

Architectural history shows that the development of types is essential to the architectural system.
C. Norberg-Schulz, 1963, 207

Ultimately, we can say that type is the very idea of architecture, that which is closest to its essence.
A. Rossi, 1966; 1982, 41

There are few disciplines that have not benefitted from the concept of the 'type', and architecture is no exception. Within architecture, the two most common schemes of typological classification have been by use – churches, prisons, banks, airports, etc.; and by morphology – buildings with long hall-shaped interiors, centrally planned buildings, buildings with courtyards, buildings with interconnecting compartments, or with separated compartments, and so on. Although, as we shall see, these are not the only classificatory systems to have been devised, much of the debate around 'types' has been concerned with how far functional types correspond to morphological types.

A basic classification by use of religious buildings, secular buildings, theatres, private houses, and fortifications was inherent to the classical system of architecture since antiquity. In the mid-eighteenth century, the French architectural writer and teacher J.-F. Blondel in his *Cours d'Architecture* compiled a very much longer list of varieties of building (sixty-four altogether), and this formed the basis for his architectural system (see 'Character', p. 122–23). It has sometimes been said that Blondel's typological classification was the origin of the modern system of functional types, but this is slightly misleading. First of all, Blondel did not call them 'types' but 'genres', which indicates the literary basis to his scheme; and secondly, his main purpose in listing all these varieties of building was to identify for each the appropriate 'character'. Nonetheless, a typological classification of buildings by purpose has been in constant

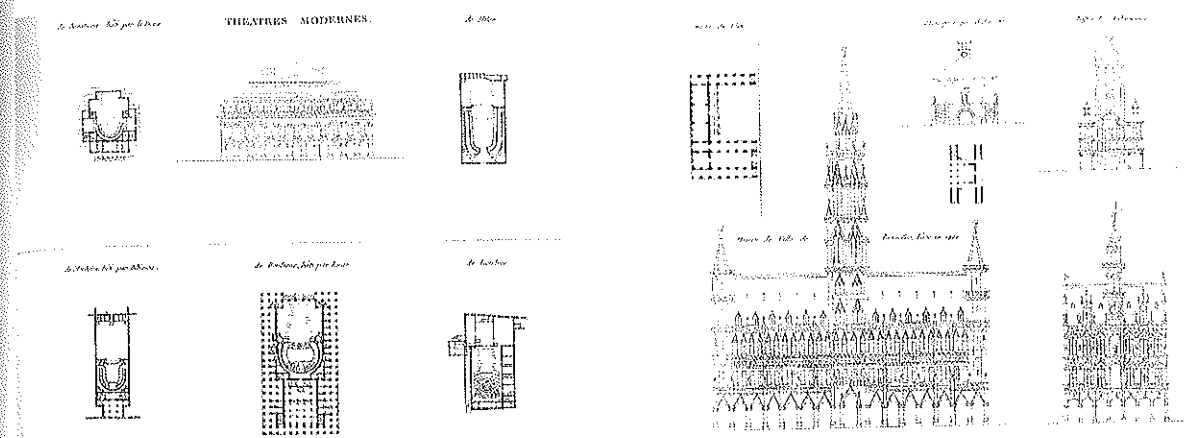
use since the late eighteenth century; a recent example is Nikolaus Pevsner's *A History of Building Types* (1976) in which the 'types' are all descriptions of uses.

The beginning of morphological classification is usually located in the French teacher and writer J. N. L. Durand's scheme of architectural education set out in his *Précis* (1802–5). There, Durand provided techniques for the composition of different architectural forms without regard to their use – though in the second volume, Durand showed his students how to adapt these forms to the programmes for buildings of different purposes, which, following Blondel, he called not 'types', but 'genres'.

The literature of architectural types and typology is large, particularly as a result of developments in the last three decades.¹ Rather than attempt inadequately, as would inevitably be the case, to summarize all the meanings architects have attributed to 'type', what is offered here is a short enquiry into the various purposes for which the concept has been used in architecture.

1. Protection of the idea of architecture as the imitation of nature

In the eighteenth century, the view that architecture was an art imitative of 'nature' (see pp. 223–26) was central to architectural thought and to claims that architecture was a 'liberal', as opposed to 'mechanical' art. From the middle of the century, pressure started to be put upon the mimetic theory of architecture by, in particular, the rationalist arguments of Carlo Lodoli (see pp. 174–75 and 295–96), and it was in order to protect the mimetic theory that the French architectural thinker Quatremère de Quincy developed his remarkably ingenious theory of imitation (see pp. 224–26, 297). According to Quatremère, architecture does not imitate nature literally, but only metaphorically, so that everyone knows that the imitation is fictitious, while being nonetheless being aware



J. N. L. Durand, Theatres and Market Halls, from *Recueil et parallèle des édifices*, 1801. Durand produced the first systematic comparison of buildings by use; following Blondel, he described these as 'genres'.

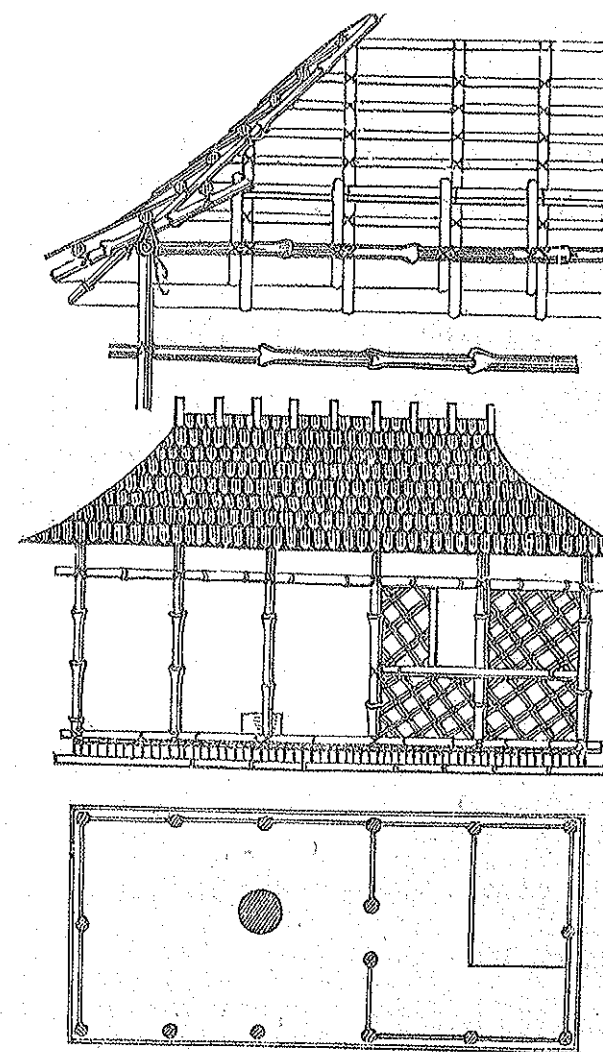
of its supposedly real reference to 'nature'. It was so as to explain what it was in 'nature' that architecture referred to, that Quatremère introduced the 'type'. In his now often-quoted entry on 'Type' in the *Encyclopédie Méthodique*, Quatremère drew a distinction between 'type' and 'model' as follows:

The word 'type' presents less the image of a thing to copy or imitate completely than the idea of an element which ought itself to serve as a rule for the model. ... The model, as understood in the practical execution of the art, is an object that should be repeated as it is; the type, on the contrary, is an object after which one may conceive works of art with no resemblance one to another at all. All is precise and given in the model; all is more or less vague in the type. (148)

Quatremère then went on to explain why the 'type' was so necessary to architecture: 'Everything must have an antecedent. Nothing, in any genre, comes from nothing, and this must apply to all the inventions of man'. But Quatremère was careful to stress that the 'type' was not the primitive cabin, the tent or the cave, which previous writers had posited as the original architecture – these were 'models'; but the 'type' was (in the case of timber building) 'that kind of combination to which the use of wood is susceptible, once adopted in each country' (149), or, in other words, the process modified by circumstance. The distinction between the 'type' – 'the original reason

of the thing, which can neither command nor furnish the motif or the means of an exact likeness', and 'model' – 'the complete thing, which is bound to a formal resemblance', was critical, because it was what enabled Quatremère to argue that while not copying nature, architecture nonetheless imitated nature.

Quatremère formulated his theory of 'types' in the 1780s, and it belongs to the architectural debate of that time; however, the encyclopedia entry on 'Type' was not published until 1825, and only after that date were the implications of Quatremère's ideas taken up, principally by the German architect and theorist Gottfried Semper. The problem that had so exercised Quatremère – to prove that architecture, while not copying nature, still imitated nature – was of no concern at all to Semper who, familiar with Goethe's theory of art as a 'second nature', could accept that architecture might be like nature in its formative processes yet be quite independent of nature. But Semper was interested in architecture's origins, seeing, like Quatremère, that 'nothing can come from nothing'. Although attracted by Quatremère's analysis of the problem, Semper was critical of the strongly idealist character of Quatremère's thought, and wanted, without losing the force of Quatremère's 'type' as a generic idea, to give it greater identity and substance so that it might be of more practical use to the architect. Semper also had the advantage that by the time, in the 1830s, that he became interested in these questions, developments in natural science had produced a more sophisticated account of both 'nature' and of 'types' than had been



G. Semper, Carib Hut, from *Der Stil* vol. 2, 1863. Semper's idea that the 'types' of architecture were to be understood through the potential of each of the four main processes involved in building – terracing, roofing, walling, and the hearth – he illustrated by reference to the West Indian bamboo hut he had seen at the Great Exhibition of 1851.

available to Quatremère; it was by direct analogy from his knowledge of animal and plant morphology that Semper formulated his theory of architectural types. As Semper wrote in a letter in 1843 to his prospective publisher, 'Just as everything there [in nature] develops and is explained by the simplest prototypical form, just as nature in her infinite variety is yet simple and sparse in basic ideas ... in the same way, I said to myself, the works of my art are also based on certain standard forms conditioned by primordial ideas, yet which permit an infinite variety of phenomena'. Semper's project was 'to trace these prototypical forms of architecture' (*The Four Elements etc.*, 170). His terminology for the 'prototypical forms' varied, between *Urformen*, *Normalformen*, *Urkeim*, and *Urmotiven* – all of them words drawn from Goethe's theory of plant and animal morphology – but when he lectured in English in London in 1853, the word he used was 'type': works of industrial art, he said, 'are like those of nature, connected together by some few fundamental ideas, which have their simplest expression in types' (1853, 8).² Following Quatremère's suggestion in his encyclopedia article on 'Type', that the 'type' of timber construction was 'that kind of combination to which the use of wood is susceptible', Semper proposed that architecture's 'types' were to be understood through the potentiality of four main processes involved in building: terracing (masonry), roofing (carpentry), the hearth (ceramics), and walling (textiles). 'This plan', Semper explained, 'should make apparent the derivation of objects and forms from their primordial motives [*Urmotiven*] and style changes conditioned by circumstances' (*The Four Elements etc.*, 132–33). (It may be no coincidence that Semper identified in architecture the same number of 'types' – four – as the biologist Cuvier, whose system he referred to frequently, had in the animal kingdom.) The example referred to by Semper as objective proof of the existence of the four primordial motives was the 'Carib hut' he had seen at the Great Exhibition of 1851; although Semper stressed that this hut had nothing in common with architecture, because each of the four motives was treated distinctly without any attempt to merge them into an expressive whole, it nonetheless made each motive, or 'type', demonstrably clear. The merit of Semper's classificatory scheme was to preserve the 'type' as a generic idea, and to give it determinacy and practical application, but without letting it become confused with a 'model'.

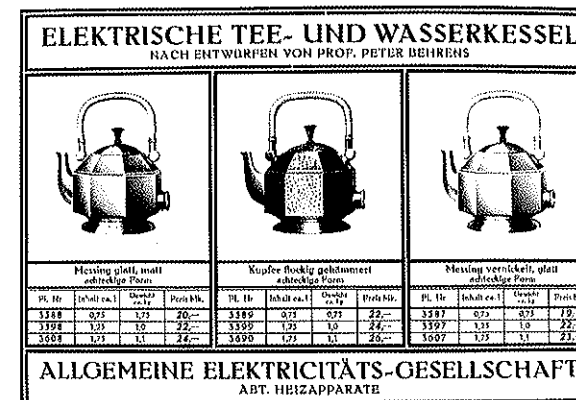
2. As a means of resistance to mass culture

In the Deutsche Werkbund from 1911, a major topic of debate was *Typisierung* – a word that has in the past been translated as 'standardization', but which according to present consensus would be best translated as 'type'.³ The Werkbund debate was initiated by Muthesius's 1911 lecture, 'Where Do We Stand?', in which he attacked the tendency towards stylistic individualism in the arts of the time as 'simply horrifying'. Against this, 'Of all the arts, architecture is the one which tends most readily towards a type [*typisch*] and only thus can it really fulfill its aims' (50). Muthesius returned to the theme at the 1914 Werkbund Congress in Cologne, when, listing a ten-point policy for the Werkbund, he described the first two as follows:

1. Architecture, and with it the whole area of the Werkbund's activities, is pressing towards types [*Typisierung*], and only through types [*Typisierung*] can it recover that universal significance which was characteristic of it in times of harmonious culture.
2. Types [*Typisierung*], to be understood as the result of a beneficial concentration, will alone make possible the development of a universally valid, unfailing good taste. (1914, 28)

Although there was an argument that the standardization of products could, in the manner of Henry Ford (see ill. p. 254), lead to economies of production, and so improve German economic competitiveness, and this was certainly an interpretation taken up by economists and management experts, that was not, it seems, what Muthesius and the other members of the Werkbund were most concerned with. Rather, the type was a means of bringing order to the chaotic world of mass consumption, ruled by fashion, individualism and *anomie*. In this respect, the 'type' occupied a position very close to that of 'form' (see pp. 161–65) in the same debates. As one member of the Werkbund, the entrepreneur Karl Schmidt, wrote after the 1914 Werkbund debate, 'for me the matter of types means nothing other than replacing disorder and lack of discipline with order' (quoted in Schwartz, 127); or as the critic Robert Breuer put it, 'the concept of the type becomes a force which impedes every form of arbitrariness ... with inescapable severity' (quoted in Schwartz, 127). It was not without significance that the products designed by Peter Behrens for the AEG were referred to as 'types'.

Although before 1914, the immediate concern in these debates about 'types' had been the design of commodities,

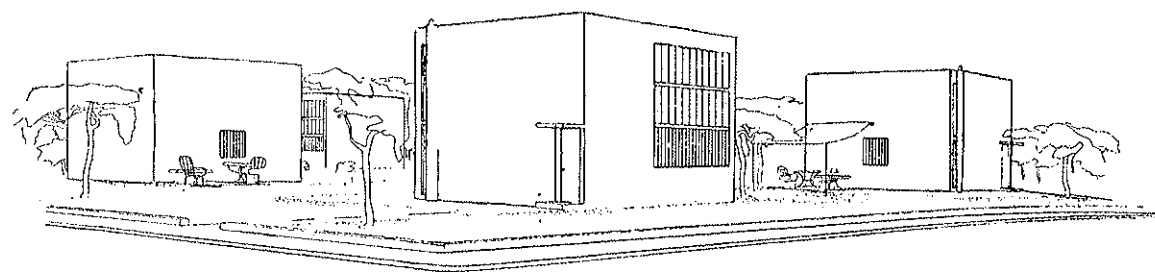


Peter Behrens, kettles, from AEG catalogue 1912. 'The concept of the type becomes a force which impedes every form of arbitrariness': Behrens's designs for AEG were referred to as 'types'.

increasingly after 1920 they extended to architecture too. Outside Germany, the best-known exposition of this theme was in Le Corbusier's *Decorative Art of Today* (1925), where the illustrations of steel office desks, filing cabinets, and travel luggage, described as '*objets-type*', or 'type-objects', were offered as the rational alternatives to the 'hysterical rush of recent years towards quasi-orgiastic decoration' (96) manifested by furnishings manufacturers. 'We have', wrote Le Corbusier, 'only to introduce this method [of developing type-objects] into our apartments and decorative art will meet its destiny: type-furniture and architecture' (77). The architectural 'types' developed by Le Corbusier, the Maison Citrohan, and the Pavillon de l'Esprit Nouveau, served the same purpose, distilling the chaotic disorder of bourgeois individualism into a rational, ordered existence. The 'type', in this context, was a means of protecting civilization against the the disintegration of cultural values brought about by capitalism, and its agent, fashion.

3. To achieve 'continuità'

The reintroduction of 'type' into the discourse of architecture around 1960 – the phase described by Anthony Vidler as 'the third typology' – started in Italy.⁴ With hindsight, it is possible to see that there were in this 'third typology' two quite distinct motives, one linked to the specifically Italian debates about *continuità*, the other to Anglo-American preoccupations with 'meaning'. Although many of those who talked about 'type' often talked with a view to both motives, for the purposes of historical analysis it is helpful to consider them separately.



Le Corbusier, mass-production houses for artisans, drawing, 1924, from *L'Oeuvre complète*, vol. 1. 'Type architecture' – the solution to the disintegration of culture threatened by capitalism and the hysteria of fashion.

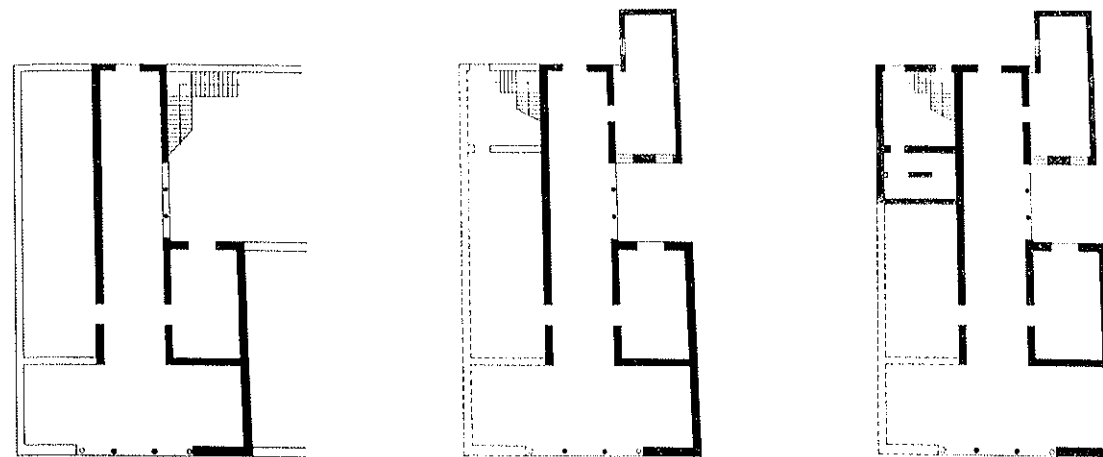
Continuità, the theme developed in the second half of the 1950s by Ernesto Rogers, the editor of *Casabella*, was in part a critique of orthodox modernism, and partly a solution to specifically Italian difficulties (see pp. 200–1). The three related concepts that came out of the debates about *continuità*, 'History' (see p. 196), 'Context' (see p. 132) and 'Type', all became key terms in the architectural discourse of the 1970s and 1980s. The distinctive feature of 'type' in these discussions, and which set it apart from earlier notions of 'type', was the emphasis, as Vidler put it, on 'the city as the site for urban typology' (1977, 3). Typology was a means of describing the relationship between buildings and the city of which they formed part, and thereby of showing how individual buildings were manifestations of the collective, and historical processes of urban development; it was a way of showing that an 'architectural event' was not just four walls and a roof, but something that existed only as part of the general urban phenomenon, considered both spatially, socially, and historically.

It was in a book by an architecture teacher at the University of Venice, Saverio Muratori, that this conception of 'type' made its first appearance in print. Muratori's *Studi per una Operante Storia Urbana di Venezia* (1960), based on research begun in 1950, was a study of the morphology of building plots and open spaces in Venice; the significance that Muratori attached to the 'types' he identified was that it enabled one to demonstrate in concrete terms all those aspects of the process of the city – growth, *milieu*, class – which historical geographers had previously treated only as abstractions. By the time Muratori's book appeared, it seems that others, among them the architects Carlo Aymonino, Vittorio Gregotti and Aldo Rossi, were

already talking about 'types' in similar terms. Although there were disagreements, particularly between those who saw typology essentially as simply a method of urban analysis, and those, like Rossi, who saw it as providing a general theory for architecture, they all agreed upon the value of typology as a means of describing the relationship of architecture to cities, and of founding *continuità* in the objective reality of the built world. Of the various expositions of 'typology', that put forward by Rossi in



S. Muratori, Map of Quartiere S. Bartolomeo, Venice (detail), from *Studi per una operante storia urbana di Venezia*, vol. 1, 1959.



S. Muratori, plan of Casa Barizza on the Grand Canal in the twelfth, fifteenth and eighteenth centuries. In post-war Italy, the 'type' became a way of describing the relation between individual buildings and the city. Muratori's pioneering study showed in great detail the progressive development of many individual buildings in Venice, and how the city as a whole consisted of a limited number of historically evolved 'types'.

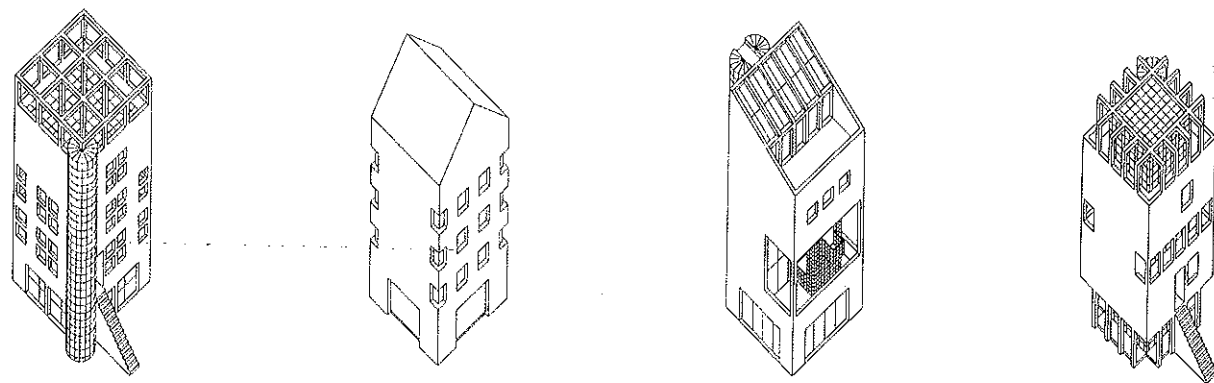
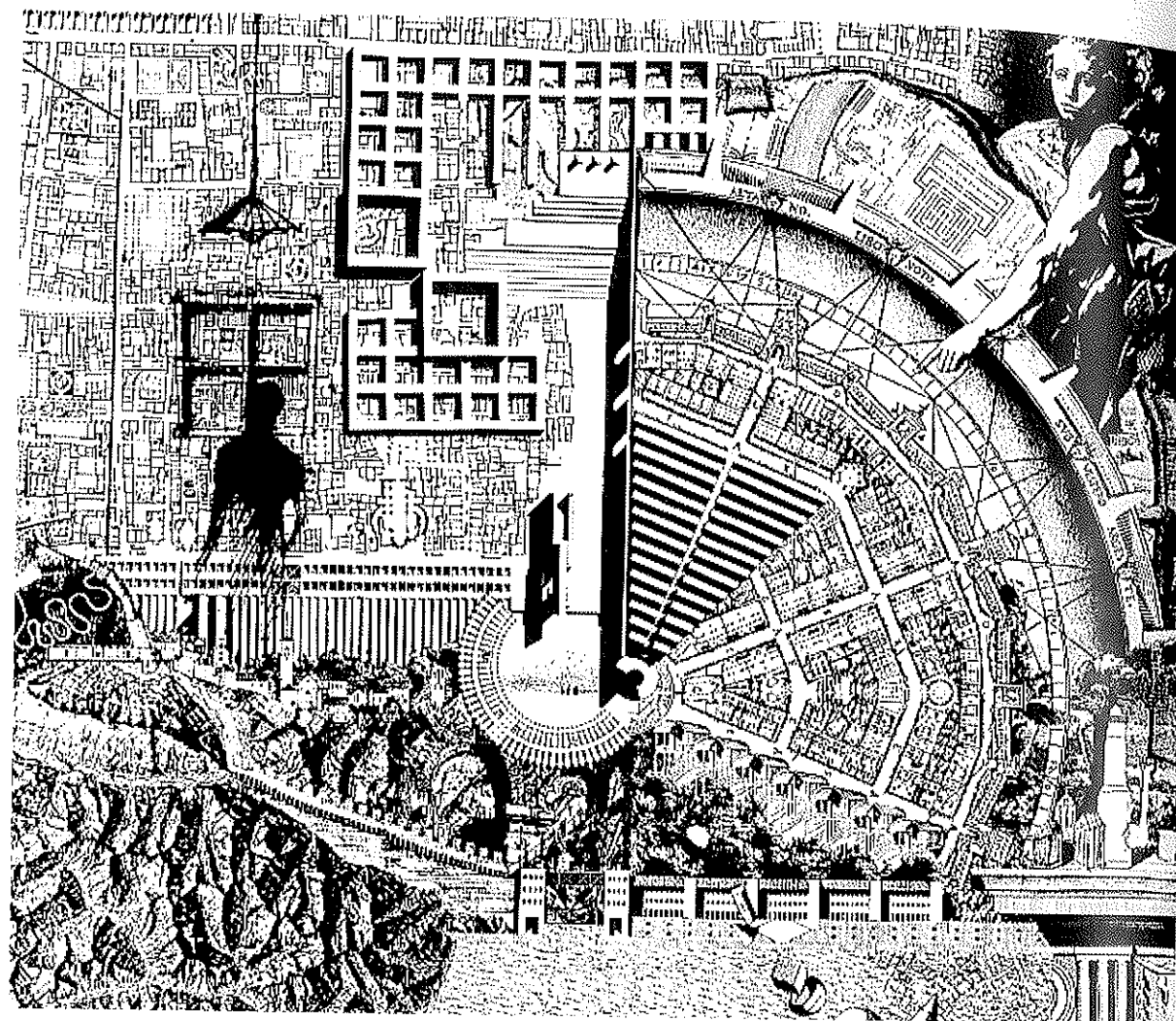
The Architecture of the City is probably the best known and, at least outside Italy, has been the most influential.

For Rossi 'type' served two explicit purposes: firstly, it offered a means of thinking about urban architecture independently of the functions to which it was put – and thus provided a critique of orthodox modern architecture; and secondly, the evidence that certain building forms and street patterns persisted throughout the history of cities regardless of the various uses to which they were put, could be taken as manifestations of 'type', that irreducible element in which the historical 'permanencies' of the city were encoded (1982, 35–41). It was from the concept of the 'type' that Rossi subsequently developed his idea of 'analogies', of an 'analogical architecture', whereby a whole city might be represented through a single building; thus, describing his experiences of the United States, Rossi remarked 'in the villages of New England ... a single building seems to constitute the city or village, independent of its size' (1981, 76). It was this idea in particular, from Muratori's research onwards, that fascinated Italian architects.

4. In the pursuit of meaning

By the 1960s it was becoming a commonly voiced complaint against architectural modernism that it had drained architecture of meaning. While the first

generation of modern architects had done this with the best of intentions – so as to remove from architecture the insignia of social class which it had traditionally borne – the results had been to produce what, in the 1960s, was to become known as 'the crisis of meaning'. This issue certainly formed a subtext to Rossi's *The Architecture of the City*, but as Rossi throughout his career maintained a calculatedly equivocal stance towards this whole question, he never addressed it directly. However, in a book written by another member of the Milan circle, Vittorio Gregotti, *Il Territorio dell'Architettura*, and published in the same year, 1966, there was far more direct attention to the problem of signification and meaning. Gregotti suggested that the 'semantic crisis' of modern architecture was in part related to typology. Referring back to late eighteenth-century architects, specifically Ledoux, these architects, with their projects for public buildings in urban settings had, Gregotti claimed, 'intended to bring the problem of the semantics of the type under control', establishing 'the possibility of an urban semantics' (100). Architectural modernism had rejected all schemes of signification, and precipitated 'the semantic crisis of the type' – 'the crisis of the power of architecture to transmit messages as effectively as other channels of communication' (101). The two remedies to this lay in the revalorization of the 'type', and in the configuration of 'context' [*ambiente*] as

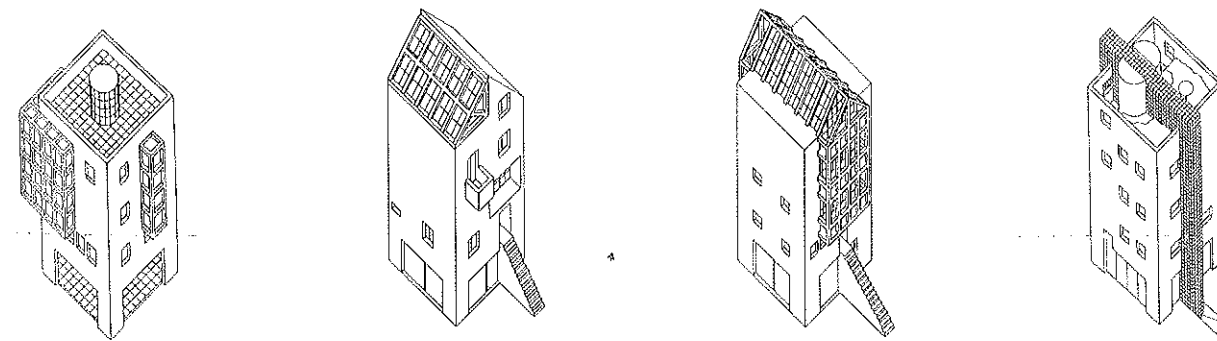


part of architecture. This view that in the 'type' – whether the discovery of new types, or the recovery of existing ones – lay the solution to the modern architecture's lack of meaning formed an important part of Italian architectural debate in the 1960s. When the English-speaking world started to take notice of the Italian discourse about 'types' in the late 1960s and early 1970s, it was this aspect in particular, more than the theory of *continuità*, that attracted architects and critics. Writing in 1977, the historian and critic Anthony Vidler, who was particularly responsible for disseminating the new theory of 'types', laid most stress upon the way 'types' were productive of meaning, such as to create 'one comprehensible experience of the city' (1977, 4). And the critic Alan Colquhoun, writing in 1989, suggested that 'type' provided the means through which structuralism, as a theory of meaning, could be translated to architecture:

Just as language always pre-exists a group or individual speaker, the system of architecture pre-exists a particular period or architect. It is precisely through the persistence of earlier forms that the system can convey meaning. These forms, or *types*, interact with the tasks presented to architecture, in any moment in history, to form the entire system. (1989, 247–48)

Or, to give another example, when Demetri Porphyrios (a Greek who had studied at Princeton) discussed the works of Alvar Aalto in terms of typology, it was so as to press the case for their having semantic meaning: 'By utilizing the associational richness of already operative and socially legitimate iconographic types ... Aalto achieves the ultimate poetic aspect of language: that of polysemy (the

(above) Aldo Rossi, *Citta Analogica*, drawing, 1976. 'The type is a constant, it can be found in all the areas of architecture': Rossi was fascinated by the poetic possibility of representing a whole city by means of a single building.



manifold levels of signification; the profusion of secondary and tertiary meanings)' (1979, 144).

Christian Norberg-Schultz suggested, in the sentence quoted at the beginning of this entry, that 'type', in its various manifestations, has on successive occasions provided architects with a means of renewing their discipline. While this is certainly true, the lesson of this particular enquiry has been that its force has always been felt through its opposition to some other concept. Despite 'type' having the appearance of the purest of ideal categories, an absolute if ever there was one, in architectural usage at least, its appeal has in practice been less from an inherent strength of content of its own than from its value as a means of resistance to a variety of other ideas. The only 'pure' theory of types, that developed by Gottfried Semper, architects have found remarkably difficult to put to any practical use; on the other hand, set against structural rationalism, mass consumption, functionalism, or loss of meaning, 'type' and 'typology' become, as Micha Bandini says, 'almost magical words which by their mere utterance yield hidden meanings' (1984, 73).

1. Useful general discussions of 'type': Vidler, 'The Idea of Type', 1977; Monico, 'On Typology', 1978; Bandini, 'Typology as a Form of Convention', 1984.
2. On Semper's terminology, see Semper, *The Four Elements etc.*, 1989, introduction by Mallgrave and Herrmann, 23, 30; also Rykwert, 'Semper and the Conception of Style', 1976. Semper's familiarity with Goethe's theory of types he gained from the naturalist Alexander Humboldt's *Cosmos*, 1843 (see Mallgrave, 1985, 75).
3. See Schwartz, *The Werkbund*, 1996, 238 n.213, and Anderson's introduction to Muthesius, *Style-Architecture and Building-Art*, 1902, 30. This discussion of 'type' as a means of resisting the effects of capitalism on culture is derived from Schwartz, 121–46.
4. Vidler, 'The Third Typology', 1977, pp.1–4.

(below) O. M. Ungers, 'Typology of Detached Houses based on a Constant Grid', 1982. 'Types' seemed to offer a way of putting meaning back into architecture.

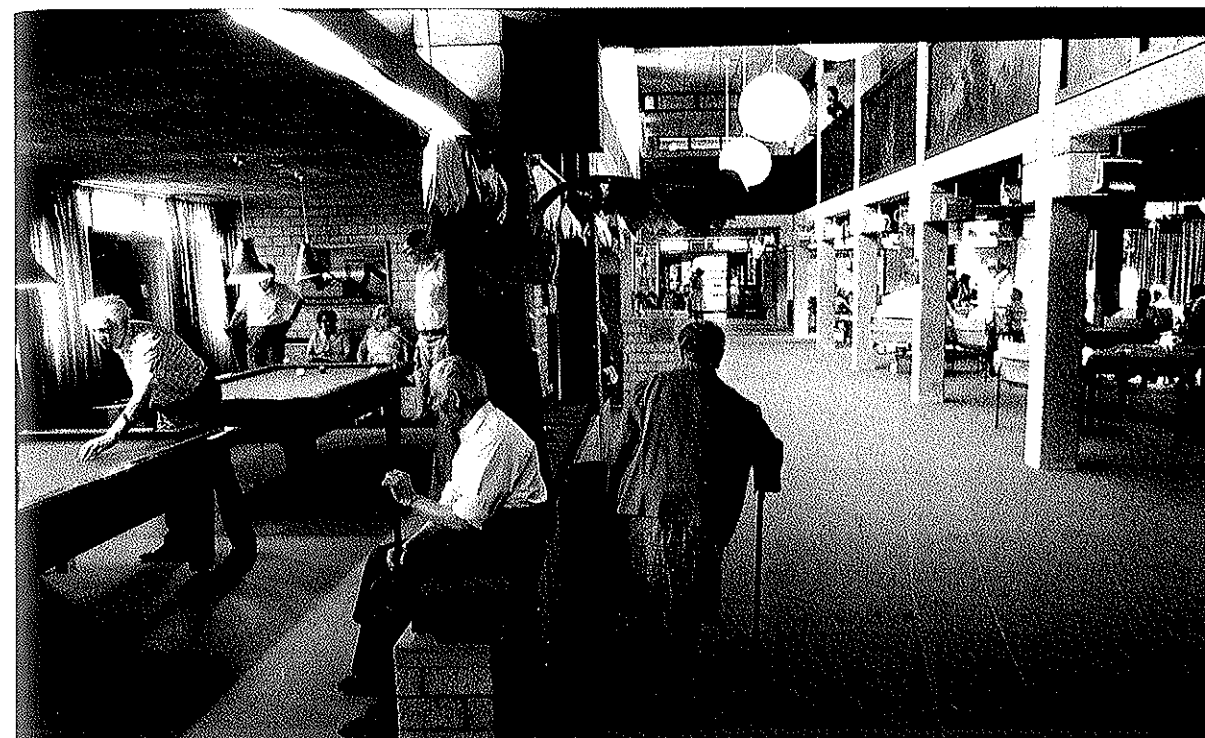
'User' was one of the last terms to appear in the canon of modernist discourse. Unknown before about 1950, the term became widespread in the late 1950s and 1960s; on the wane in the 1980s, it has returned to currency in the 1990s serving a different purpose to that it maintained in the modernist era. The term's origins coincide with the introduction of welfare state programmes in Western European countries after 1945, and it is in relation to these that its first phase of currency should be interpreted.

What the 'user' is meant to convey in architecture is clear enough: the person or persons expected to occupy the work. But the choice of 'user' in place of 'occupants', 'inhabitants' or 'clients' has held strong connotations of the disadvantaged or disenfranchised – it particularly implied those who could not normally be expected to contribute to formulating the architect's brief. Furthermore, the 'user' was always a person unknown – and so in this respect a fiction, an abstraction without phenomenal identity. The 'user' does not tolerate attempts to be given particularity: as soon as the 'user' starts to take on the identity of a person, of specific occupation, class or gender, inhabiting a particular piece of historical time, it begins to collapse as a category. Deprived of its abstract generality, its value disintegrates; for its merit is to allow discussion of peoples' inhabitation of a building while suppressing all the differences that actually exist between them. Describing them simply as 'the users' strips them, or any sub-group of them, of their discordant, non-conformist particularities, and gives them a homogeneous – and fictional – unity. It was just this tendency to abstraction that made the French philosopher Henri Lefebvre suspicious of the term. In *The Production of Space* (1974), he writes: 'The word "user" [*usager*] ... has something vague – and vaguely suspect – about it. "User of what?" one tends to wonder. ... The user's space is *lived* – not represented (or conceived)' (362). As far as Lefebvre was concerned, the category of the 'user' was a particular device by which modern societies, having

deprived their members of the lived experience of space (by turning it into a mental abstraction) achieved the further irony of making the inhabitants of that space unable even to recognize themselves within it, by turning them into abstractions too (93). Lefebvre's remarks are among the earliest attacks upon the 'user'. Yet for Lefebvre 'use' and 'user' were by no means wholly negative concepts – indeed his ultimate desire was to see users regain the means to appropriate space and make it their own. He was, as he put it, 'For appropriation and for use, ... and *against* exchange and domination' (368). Use is what would unify spatial practice against all the forces that dispersed it: 'use corresponds to a unity and collaboration between the very factors that such dogmatisms insist on dissociating' (369).

A similar view of the emancipatory power of 'use' against functional determinism is to be found in the writings since the early 1960s of the Dutch architect Herman Hertzberger. 'User' is a recurrent term in Hertzberger's articles, and it is clear that he sees the whole purpose of architecture as to enable 'users [to] become inhabitants' (1991, 28), to create for 'the users ... the freedom to decide for themselves how they want to use each part, each space' (1967; in 1991, 171). The measure of an architect's success for Hertzberger is the way spaces are used, the diversity of activities which they attract, the opportunities they provide for creative reinterpretation (see *ills.* pp. 116, 313). Hertzberger's analogy for describing this process is language: 'The relation between a collective given and individual interpretation as it exists between form and usage as well as the experience thereof may be compared to the relation between language and speech' (1991, 92).

However, this very particular, positive sense of the user did not enter general currency until the 1990s. Until then, the most common reason for interest in the 'user' was as a source of information from which design could proceed. It is hard now to appreciate the excitement and



Interior, De Drie Hoven, Home for the Elderly, Amsterdam, H. Hertzberger, 1964–74. To create for 'the users... the freedom to decide for themselves how they want to use each part, each space': to Hertzberger, 'users' are the ultimate measure of an architect's work.

anticipation surrounding studies of the 'user' in the early 1960s. An English schools architect, Henry Swain, speaking in 1961, announced that 'To evolve techniques to help us to analyse the needs of the users of buildings is the most urgent task of our profession' (508). Swain's choice of the word 'user' in place of the more conventional 'client' or 'occupant' can be seen as serving at least three purposes. Firstly Swain, like many other architects, believed that analysis of user needs would lead to new architectural solutions – to a truly 'modern' architecture liberated from dependence on conventional architectural programmes or formulae. The 'user' would provide the material through which architecture might finally realize its potential. Characteristic of the confidence in the results that would follow from the study of 'user needs' (although the term 'user' was not employed in it) was the British Ministry of Housing and Local Government Report *Homes for Today and*

Tomorrow of 1961 (usually known as the Parker Morris Report) that recommended a new basis for defining the standards of state-subsidized housing. In it, the authors took issue with the previous policy of statutory minimum room sizes, to which they objected because it tended to produce a conventional arrangement for the dwelling, with little scope for flexibility either in the design or the subsequent use of the dwelling. Instead of minimum room sizes, they recommended a minimum size for the entire dwelling, arrived at 'by looking at the needs as a whole of the intended occupants of a dwelling'. As they set out their rationale,

This approach to the problem of design starts with a clear recognition of these various activities and their relative importance in social, family and individual lives, and goes on to assess the conditions necessary for their pursuit in terms of space, atmosphere,

efficiency, comfort, furniture and equipment.... The approach is flexible, questioning such widespread assumptions as that equal floor areas should be devoted to sleeping, dressing and sanitary needs as to all other needs put together, or that houses should generally have two storeys rather than one, one and half, two and a half or three. The approach is also indirect. Arrangement and rooms are the results, and not the starting point; arrangement flows from the inter-relation of the ways in which the needs can be satisfied within the limitations and opportunities provided by the site, the structural possibilities and the cost; rooms grow from the needs and provide for the needs – they evolve as a consequence of thought and not in the copying of what has gone before. (4)

Striking in this passage – and wholly characteristic of the widespread interest in the study of the ‘user’ – were the confidence that attention to people’s activities and needs would lead to non-traditional architecture; and a vagueness – characterized by the words ‘flows from’ and ‘grows from’ – as to exactly how this information about the user would inform architectural practice.

Secondly, the choice of the term ‘user’ may be understood in terms of the expansion of the functionalist paradigm – if a relationship was said to exist between buildings and social behaviour, then it was necessary to have a word to represent those upon whom buildings were perceived to act. The ‘user’ satisfied this need, providing, as it were, the required second variable in the functionalist equation. The ‘user’ therefore may be seen as a result of the functionalist model – and some of its unsatisfactoriness flows from the shortcomings of this model.

The third purpose of the ‘user’ was to sustain architects’ belief-systems during a period of astonishing favour and good fortune for the profession. The two decades after the end of the Second World War saw the growth of the welfare state in Western European countries, and of welfarist policies in the USA. Within this political system, designed to stabilize relations between capital and labour but without effecting any major redistribution of the ownership of wealth, architecture was widely adopted by Western governments as an important part of their strategy. Not only was it a matter of providing new schools, housing and hospitals, but of doing so in such a way that those who occupied these buildings would be convinced of their ‘equal social worth’ with all other members of society. The task given to architects, and in the execution of which they were

entrusted extraordinary freedom, was to create buildings that would induce – in the face of persisting social differences – a sense of belonging to a society of equals. For the many architects employed on public-sector projects, it was necessary to convince themselves – and the public at large – that the ‘client’ was not the bureaucracies or elected committees that actually commissioned the buildings, but those who would actually inhabit them. Although these people were almost invariably unknown to the architects, the professional claims of architects to serve the greater good of society depended upon being able to show that the true beneficiaries of the new schools or social housing were indeed those destined to occupy them. The ‘user’, and the extensive analysis of ‘user needs’, allowed architects to believe that notwithstanding their employment by ministries and government, the people whom they truly served were the occupants of the buildings.¹ By privileging ‘the user’, it could be claimed the expectations within a welfare state democracy for the disempowered to be treated as citizens of ‘equal social worth’ was being realized. It might, therefore, be said that the purpose of the ‘user’ in the 1950s and 1960s was partly to satisfy architects’ own belief-systems, to legitimate their claim to be working for the underprivileged class, while in reality working for the state; and partly to allow architecture to hold its particular, and peculiar place within the welfare state democracy as the service which provided the appearance of a society moving rapidly towards social and economic equality, when in reality such differences persisted.

The decline of interest in the ‘user’ and ‘user needs’ corresponded to the decline in public-sector commissions in the 1980s. Not only was the ‘user’ no longer of value to architects, but moreover, as their social authority declined, the ‘user’ became a positive threat, the personification of uncontrollable disorder that frustrated the architect’s intentions.

Perhaps another reason for dissatisfaction with the ‘user’ has been that it is such an unsatisfactory way of characterizing the relationship people have with works of architecture: one would not talk about ‘using’ a work of sculpture. Yet with architecture, there is still no better alternative, and a recent book has reinstated the word ‘as a more appropriate term ... than either the occupant, occupier or inhabitant because it also implies both positive action and the potential for misuse’ (Hill, 1998, 3). By the late 1990s, it appears that ‘user’ has lost its earlier connotation of the disadvantaged and disenfranchised and become a means for architects to



Washroom, Little Green Lane School, Croxley Green, Hertfordshire. 1949. ‘Users’ wash their hands in the small size washbasins specially designed by David Medd for primary schools. Introduced in the post-war era, the word’s purpose was primarily to describe those whose interests the building programme of the welfare state was intended to serve.

criticize their own practice. It was a peculiarity of Lefebvre’s book *The Production of Space* that ‘use’ and ‘user’ appeared in two contrary senses; Lefebvre’s second, emancipatory sense, also used by Herzberger from the late 1960s, now seems to have displaced the previous sense produced out of the circumstances of the welfare state.

1 This was the phrase coined by the political theorist T. H. Marshall in 1950. See Forty, 1995, 28.

2 See Lipman, ‘The Architectural Belief System’, 1968, for an interesting discussion of this dilemma.