Of Typology and Historical Precedents

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The Modern Movement rejection of typology resulted in the destruction of modern cities and the loss of figural quality in public buildings as opined by Christian Norberg-Schulz (1984). The process of urban development which took precedent of the idea of mass production, as idealised by Le Corbusier, resulted in the treatment of buildings as isolated objects rising in the landscape. Traditional qualities of urban spaces, the streets and squares, were replaced by vast, unused spaces which were coined as loss space. In his article, Space and Anti-Space, Steven Peterson (1980) opines:

Modern space is, in effect, anti-space; the traditional architecture of streets, squares and rooms created by differentiated figures of volumetric void is by definition obliterated by the presence of anti-space (which) leads to erosion and eventual loss of space, and the results of this can be seen all around us.

Functionalist attitude towards internal organisational, totally neglected the planning of external spaces which resulted in discontinuity and incoherent reading of the urban fabric.

Functionalist slogan, form follows function, which does not admit the existence of any typological ground, also resulted into a bland and insipid image of the public buildings, which were devoid of any meanings and associations with the past. The symbolic types of the past were abolished, Christian Norberg-Schulz (1980) writes, and

substituted by the functionalist credo that the forms should follow from the functions. As a result, public architecture tended towards simple efficiency, reducing for instance the city hall to an office building and the church to an assembly hall.

Due to these failures of the Modern Movement, there have been renewed interests for the return and reinterpretation of the earlier concepts of typology. Renewed interest in historicism and the development of traditional cities, which has been neglected by the Modernist, resulted into new definitions of typology. From the article, Contextual Approaches to Typology at the Ecole des Beaux-Arts by Ahmet Gulgonen and Francois Laisney (1982), three major definitions of typology can be deduced. The first is by looking at the city as a typological ground; the second is based on the spatial and formal characteristics of the type itself; and finally, the third definition is based on classifying buildings according to use as conceptualised by J.N.L. Durand earlier in the nineteenth century.

Gulgonen (1982) elaborated that the first conceptual definition of typology was based on the idea of architecture as a process of construction from the single dwelling to the total city, and not as the single artistic event proposed by the avant garde or the industrially produced object proposed by the nineteenth century theoreticians as espoused by Rafeal Moneo (1980). This conceptual approach was taken primarily by the French and Italian

theoreticians and architects, early in the 1960's. Moneo pointed out that one of the Italian architects and historians was Saviero Muratori. In his Studi per una operanta Storia Urbana di Venezia (1959), Muratori examined the urban texture of Venice and the "idea of type as formal structure that provide a basis for continuity among the different scales of the city" For Muratori, the elements of the city such as the calli, campi, and corti are seen as typal elements which generates the growth and development of the city. Thus, this definition, takes the approach of linking architectural typology and urban morphology, and proposed the morphological analysis of the structure of the city in order to understand the underlying principles of architectural operation.

In the late sixties, another Italian architect, by the name of Aldo Rossi followed and refined Moneo's conceptual definition of typology. In his article Aldo Rossi : The Idea of Architecture and the Modena Cemetery (1976), Moneo argued that Rossi and his followers, known as the Tendenza, believed that there are architectural principles residing within the urban structure, and the proof of their autonomy lies in the architectural types of the city. And thus, from this belief, they proposed the concept of an autonomous architecture expressed in the development of a typology of relationship between architecture and the city. In the beginning of his Architettura della Citta (The Architecture of the City) (1966), Rossi wrotes, The city which is the object of this book, is understood within it as architecture. When I speak of

Architecture, I don't mean exclusively the visible image of the city and the whole of its architecture, but rather architecture as construction. I refer to the construction of the city in time. For Rossi, a complete study of the growth and development of a city will reveal certain rules and principles that will govern the architectural operations.

Gulgonen opined that the second conceptual definition of typology, takes the approach of looking at the development of certain spatial and formal types that could be found throughout history. Through graphic analysis of historical precedents, certain fundamental modes of organisation, such as centralisation, axiality, and gridiron planning will emerge. These modes of organization are usually manifested in public buildings, especially in churches. Spatial types such as a basilica-plan church can be found in different historical periods and various societies. Another approach taken within this definition is to classify urban spaces such as streets and squares, based on their formal and geometrical qualities. This approach is primarily developed by Rob Krier in his book, Urban Spaces (1979).

And finally Gulgonen deliberated that the third and most accessible concept of typology is based on classifying building according to its use and upon its institutional characteristics, as first conceived by J.N.L. Durand in the nineteenth century. This approach takes a view that by analysing buildings with similar function, certain organisational themes and formal characteristics within the particular type will emerge as historical constants. Ellen K. Morris in her article Architectural Type and

the Institutional Programme (1982) wrotes:

"The historical lineage of a building, out of which arose shared formal assumption, was recognisable in its organisation and its particular symbolic motifs. For any society, the functional lineage which enables one to connect a particular building with others of its historical family, or type, becomes an issue of heightened importance in those buildings..."

Thus by communicating the continuity of the institutional heritage, it will enrich the image of public buildings and evoked a sense of 'familiarity with such buildings.

The concept of typology, as elaborately explained throughout the paper, takes many meanings and values. However, despite the various meanings, there is a common denominator in term of the use of history. John E. Hancock in his essay Between History and Tradition: Note Towards a Theory of Precedent (1986) proposed that through three methods of looking at historical precedents, certain rules and principles of architecture can be revealed and applied in the design process.

First, the graphic analysis method is aimed at the rational comprehension of the building's abstract organisation: space, volume, hierarchy, zoning, plan-configuration, and fa ade composition. "Diagrams are used primarily in communicating the essential characteristics and relationship in a building. Second, the experiential method is intended to bring out the "qualitative description of the building's sensual and meaningful presence:

the effects of texture, material, color, ornament, symbolism, atmosphere, and acoustics. The techniques used to convey these qualities are principally pictorial and literall. And finally, the transformational method is intended to discover the original intentions of a building design which normally involved rigorous criticism. Thus, through these methods of analysis, certain typical characteristics in term of spatial organization and formal strategies, can be derived from historical precedents and be used as tools in the design process.

At Universiti Putra Malaysia (UPM), architectural students utilise historical precedent studies as part of their design process. First Year architectural students analysed and interpreted prominent artists artifacts and designed a Studio Tower based on their synthesisations. From Artworks to Building elaborates in detail of their methods and approaches. Contemporary Concept of Community Library for Second Year Studio started with studying the "traditional library as a repository of books to a rather larger function of a receptacle of digital information". Acclimatising Universal Design for Aging Community for Third Year Studio dwelled into the aspects of Senior Health Care Centre and Retirement Centre.

Breaking through the international barrier, for the first time, a Joint Studio was conducted between Third Year Studio at UPM and Universiti Islam Negara (UIN), Malang, Indonesia. International coorperation continues with The Conceptual Master Plan for Bandar Seri Begawan Water Front

Precinct between Fifth Year architectural students of UPM and the Fourth Year students from the Faculty of Arts and Social Sciences (Geography and Development Program), University of Brunei Darussalam.

The tradition of excellence at the Department of Architecture, UPM continues with four Fifth Year architectural students receiving PAM Johnson Suisse Scholarship 2014 worth RM7,500 each. Four of the recent architectural graduates of Bachelor of Architecture were shortlisted for the prestigious PAM Tan Sri Ar. Chan Sau Lai Architecture Award 2014 with Michele Julieana Vaz receiving Commendation Prize worth RM5,000 for her thesis project titled Kota Damansara Memorial. The accolade culminates with Muhamad Razaki Bin Jusoh with his Petronas Motorsport Gallery receiving the Merit Award for the ArchiPrix SEA 2014, a biannual event celebrating the best of graduation projects from the Schools of Architecture, Urban Design and Landscape Architecture of the South East Asia Region.

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