. A standardized model for each component of the building is established based on the scale of the human body, which greatly increases the cost of building construction time, thereby satisfying the densely populated city.¹⁴ From the perspective of historical development, the transformation of handicraft industry to mechanization has improved social efficiency, but also ignored people's needs for personality. And the standardized production of paradigm typology completely stripped off the connection between product form and history.

After World War II, the critical movement of modernism was surging, and typology was on the rise. Rossi and Creel brothers, represented by neo-rationalism, introduced social history and humanities, expanded their research scope to various elements of the city, and focused on reshaping urban

space. The first two typologies are to find and rationalize the prototype from the external factors of nature and people. The third type of typology returns the research object to the internal structure of the building, and from the perspective of the city, finds the type of building.¹⁵ It is considered that the city is a gathering place of architectural elements, and also the basis for the emergence of new types of architecture. The third typology is characterized by the fact that the type is not a re-invention of past building types, nor is it just a repetition of past type forms. It can take on the meaning of past forms, and it can be transformed from special fragments of cities and their boundaries. Reorganize by fragments in a new context. The city itself is a type, a form of a building type hierarchy.

IV POSITIONING

Havik's lecture about phenomenology provided me with a lot of literature for learning. From my perspective, architectural phenomenology emphasizes the integration of the essence of architecture into personal experience, highlighting the details of the composition of the building and the perception and experience gained from the interaction between people and the building. Foundations and sources. The 'phenomenon' experienced in this situation is a self-observation of pure consciousness. In this self-observation of consciousness, people can reflect on how phenomena appear in consciousness and the way in which phenomena are formed.¹⁶ However, in the context of phenomenology, people's experience and formation of architecture requires people to temporarily suspend existing concepts and preferences, remove any preconceived ideas, and devote themselves to the experience of architecture in order to obtain the original of its essence Cognition. This kind of cognition is a pure state of consciousness, which is related to factors such as social experience, knowledge background, and individual's interest in architecture, grasping the spiritual connotation and essence of architecture through self-observation of consciousness. As a result of that, the certain authenticity sometimes could be doubted.

Phenomenology provides a method of 'seeing'. It is a complex and highly technical 'seeing' training, that is, seeing things which cannot be seen by the natural thinking attitude in the vicinity. Regarding the previous part in this essay, architectural phenomenology can be considered as an architectural philosophy, a new perspective and method of thinking and observing architecture, a soft support for design. While architectural typology, as a research method, has a large number of results and indicators at the application level. Moreover, the typology of architecture is richly related to region, culture, and history. Personally, typology has great theoretical and practical significance in terms of discipline paradigm and design methods. The essence of typology is to summarize the characteristics and rules of human classification behavior through the discussion of classification consciousness, and to rationalize this subconscious behavior. Its practical significance is to let people take the initiative to apply classification methods to further understand and think about research in certain areas.

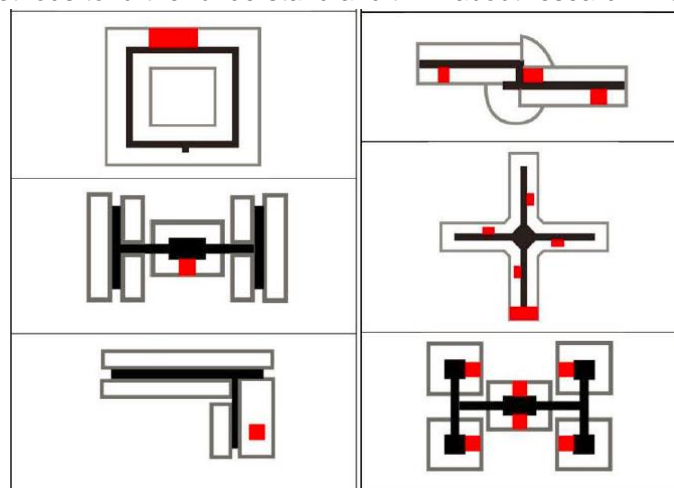


FIGURE.03 TYPOLOGY RESEARCH ON HOW OPEN SPACE RELATED WITH BUILDING, DIAGRAM BY CHENGPEI JIN

Architectural typology mainly studies the building form, function, internal structure, and the generation and transformation of new building forms to solve the deep-seated problems of building forms. When using the ideas of typology to specifically guide architectural design, generally, some basic methods of typology are used. Such as 'classification', summarize the existing types, shape it into simple geometric figures, and find its 'variants', looking for fixed elements from the changing elements. Based on this, the fixed structure of the restored city and architecture is linked to history, culture, environment and context. But typology also has its own problem. As we all know, the ultimate form of architecture cannot exist. 'Type' does not mean that it is the ultimate essence of architecture. It is also a medium in the transformation of architecture. Through this medium, new form can be produced. The practice of design methods using typology is invariable method, according to the idea of typology, different architects can have their own typological design practice methods. Standard patterning cannot solve all problems. Architectural design is actually a combination of reason and emotion, it is hard to finish a complex research with just one single method.

Mumford once pointed out, there is no limit to the congestion of urban living; there is no limit to the increase in land rents. There is no standard for urban construction, zoning planning, and the distribution of buildings. There is no order to follow. There is no aesthetic meaning to pursue, no reason to speak. There is only one control method that continues to operate: profit.¹⁷ Therefore, thinking it from the opposite way, about my research question which focus on the stable living topic, the meaning of habitation is not just considering the size of the house, whether the house price has risen, whether to live in the downtown or the countryside, but also people's thinking about architecture. This does not only contains the subjective feeling of peace and beauty, but also pursuing maximum profit by typology research. If I could combine objective logic of rationalism and eternal care of human beings, then I could do with it.

END NOTES:

- ¹ James Snyder, *Architectural Research*, (New York: Van Nostrand, 1984), 14.
- ² NYC Planning, *Housing 2.0*, (New York, Housing and Economic Development, 2017), 3-6.
- ³ Martin Heidegger, *Bauen, Wohnen, Denken*, (Stuttgart: Klett-Cotta Verlag, 2016), 158.
- ⁴ Rafael Moneo, *Oppositions: On Typology*, (Massachusetts: MIT Press, 1978), 28
- ⁵ Luiten, J.H.. *Het typologisch gereedschap : een verkennende studie omtrent typologie en omtrent de aanpak van typologisch onderzoek*.
(Eindhoven, Herz. uitg redactie, 1987), 13.
- ⁶ Aldo Rossi, *The Architecture of the City*, (Beijing: China Architecture & Building Press, 2006), 23-31.
- ⁷ Ibid, 128-130
- ⁸ Kening Shen, *Architectural Phenomenology*, (Beijing: China Architecture & Building Press, 2007), 1-2.
- ⁹ Maurice Merleau-Ponty, *The Phenomenology of Perception*, (New York: Humanities Press, 1981), 283-298.
- ¹⁰ Kening Shen, 95-96
- ¹¹ Master Series Editorial Department, *Steven Holl's work and ideas*, (Beijing: China Electric Power Press, 2005), 14.
- ¹² Anthony Vidler, *The Idea of Type: : The Transformation of the Academic Ideal, 1750-1830*, (Cambridge: MIT Press, 1977), 97
- ¹³ Christopher Alexander, Sara Ishikawa, Murray Silverstein with Max Jacobson, Ingrid Fiksdahl-King and Shlomo Angel, *A pattern language, towns-buildings-construction*. (New York: Oxford University Press, 1977), ix.
- ¹⁴ Anthony Vidler, 99..
- ¹⁵ Aldo Rossi, 32-43.
- ¹⁶ Kening Shen, 169.
- ¹⁷ Lewis Mumford, *Culture of Cities*, (Beijing: China Architecture & Building Press, 2009), 180-181.

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Eindhoven, Herz. uitg redactie, 1987.
- ⁶ Aldo Rossi, *The Architecture of the City*, Beijing: China Architecture & Building Press, 2006.
- ⁷ Kening Shen, *Architectural Phenomenology*, Beijing: China Architecture & Building Press, 2007.
- ⁸ Maurice Merleau-Ponty, *The Phenomenology of Perception*, New York: Humanities Press, 1981.
- ⁹ Master Series Editorial Department, *Steven Holl's work and ideas*, Beijing: China Electric Power Press, 2005.
- ¹⁰ Anthony Vidler, *The Idea of Type: : The Transformation of the Academic Ideal, 1750-1830*, Cambridge: MIT Press, 1977.
- ¹¹ Christopher Alexander, Sara Ishikawa, Murray Silverstein with Max Jacobson, Ingrid Fiksdahl-King and Shlomo Angel, *A pattern language, towns-buildings-construction*. New York: Oxford University Press, 1977.
- ¹² Lewis Mumford, *Culture of Cities*, Beijing: China Architecture & Building Press, 2009.