

# BUILT FORM



## Contemporary Types and Urban Morphology

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### Viewpoint

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Different approaches to urban morphology start from the investigation of urban tissue, and as a practical outcome, they might lead to professional action in planning and urban design. The role of historical types in these approaches is clear. However, the place of contemporary forms has not yet been clearly defined. Reviewing Conzenian and Muratorian approaches shows that the temporal dimension and emergence of contemporary types are not comparable to types that are routinely considered in urban morphology. Among morphological concepts, 'type' as a notion that classically deals with forms has a strong background in building traditions. Reviewing definitions of type can clarify how we can place contemporary types in urban morphology.

Regardless of the genealogy of the word type, reviewing this concept started from the mid-20th-century conceptualization of Argan (1963), Colquhoun (1969), Vidler (1977), and Moneo (1978), although all these are based upon thoughts of Quatremere de Quincy, Abbe Laugier and first of all Goethe. Argan used the word 'type' versus 'prototype', which means a configurative form exists before all designed examples derived from it. But 'type' is a result of a reduction process of all existing forms of a defined function, use, or configuration. Therefore, type is a root form, which stems from a knowingly study and observation process, reduced from all existing forms with a common subject (Argan 1963). Recognising a 'type' is a result of refining, reducing and summarising definite forms to a root. According to Argan, types must be defined in a hierarchy in which these types should have longitudinal and latitudinal relations with each other. Colquhoun (1969) extracted the innovative capacity of 'type' in the design process. He argues that every act of design deals with pre-assumptions, and there is no way to have our pure intuition at the beginning of the design process. Using types will not bind our hands to design, but just makes us start faster; Since the response to each design challenge can be found in a definite type, and any other methods, tools, and applications can only lead us to a framework which shows us the way to pass the process. No final forms can be derived from those methods, tools, and applications. Here, using a typological hierarchical repertoire can bring us to the first step of designing an absolute final form. Vidler (1977) seeks the meaning of type in the context of the city as a repertoire for architectural and urban forms. Here, the urban tissue can be seen as a whole, whose past and present are embedded in its body. The typological approach, which he described as 'third typology' (versus Nature-oriented typology of Laugier and Mechanical

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typology of Le Corbusier), deals with themes that remain in pre-existing types, themes which are common between types and themes resulting from combining these types (Vidler 1977). The urban tissue is a stack of the city's experience, and in this stack, we can find fundamental rules for designing spaces and buildings. By choosing forms (basically their types) from the past, although the forms are disconnected from their temporal period, they still bring their social and political meanings from the past to the present. Therefore, the continuity of urban forms can be seen through temporal changes. Moneo (1978) excavated the notion of type and defined type as 'a concept which describes a group of objects characterized by the same formal structure'. As he argues, type is not a spatial diagram of an average of a serial list, but is based on the possibility of grouping objects by certain inherent structural similarities. The idea of the type, which 'ostensibly rules out the individuality in the end', has to return to its origins in a single work. Moneo expressed that types are not only tools for describing the architecture, but architecture has always been produced through types. The architecture can be produced through types because types are open to the process of change. The type can be thought of as the frame within which change can be operated.

All these can be seen as a viewpoint extremely rooted in the words of Quatremere as defined 'type' versus 'model': "the model understood as a part of the practical execution of art is an object which should be imitated for what it is the 'Type' on the other hand is something in relation to which different people may conceive works of art having no obvious resemblance to each other. All is exact and defined in the model; in the 'type' everything is more or less vague. The imitation of 'types' therefore has nothing about it which defies the operation of sentiment and intelligence. (Chr 1788 in Argan 1963) Quatremere sees type as a vague and neutral entity that brings only an idea of a form and does not dictate a form. Therefore, type always transfers the content of past projects, but this content does not affect the design process of a new building. All these buildings are refined in their formal qualities in a type, and a designer can create a new building free from historical indicators.

As an outcome for this conceptual review, key points which introduce the notion of type can be summarised in a way that any practical action deriving from morphological thought, dealing with new form, can be founded upon them.

- Consideration of 'type' as a vague and neutral entity that brings only an idea of a form, but does not dictate it;
- The process of reducing the existing form to a root configuration of a type;
- Embedded historical content within the type and the ability of the type to be free from historical content;
- The commitment to developing a hierarchy of types which have longitudinal and latitudinal relations with each other;
- The ability of types to be used independently or in relation to or in combination with each other.

As the last word, the notion of the type can fundamentally be used to view history as a process which has not ended in the past, However, the end of this period can be seen in every singular present moment.

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