My own type & typology: ‘Mercato di Genova’

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I Introduction

Cities are becoming complex systems with interaction and connectivity of flows through its infrastructure. These systems are becoming an accumulation of flows, almost moving towards a congestion in the city. In my research the place of flow will be searched for to find the places of congestion in the city.

Searching for the places of congestion in a city can be seen as a search for the concept of type in my own design-research. Naming the architectural object is a process that is forcing to typify. This, the identification of architectural elements or of a whole building, is part of the nature of language. The naming of these elements can be seen as the creation of types of similar objects with the same characteristics.

What is my own definition of type? What is the specific type to search for in Genoa? How can the typology of the places of flow and places of congestion be defined? Other architectural writers have already stated different definitions during time but for this research it is necessary to find my own definitions.

Rafael Moneo for example, a Spanish architect stated the following definition about the typifying of the architectural object in this article:

“On the one hand, a work of architecture has to be considered in its own right, as an entity in itself…From this point of view, the work of architecture is irreducible within any classification. It is unrepeatable, a single phenomenon…On the other hand, a work of architecture can also be seen as belonging to a class of repeated objects, characterized, like a class of tools or instruments, by some general attributes.”

Looking into the past to define a new structure with the typological view is creating the same juxtaposition as the one stated by Moneo. However, it will be shown in this paper that this research methodology can also lead towards an outcome without this duality.

To find my work of architecture, the Public Building Studio in Genoa is offering an investigation of accumulation and its spatial configurations of capitalism in the urban discourse. It starts by considering the site as an intrinsic component of the program. In the Msc3 studio, Genoa is used as a field of research to couple the program and site to look for various forms of accumulation.

In the case of my design-research this accumulation is found in places of congestion. This place of congestion is then defined as the market place. The mercato di Genova is a place creating relationships between the different scales of elements of the city. It is also a place where flows of people and the flows of good interact. It is one of the only public spaces left in the dense city of Genoa, where flows can congest. This research was done with a typological view on the city of Genoa. By looking to congestion of flows that occur in that architectural object, a type of flow is created to look for in that architectural object. The mercato di Genova becomes a typology.

Questions that are raised are for example: What set of rules can be created to work with in the future design-process and what kind of relationship can be found in this typology? According to the earlier mentioned Moneo it can be a reproduction of the old type to structure the new form, to destroy this old type or to transform the old type. It can also be a research that produced images about the history of markets which will not be used in the further design.

The world of objects created by architecture is produced by types, so to continue towards the future design it is first necessary to look into the research of my own type & typology: ‘Mercato di Genova.’

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1 ‘Oppositions’ is a journal for Ideas and Criticism in Architecture. For this issue he wrote the part of the architectural theory, necessary to understand the ideas stated by other writers as Francesco Dal Co and Anthony Vidler. The title of his article is ‘On Typology’.
II Research-methodological discussion

Tom Avermaete talked about architecture and its epistemes during his lectures. One of his defined epistemes is typology, it relates to the study of types. Avermaete defines type according to the dictionary as "a number of things or persons sharing a particular characteristic, or set of characteristics, that causes them to be regarded as a group, more or less precisely defined or designated; class; category."

To understand the built environment of Genoa I started looking at it through the lens of types. With this lens I searched for congestion in the urban discourse. It created a goal to look for in Genoa. By defining the type to look for, I could find places that could become interesting for the future design process.

What then is my type? Moneo describes it as a concept that categorizes a combination of objects characterized by the same structure, it is like thinking in groups. In the case of my methodology, the type is first defined as a place of congestion. After the research during the field trip to Genoa it was defined further one to the market place, or in Italian the ‘mercato di Genova’. The market place in Genoa is, like stated before, one of the only public places left inside the dense city of Genoa. Every neighborhood has its own covered market hall, where people can meet, eat and greet. Second, it is a place where different flows accumulate or congest. The distribution of food for example, encounters the human being in this place.

Type & typology are often described and criticized in literature, most of the time critics say that looking into the past of the built environment would not help the architect to create a new structure. It can be stated that the search for the ideal type, the standard in architecture of the past for reproduction will not be helpful. The automatic repetition of the ‘frozen mechanism’ is often used as an argument against typology. However, using or transforming this ideal type towards new architecture is often done by famous architects. These architects imply the idea of change. They use the concept of type not necessarily by mechanical reproduction. The type is a frame wherein change can operate, it denies the past while looking to the future.

To create this frame of typology in my research, I had to define the object, the work of architecture in my concept of type? By stating the market place as the architectural object, the concept of type changed into a specific research of the built environment of Genoa. A challenge created by this statement is for example the missing-out on other public spaces, places of congestion in the built environment of Genoa. However will it help to specify the research for the program that is used in the next step of the design process?

III Research-methodological reflection

Over time the history of looking with a typological view into the built environment changed accordingly to the changing of society. The birth of a type is determined by an existent complex of demands given by society, according to Giulio Carlo Argan, an Italian art historian and politician. II

At the end of the eighteenth century for example, the traditional discipline of architecture was questioned by the social and technical revolutions of that time. Quatremère de Quincy, a French architectural theorist, defined an architectural type during this evolution. He stated that a type, not so much an image of something to be imitated is, but more an element which should serve as a rule for a future model. He makes a distinction between the model and the type. The model is something to be imitated, something exact and defined, whereas the type is something more or less vague.

Next to the vagueness, Quatremère sees a type as a carrier of the experience of forms that are already accomplished in projects or buildings from the past. With the reduction of preceding works the type will help to neutralize the past. What is in the past is absolute and can be a framework to be used in the future. The experience of forms was related to the type with the reason and use. Just like the shape of a man’s back was related to the back of a chair. Quatremère states a clear relationship between the ‘needs and nature’. I

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I He wrote ‘On the typology of architecture’, an article in the magazine Casabella. The issue was focusing on typology, with articles of other authors as Oswald Mathias Ungers for example.
Another initiator of the typological way of looking is Jean-Nicolas-Louis Durand. In 1801 he created *Recueil et parallèle des édifices de tout genre anciens et modernes*. This was an investigation of churches from different periods, categorized by certain characteristics. He used the type more as a combination of changing parameters, focusing on the built form of architecture. In the design process Durand also used the typological approach, starting from a proposal of the concept of type instead of the program, with the drawing as the main tool. For Durand, architecture is about composition of parts, independent of the program. Durand created a simple method to design architecture that coped with the functional program demanded by the society of the nineteenth century.

Not only in the nineteenth century typology was used in architectural theory, during the twentieth century the lens of typology reappeared in Italian architecture. The group of architects consisting of Saveiro Muratori, Aldo Rossi and Carlo Aymonino for example, reacted against the modernistic style. The Modern Movement rejected the concept of type. New architecture should be created by a new language. Again the appearance of type in architectural theory was linked to a matter in society. Muratori was the opposite with his design for a new project *'Barene di San Gioliano'*. The city is not defined by functional zoning, as expected in a modernist plan, but through a clear description of typology. He also researched the urban situation of Venice in 1959, using the drawing as an illustration of the capacity of buildings and neighborhoods. He stated that the built environment could be seen as a material organism that changes constantly. Rossi, who also was part of the Italian group, reacted with a logic that defines type based on the juxtaposition of memory and reason. He states that the principle of the city are proof of their history. Because the builders of the city lost their history the task of the architect today is to contribute to the recovery of this history. The architectural object cannot be considered as an isolated object, it is connected to its city and his history.

During the development of architecture new types appear at moments when society is changing. A search into the past of an architectural object or typology will then neutralize this past, so it can be used in the future. However, one of the architect's greatest efforts is made when the creation of a new type is giving up on a known type. By the invention of a new type the personality and the own voice of the architect can be used. The description of a new set of relationships between a new group of buildings or element can be a reflection of the voice of the architect.

In my typological research into the market places of Genoa I looked at specific architectural objects. I created relations between an existing typology. However you can think about a new future for the market because of the changing culture of food-production. Was this specific research to the *mercato di Genova* necessary? Is there a demand for a new type created by me?

IV Positioning

“Architecture is too slow or too fast.”

As an architect you can rebuild the past or design an impossible future. When the architectural object is finalized it is never inserted into the unforeseen urban present. The desire of the city will always flow in between the architectural and the nonarchitectural.

This issue occurs by researching for typologies. The research is focused on types of the past and can lead to a ‘frozen mechanism’, repetition without transformation of change. As a researcher with a typological view, you will also move in between the past or the unknown future. Even if the concept of type is used to transform into a new future structure, it is never sure if this future structure will be wished for.

In the case of my type, the *mercato di Genova* I researched a type of covered markets in Genova that was designed during a time with a different food-culture. Where in the nineteenth century (the first market is built during this time) it was a brand new technological object created for the preservation of food, it is nowadays more focused on other aspects of the market.
A market in the present is more about the activity of buying food. It is more about the movement in search for that specific product or more luxurious food. It is a traditional movement, which is not done as much as in the earlier days. The supermarket of the present took over the job of food preservation, the act of doing groceries changed a lot over time.

The market of the future will probably be something different. What will be the act of buying food be in the future? Looking into the typology of the past is indeed a way of looking for examples to repeat and fall into the automatic repetition of history. But in the case of the mercato di Genova, and other cases, it can also be a starting point to find a set of rules for the future market. To search for the act of buying food for example, with this finding you can state that the future market will be focused on this act. The typological view in my research created a frame to use in the rest of my design process, which will in the end create a transformed mercato di Genova.

What was my own definition of type is the last standing question of my research. Is my definition the same as Quatremère de Quincy, something more or less vague, not so much an image of something to be repeated? Maybe my definition is linking more with the modernistic view, where there was no demand for typology, because the past could not create the new future. Or am I moving towards an Italian view where the typology theory is also used in the design process. Did I use it to define a group of objects with the same characteristics? Maybe I looked for a new frame wherein change can operate while denying the past while looking to the future.

All I know is that I can define my typological view towards the city, as a lens to create a new set of rules to be used in my design for the market of the future.


12 Avermaete, T. (n.a.) Architecture and Its Epistemes: Lecture Notes for Students


14 Avermaete, T. (n.a.) Architecture and Its Epistemes: Lecture Notes for Students


