On typology

The debate on typology’s role in architectural design has been of certain attention in various periods. It is attached to architecture, and has undergone enormous changes through the years of conscious building process just as architecture itself evolves. Typology can be perceived in two various ways, agreeing with Gregotti’s words, that it can offer ideological and practical foundation.

On one hand, there is the practical side, typology as a research solution is an organizing tool. Typology in architecture approaches built space through an isolation of the attributes of the specific space. These attributes are identified as characteristics, which are used to define similarities or differences and as a group form types. Building typology is a classification-categorization through common characteristics found in buildings, according to their association with different attributes. Style, morphology, size, materialization, are among the many elements that comprise types. With the use of the term typology, a division of the architectural language is achieved, that places built spaces into comparison and further understanding.

On the other hand, typology, seen in a long-term sense, is also a methodological tool for the design process. The type becomes a reference tool through which designers can refer to further enrich their architectural language or to further understand the type of building their asked to produce. At the same time designers can refer back to the classic side of the architectural tradition. Methodology lies in the fact that it can be used as a guide to each attempt for a new project to further understand its demands and a possible outcome.

Typology & stereotypes

The word ‘stereotype’ comes from the Greek ‘typos’ and ‘stereos’, which means solid, steady, inflexible, therefore it means rigid type, and also ‘repeated or reproduced without variations, in accordance with a pre-established conception, or a general one, and bearing no distinctive signs or individual qualities’. By definition then, types are in close relation to stereotypes, in a way that typology as a grouping of similar characteristics, is expected to create (architectural) stereotypes since type also carries the message of the symbol and function.

According to my opinion, architecture is not a closed system for academics to reflect upon, but a tool for the public, practiced through trained individuals for society’s wellbeing. In that sense typology of architecture in the collective view may not always be perceived as an academic tool of reading architecture. The type therefore has a different effect depending on the viewer and is equally affected by his education, financial situation and experience, among many factors. Type mostly affects the way people perceive buildings of a specific function and how they expect their architectural language to be. In that sense, types for the public view are a way to perceive buildings and functions as a pair in a more coherent way. It is quite common to witness the function of a building to be attached to the form and language of the architecture applied, thus providing proper

1 Gregotti, V. ‘...not only ideological but also as a concrete tool...’
2 Gregotti, V.
3 De Carlo, G.
4 Reichlin B. ‘...The typology-morphology pair bears a certain family resemblance to the more famous pair identified by the idea code and message...’
ground for the emergence of the stereotype. Stereotypes are also a result of other factors that affect architectural composition such as involvement of bureaucracy and finance. Typology as an expression of the function of the building has too undergone changes through the years. Although there is frequently a departure from the attachment of type to function, modern city is now a collection of stereotypes to a large extent.

According to Ungers, the trend of form following function, led at the cost of architecture, to an all discriminating pragmatism as the oppressing phenomenon of empirical optimism. De Carlo, on the same debate, also based his criticism against the notion of type, on the description of stereotype as the rigid type that is repeated or reproduced without any variations and according to a pre-established conception, and bearing no distinctive signs or individual qualities. He further states the fact that various types are repetitive and mainly are unconcerned about the physical, cultural and social context. This comes in agreement to the opinion that types which are developed into stereotypes are by definition anti specific and universally applicable.

Position on typology & architectural design

Making architecture nowadays is provided with an increasing variety of tools of reference. Literature, visual references, information through various means etc. provide a wide range of material to reflect upon. In general, people have a better overview of what is being produced, what is projected through a trend and what is already regarded as architectural history, in the form of monuments and preservation worthy buildings. Despite that, architectural design process is not always conscious of the context and when typology comes into reference the result is frequently a repetition of a stereotype. At the same type there are numerous factors that significantly affect composition, such as finance, politics, education clients etc. These factors also affect typology in advance, making an interactive system. I personally believe that typology should be treated with respect, but through a critical eye. In the same spirit as Bernardo Secchi suggests, type should be interpreted rather than being limited. Referring to typology, should be only as a point to start from, when attempting to design new space. This is because typology as an objective system with its own guides is going to inevitably lead to conventions affecting the freedom of design. As it is already mentioned, the creativity and subjectivity of the designer on individual level, falls on a secondary place due to the accepted weight of types, allowing for imitation rather than creation. Therefore to base a disciplinary certainty on the notion of type when aiming for a creative process would be limiting for the designer. As Ungers states successfully, an attachment to type and reproduction of typologies gradually removes innovation and the need to change and improve. Furthermore designing and experiencing space has to face constraints over its wealth which, according to my

5 Gregotti, V.
6 De Carlo, G.
7 Ungers, O.M.
8 De Carlo, G. ‘...Typology has become in reality a classification selecting only fixed and repressive types and proposing them in a commanding and univocal way to architectural design. In other terms, typology has become a means conditioning the free expression of those using or experiencing the architectural space, it therefore is antithetic to participation...’
9 Gregotti, V.
10 Secchi, Bernardo.‘... be defined and interpreted rather than being limited...’
11 Ungers, O.M. ‘...A reality that is directed by cliches rather than ideas, stereotypes, rather than images, and classifications rather than concept, is stagnant, unable to develop or transform further...’
personal expectations would lead to its decay. A decay that would mean lack of happiness and vitality that may come through the design (as an architect) and the experience (as a user) of built space. By further understanding building typology and its use, it can be put to use with an innovative approach, to further enrich or alter a specific type to the benefit of architectural quality. The typological approach has contributed and will continue to contribute, a great deal to architecture but only on the condition that it remains a constant subject of discussion.

References

- Argan, Giulio, ‘On the typology of architecture’,
- Rossi, Aldo, ‘The architecture of the city’,

12 Secchi, B. ‘...Type in the sense used not only by architects, becomes a term and a way of interpreting and organizing design thought, which appears to impose excessive restrictions and constraints on the wealth of possible experience...’

13 Reichlin B.