

Keynote: Vernacular architecture and typology

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“A language is a dialect with an army
and a navy.”

Max Weinreich

Typology

A pious Muslim, whose son was about to get married, he went to the mosque of a small village and asked the brothers to help build the new house. All the faithful agreed, no questions like: “What type of home?” “How are distributed functions?” what materials and what techniques? “Simply: the house. In the past times the owner very likely did not even need to describe a house to a local mason who shared his cultural milieu; he simply told the mason what he needed and the mason built the house without too much planning and the carpenter, when he built the roof, built the only roof he knows. The idea of house is a concept shared by the whole community and it is so rooted, that exists in the mind of the inhabitants even before challenging the tools and execute the work.

We have introduced the concept of type using this short fable, whose definition in its simplest version sounds like this: “Type is the organic sum of the morphological invariant features of a group of buildings from the same time period and cultural area. Typology, not to be confused with type, is the science that studies the types, their mutual relations and their evolution in time”.

The a-priori type

In the past village where the houses and overall fabric are notable for their homogeneity, is possible because at a given point in the past every villager building a house referred to the same common legacy of constructive, distributive, and decorative techniques.

Changes over time occurred so slowly that almost any abrupt change in the formal continuity of any one built object was essentially cancelled out. Homogeneity, far from being mo-

notonous, was the aesthetic merit of the village.

This is not to say that differences almost did not exist. “A shepherd of a large flock who must distinguish one sheep from another necessarily takes into account the subtle differences between his individual sheep,” writes Heinrich Tessenow, “and he is quite able to do it, while a non-shepherd like ourselves thinks they all look alike because in this case our eyes are not used to seeking out the subtleties.” (1)

Paradoxically, when the protagonists of the modern movement tried to cut the bonds of historical consciousness and by extension the historic fabric by using a clean, abstract language, they constructed that language from the southern Mediterranean vernacular. Masters of modernism such as Joseph Hoffman, Adolf Loos, Adalberto Libera, and Carlo Enrico Rava, for example, were inspired by examples of Libyan, Tunisian, and Algerian Vernacular building.(2)

A patrimony of expression of space and architecture still exists that people retain in their memory and apply when they build a house without an architect. If we visit a *gurbi* an illegal settlement on the periphery of Tunis, such as the Melassine quarter, or a *douar* at Marrakesh, places where we would expect chaos, we will be surprised by the rationality of the layout, with its equal-sized plots properly aligned along regular streets. Most striking is the similarity of these layouts to the fabric of the *madina*. The immigrants from the hinterland, who have occupied the land and subsequently built these structures, have used the patrimony expressed by the type simply because it is ingrained in their consciousness. These and other similar examples reinforce the principle of type that Saverio Muratori called “a common creative effort.”(3). His observations on the built fabric of Venice and Rome also led him to the important and original corollary that type is not only an *a-posteriori* mental construct, but it already exists within the built reality of the building, the fabric, and the city. It is “the mental project” of whoever builds or remodels a building, and therefore precedes the planning stage as a pre-representation. Furthermore,

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Muratori points out, at their deepest level, types are much more than just schemes established *a-posteriori*. They are the essential formative elements of stylistic forms and also of the works of art themselves. In these works they represent the often decisive contribution of an environment and a culture operating at the individual level while characterizing an entire school, age, and people. Outside such a formative spiritual climate single works would not even be conceivable.

Unlike Platonic ideas, the *a-priori type* does not pre-exist at the meta-physical level or on a formal schematic level as Argan suggested, but is a product of the historical process and is rooted in a society's culture, as John Habraken never tires of stating. (4) For Muratori, the type is the concept, not a scientific paradigm, a conjecture with which to verify the sensible world except in contrary cases; rather, it is scientific in that it exists and has its roots in History. If it were not immanent in reality/History, which helps to interpret, it would in fact be a broken tool and we would make the usual error of constructing an abstract and subjective system like the gestalt of Christian Norberg-Schulz, entrusting ourselves to theories based on perception. It is neither the work of individuals nor of a society in a given historic moment, but is slowly formulated and progressively added to by society as a whole during its cultural-historical evolution. Since it is formed on the structure of the environment and on principles and structures of use as experienced, the *apriori type* is deeply tied to the place and is opposed to the conventionalism of standards, but to the atopic as well. It is always politically, culturally, and economically up to date. While it is shared it is also individual, insofar as each person who uses the type introduces new elements that make changes in it that are not part of the existing consensus. We may sum up by saying that an *a-priori type* is determined by the legacy of transmittable characteristics which precedes the formation of the single building, governing its structure of relations from within. In other words, it is the body of customs and norms acquired over the course of

the building experience, which forms the framework for previewing the proposed building.

Spontaneous conscience

The a-priori type is definitely a product of the spontaneous conscience that is the attitude of man to adhere to established standards, rules and customs, that stem from the built tradition. Even in the absence of real building regulations, the force of custom was such that the manufacturer adhered in full to the existing built reality. Returning to the example of the illegal settlements in many Islamic countries, the building is a precise economic reply and is done by dividing the land in accordance with the rules and conventions that translates instances of spontaneous conscience, rooted in time. The distribution of land produces plots of constant size that match constructive, economic and distributive requirements of the house. In the minds of those who divide the land a close relationship between land-use, type of house and type of urban fabric is established, which will be summarized in the act of constructing. The spontaneous consciousness of the rule matches the spontaneous consciousness of the type.

Vernacular architecture

It is not nostalgia for a distant past that leads us to refer to vernacular examples, but the expression of a conscious spontaneity that they embody. The striking unity of a Kabyl settlement on the mountain above Tizi Ouzou in Algeria or a *ksar* in the Draa valley in Morocco are the expression of homogeneous society, which, passed the state of nature, have metabolized experience in tradition.

In the Italian *Enciclopedia Treccani* we read: vernacular, from Latin *vernaculus*, adj. "domestic, familiar", that continues: "Speech characteristic of a center or a limited area. This is in contrast to language and is distinguished from dialect, with respect to which is more popular and local (as in French *patois* is opposed to *langue* and differs from *dialecte*), and is used most often for historical reasons. Most of the dictionaries associate vernacular to linguistics: for instance from

the *Free Dictionary*:" being or characteristic of or appropriate to everyday language; "common parlance"; "a vernacular term"; "vernacular speakers"; "the vulgar tongue of the masses"; "the technical and vulgar names for an animal species", or from the *Your Dictionary*:" Vernacular is common language spoken by average citizens of a particular place, or is language used within a particular field or industry".

From the previous definitions it seems that the term is used with two meanings. The first branch (in the sense of the meaning) more Anglo-Saxon (which corresponds to the English "dialect" defines the "dialect" of a "variant" of a linguistic geographic continuum, and therefore the term is understood to refer to a specific family language and possibly related to the "linguistic form of reference" or "root" of the family, called the standard form. In this sense we can speak of "dialect of a language" or "dialect of a language or dialect continuum" as tantamount to speak a variety of languages intelligible with the others in the group to which it is ascribed.

The second meaning, derived from Greek antiquity, identifies the "dialect" as any "idiom" with its territorial characterization but devoid of political or literary prestige, and that from the point of view of descriptive linguistics and philology is independent of any bond dependence, subordination or affiliation with the official language (or official) in force in its territory of relevance, although between dialect and the official language there may be significant relationships and similarities. (5)

Bernard Rudofski in the introduction of the exhibition at MOMA, dedicated to the architecture without pedigree, describes the transition from the state of nature to the spontaneous consciousness, just as we read in the vernacular architecture: "it seems that long before the first enterprising man bent some twigs into a leaky roof, many animals were already accomplished builders. It is unlikely that beavers got the idea of building dams by watching human dam-builders at work. It probably was the other way. Most likely,

man got his first incentive to put up a shelter from his cousins, the anthropomorphous apes. Untamed apes do not share man's urge to seek shelter in a natural cave, or under an overhanging rock, but prefer an airy scaffolding of their own making. The untutored builders in space and time-the protagonists of this show-demonstrate an admirable talent for fitting their buildings into the natural surroundings. Instead of trying to "conquer" nature, as we do, they welcome the vagaries of climate and the challenge of topography. Whereas we find flat, featureless country most to our liking (any flaws in the terrain are easily erased by the application of a bulldozer), more sophisticated people are attracted by rugged country. In fact, they do not hesitate to seek out the most complicated configurations in the landscape".(6) and Glassie captures vernacular architecture in a matter of democracy and inclusion that does not have the architecture with capital A: "The study of vernacular architecture through its urge toward the comprehensive, accommodates cultural diversity. It welcomes the neglected into study in order to acknowledge the reality of difference and conflict" (7). Rudofski who writes in the forties does locate under the umbrella of architecture without architects not only the homes of men, but any unplanned settlement, choosing beautiful images based mainly on their aesthetic impact; while for Glassie vernacular architecture is the ordinary house and everyday life, the first imbued with the values of family and community.

However, both of the subtle differences of assessment of Bernard Rudofski, Paul Oliver, Henry Glassie or Dell Upton it is clear that vernacular architecture for its collective character, its belonging to an established and undisputed tradition, is an expression of the world of spontaneous consciousness. The works of vernacular architecture are typological variants of the leading type a-priori and can be studied by the typological science. This is absolutely true for the pre-modern architecture.

Critical conscience

In the second half of the nineteenth century, building as a work of spontaneous consciousness faced an unprecedented crisis and eventually its natural relation with the culture was severed. Rapid economic growth fueled by industrialization, as well as the specialization of the building industry itself, took by surprise those who venerated the existing “old” city. In addition, population growth caused the unprecedented outward expansion of those European cities just emerging from a state of semi-stagnation. The pre-industrial expansion of these cities had been inward and was achieved either through the erosion of public space or the deliberate transformation of existing structures. The new demographic and economic vitality combined with new mechanical means created new demands and functions. To meet them, traditional builders had only their limited experience and expertise derived from earlier changes in the local urban fabric and building practices and thus were only partially successful. The tastes of these medieval builders were formed by a common background and training, and their relation to building itself reflected this formation. The new bourgeois culture, in contrast, began to conceptualize buildings intellectually, as one can see in the universal forms of neoclassical architecture. Their response was primarily quantitative, leading to the reduction of a project to a simple question of style, in contrast to the spontaneous richness of the medieval town. Building became the monopoly of the architect and the owner: “building one’s house” became “finding one’s house on the market” Since that time the fact of working on special buildings has molded the professional figure of the architect.

In addition to the inadequacies of the builders, nineteenth-century urbanism was adversely affected by the incapacity of the bureaucratic culture to assimilate the pre-industrial, medieval city. The Enlightenment, concerned with the abstract behavior of people, eventually conceived the city in terms of mechanical problems like transportation and sanitation, refusing to understand the existing city beyond

the superficial image of the medieval crowded narrow winding streets. The intellectual position of the Enlightenment also proved inadequate for facing the challenge of the new era; so did Romanticism in its vain desire to favor morality and emotion, and Positivism because of the narrowness of its vision of reality.

The Enlightenment inspired countless modern interventions in historical cities, from the nineteenth-century attempts to “liberate” monuments (e.g., Hausmann’s gutting of Paris) to Le Corbusier’s famous Plan Voisin.

I do not want deny the value of XIXth century urbanism, and architecture, but as a result of its conflictual relationship with the past it betrayed an exhaustion of ethical and expressive impulses.

The phenomena described above have resulted in the long run a general weakening of the societies, making them more permeable to the a-critical import of alien architecture and at the same time a hypertrophy of egocentrism of the architect; so to paraphrase the examples of linguistics, and we passed from dialect to language often to finish using the idiolect. At the same time, the proliferation of increasingly specialized building types, which by definition are little or nothing spontaneous, has also influenced the design of the dwelling. Today’s homes are designed with strong intentionality and load of signs and meanings that are irrelevant. The first consequence is that every single house is not part of the chorus, placed in a homogeneous environment, but lives an aggressive competition among architects, which contributes to the cacophony of the contemporary city.

The critical consciousness of the builder is founded in the early stages of the crisis, when there is the problem of designing the building intentionally. You can then define critical consciousness the state of uncertainty in the face of built reality that inherited an obligation to operate with very deliberate actions by imposing conscious project in the construction process. Analogously in this period of crisis the type can only be reconstructed a-posteriori.

This has undermined the vernacular

as the main vehicle of expression both in language and architecture, making the latter a subject of folklore. Beyond the numerous and often inflated literature documenting and studying the architecture which is than the role of the vernacular? Examples of inclusion of vernacular architecture in modern design are numerous, but the results are unconvincing.

In the case of Aldo Rossi elements of the vernacular architecture like the lighthouse, the chimney, the sea cabins can be separated from their historical context and become poetic objects, losing all typological meaning and their participation in a specific culture.

In contrast Hassan Fathy in the sixties put himself against the world of building production and the academia now converted to a simplistic modernism. His book *Architecture for the Poor* is a call to common sense, an invitation to find coherent solutions in the building traditions of the common people, to reevaluate ancient technologies in the name of economy and well-being. Its architecture reflects the tradition, but it is animated by a moral imperative that all leads back to the simple without being simplistic. It rarely gives in to the decoration. Nevertheless even in the most socially engaged works as in the villages of Gournna and Bariz his interpretation of tradition, based on a personal, refined sensibility, but not on a scientific method of history, remains in the wake of post-modern attitude (8).

Rasem Badran, the most interesting Arab architect and urban designer today, chose the traditional Arab city as a reference of his projects. A sharp eye and a remarkable sensitivity, and a graphic mastery with a certain redundancy of signs are accompanied by an eclecticism in the choice of models, - I quote the renovation of the promenade of Sidon - producing works, especially in the printed version of the un-built projects, in precarious balance between folklore and sophisticate quotation(9).

These examples of great architects show that any reference to the vernacular architecture hides the risk of a fall in the post-modern poetic, imbued with nostalgia for a golden un-known age.

Only a critical process of philolog-

ical reconstruction implemented on the living body of the city, distilling the lessons from the overlapping stratification in history of vernacular architecture, can subtract the architect to the persuasive charm of the images.

Typological process

In 1946 Muratori recognized the need to insert type into the complex flow of history, intuitively connecting type with the concept of organism and embedding both in society. In fact, he continues, "the architectural type is a kind of architecture and therefore a building organism which, as a result of repeatedly taking shape in order to respond to the typical needs of a given society, ends up so intimately adhering to its psychological climate that it absorbs all its essential human traits." Type, then, is not merely a sub-product of the historical process that leads to the mechanical repetition of needs or material development. It is History.

The connection of type to historical process is the only correct use of it in the design process, since the type is an authentic expression of the collective memory. Due to a rupture in the historical process, at present type can be approached only through a reflective critical consciousness. This operation of critical consciousness to reach spontaneous consciousness that will, at best, fall short of the goal, is what Muratori called "asymptotic." (10)

Our idea of "type" as history cannot be separated from the idea of process. The most relevant concept of typological theory is that of processuality, which fixes the mutations of the type in the historical duration. Without it, the type runs the constant risk of falling into one of the historic errors: an a-historic formal scheme good for every trick, or a mechanical montage of forms broken off from the real world. It is necessary to understand the internal mechanism that animates the type and anchor this in built reality, which would otherwise not be different from any biological organism. This is the most relevant concept of the method of typological analysis. By the concept of process we understand the internal mechanism that animates the type and anchors this mechanism in the built

reality.

Typological process allows us to understand the evolution from one type to the next, but does not really understand the deal with the question of dating (the province of traditional historians) so much as it does the question of the sequence of buildings and urban fabrics. In fact, similar typical conditions can be isolated in the history of different civilizations in different periods.

The tracing of typological processes allows us, on the one hand, to establish those characteristics of the building that are essential for the determination of continuity in the process over the course of its transformation. On the other hand, it also determines those characteristics that constitute departures or exceptions, and in their own way contribute to the valuable heritage of experimentation. In other words, typological processes show us at the same time both the rule and the exception.

“Phase” is defined as the period of time needed to allow the clear identification of changes in the built object. The progression of phases makes up the diachronic typological process from the Greek *dia*=through, and *kronos*=time, if conducted in a culturally homogeneous area that is, with negligible external influences, such as a closed valley, are syntopic from the Greek *syn*=together, and *topos*=place.

The basic type in any typological process coincides with the ideal house in any given time and progressively changes through specialization from elementary matrices to complex derivations. The type is commonly recognized by every inhabitant, and it can accommodate slight changes based on its role and source of revenue, provided they are within the bounds of the type. We can also call it a “leading or current type,” since it is the type all members of a society recognize as optimal. In a given phase it can be coherently found in the corresponding building. A synchronic variation is a type of house realized under less than optimal conditions. These can be the result of topographical problems, or of problems with placement in a block or placement in an incongruous fabric. Even under the best conditions there is always a

chance for synchronic variations to develop within a group. If there is a slight rotation in the tissue, as is common, there will be at least one house with walls that are not parallel. Such a house will face problems such as trying to raise a vault on a trapezoidal plan and the difficulty of furnishing spaces with odd angles and will inevitably lead to variations in the type.

The typological process is as complicated as the urban or territorial organism in which it operates; it more or less involves the intersection of different processes. It is therefore necessary to reduce the complexity of a building type or a contemporary urban tissue by assuming that they have necessarily absorbed their predecessors and then backtracking to find the simplest form of the type or fabric. The elementary matrix is the first documentable type at either the substratum level or an archaeologically measurable level upon which the reading can be based.

A diachronic and syntopic typological process, limited within the bounds of a circumscribed culture area and referring to the residential type, can be described. Taking any of the beautiful Rudofski's examples of medieval city in the Levant or the Maghreb, the “leading type” in the initial phase of the typological process is an elementary type or plan - we can call it founding type - whose dimensions are an expression of that specific building culture. The urban fabric is conceived on the basis of this leading type and is concurrent with it. Modified houses exist, however, on irregular lots or on slopes or located at the beginning of a series, or in a corner and so on; the sum of these experiences generates a parallel process by synchronic variation, insofar as each can cause the imitation of its neighbor, offering itself as a possible solution to a problem. In turn, the parallel processes mature with and modify the leading type as people gain in experience.

In the second phase, assuming the continuous growth of the city, the next leading type will evolve by exceeding its limits and refining some of its parts. In new growth zones of the city the new leading type adapts to the tissues planned specifically for it, and is found mainly on principal or matrix routes or

planned routes. This is not the case in the old city center, where the layout is more permanent because of the resistance of the building tissue to change. What contributes most to the conservation of such an area is that real estate is simply heaped atop the resistant existing tissue.⁴⁹ In this case the inhabitant must compromise between the concept of a leading type, an ideal expression if you will, and the reality that the building tissue is unyielding.

The inhabitant's intervention will determine two new possible types of synchronic variation. The first are the renovations or mutations made to the elements of the interior without disturbing the main structure; the second is demolition and reconstruction. In neither case will the adaptation of the new leading type in the old building tissue reach optimal conditions.

Variations generate processes that in turn contribute to the development of the next leading type. In this third phase the new leading type is comfortably located in the new yet saturated fabric but it will be subject to modification in the two older building tissues. The more time that elapses between phases, the more difficult it becomes for the leading type in the old tissues to adapt. The assumption that the growth of a city is steady is hypothetical. In practice, after a certain number of growth phases a period of relative stagnation, or even of regression, sets in, often resulting in vacancies, abandonment, and the like. This was typical of all Mediterranean cities after the Black Death almost halved their populations after 1348. In Siena, until well into the mid-nineteenth century, for example, large undeveloped areas still lay within the city walls.

A more realistic picture is one in which intervals of more or less intense growth alternate with periods of arrested development and regressions. During the periods of accelerated growth and subsequent slowing down, the behavior of residential tissues and special tissues is different. The residential tissues easily both accept rapid growth and resist regression.

The period of regression affects first and foremost the special buildings, as they represent an investment of cul-

tural and economic surplus by the collective. In periods of economic stagnation, limited building activity inhibits the evolution of a leading type. Where building tissue shrinks, the specialization of the residential type is also reduced from its former incarnations and produces only synchronic variations. This is logical, since the reduced and limited requirements of the surviving population will lead to a simpler use of the old buildings. A similar phenomenon occurred in Tripoli and Algiers during the late Ottoman period, and in Naples under Spanish domination: because the walled city was restricted to the area claimed by the walls, it grew in height, blocked open spaces, and turned special buildings into collective residences. In periods of crisis the most adaptable structures are the serial ones, that is, iterative ones; in the special buildings as well the serial parts are those that are most easily recyclable.

When a period of stagnation gives way to a new cycle of growth the notion of a leading type is considerably attenuated in the spontaneous consciousness of the residents and they are able to manage only synchronic variations. As a result, diatopic⁵¹ (from the Greek *dia*=through and *topos*=place) formed modifications thrive in the weakened body of the city, and a new leading type is often imported from a distant but culturally dominant area. A new leading type, the result of the synthesis of local processes and the imported model, is then used in the future expansion of the city.

Despite cultural differences, this phenomenon is discernible in both Europe and the Islamic Mediterranean. After 1850, the model used in Italy originated in Paris or Vienna but was grafted onto strong local traditions. The local traditions explain why the fundamental typological processes in Genoa, Florence and Rome took such different directions despite their use of the same models.

In Aleppo after 1870 the Venetian type called a *portego* was merged with the local type of courtyard house with *iwan* to produce a tripartite house with a wide main corridor. This model was universally adopted when the new quarter of Aziziye was built in the sec-

ond half of the nineteenth century.

Algiers presents yet a different case: instead of agreeing to adopt a single Western model, a variety of types were imported and imposed by the colonizing French population. The impact of colonization minimized the effect of local processes and the leading type coincided almost exactly with the imported model. I say “almost” precisely because even though local building customs were followed only in those residential sections of the city which the French shunned, they nevertheless persisted through many small gestures. Only a detailed reconstruction of the typological process would reveal to what extent they survived.

It is clear, however, that the post-1830 colonial construction of Algiers preserved traces of local traditions in the compact dimensions of its building blocks, the result of a minutely divided property substratum and of the demolition and reconstruction of small courtyard houses. The imposing imperial facades of residential buildings also mask a lingering spontaneous ones.

To sum up: Process is always diachronic, based on continuous time whose rhythm changes in relation to the behaviour of the various scales. The inertia of the large territorial scale with its urban framework and infrastructure produces a slower rhythm, while, on the other end of the building scale, changes occur faster and thus have a quicker rhythm. Differences can also be discerned in the position of the objects on the same scale, for instance between central and peripheral buildings, or between special and residential buildings. The typological process takes place in phases in which the leading type proceeds through moments of equilibrium alternating with synchronic variations. The typological process may be syntopic (i.e., occurring in the same area) or diatopic (i.e., involving variations between areas). Finally it can refer to the basic type (the house) or to special types.

The graphic models we construct in our mind or represent on paper are reductive. Not even the metaphor of a tree with its trunk, branches, and foliage can do justice to the complexity of typological processes, unless it is the

banyan tree of India, whose enormity and growth pattern would merit definition as a grove rather than a single tree. Its branches extend out horizontally, shoot upward, descend toward the ground, and sneak underground where they take root and shoot out new branches not unlike the original ones. Eventually only the expert eye of the gardener can distinguish the primary trunk. The reconstruction of typological processes is somewhat similar to the script of a film, with one important difference: the filmed work anticipates scenes which might take place in the future, while the reconstruction of typologies projects into the past. It approaches past scenes with the unquestionable advantage of already knowing many of the elements, relationships, and sequences; it can therefore critically reconstruct the missing pieces insofar as they are typical. It requires the awareness that a critical description of the process -as in all disciplines- must be carried backwards throughout from the final frame. The term “critical” is emphasized: even a reading restricted to documentable facts is not “objective,” nor is knowledge the equivalent of a mass of data piled up in a closet but is remote control operated by our minds. We hear only what we want to hear and nothing else.

Returning now to the vernacular architecture, we established that all those beautiful and moving homes of ordinary people belong to the state of the spontaneous conscience.

Two important questions remain open: If there is a space in the critical consciousness to the vernacular architecture and if, beyond architectural analysis that leads to the discovery of extraordinary architecture without pedigree, it is conceivable to speak with a vernacular idiom in the contemporary design. The answer is a cautious yes in both cases.

Let it speak the language of things (11) is important because it allows not only to bring out the fragments of spontaneous consciousness that everyone keeps jealously in his unconscious, but also to reaffirm the social value of architecture against the anarchist current interpretation of the great stars and the media. The journey back along

the line of time, required by the typological process, allows us to reconstruct the complex heritage of principles and know-how generated by the traditions and consumption, consolidated in a society. It allows you to resume the broken thread with the story and set rules for a design for ordinary people, subtracted from the fashion. This all the more real and measurable in the basic buildings, the house, to which the majority of vernacular researches are dedicated. The typological process offers dignity and scientific method to research on the vernacular architecture, subtracting it from the easy imitation of eye-catching shapes.

Notes

1. "To assume homogeneity means developing a noteworthy sensitivity, a sensitivity in only one direction; because it is necessary to concentrate all one's attention on every subtle detail; this is the limitation which characterizes uniformity and also order." Tessenow, H. (1989) *House Building and Such Things*, p. 17.

2. Carlo Enrico Rava is perhaps the least known, but decidedly the most important figure as a theorist of the Rationalist Movement (he was leader of the Gruppo 7 in 1926) and a participant in the debate on modern colonial architecture. His ideas on colonial architecture begin with the rejection of Moorish (and other) styles as inspirations for Libyan architecture, which he claims is of classical Roman derivation. Ultimately he sees "an extremely fine Mediterranean intonation that clearly relates it to all other architectures of southern origin" (C. E. Rava, "Una architettura coloniale moderna mediterranea," *Domus* (1931), 39. On the same subject see also *idem*, "Costruire in colonia," *Domus* (August-October 1936), 28-30; and *idem*, *Nove anni di architettura vissuta 1926 IV-1935 XIII* (Rome, 1935), 103 ff.

3. S. Muratori, "I Caratteri degli edifici nello studio dell'architettura," Inaugural lecture, Course on the Character-

istics of Buildings, IUAV, Venice, 1950, p. 15. Muratori further adds, "What is more, the most orthodox application of that idealist thought which seeks to negate type does not suffice to deny the existence of true collective expressive creations manifest in some typical spatial and structural intuitions - which make up the architectural core of an entire civilization."

4. "Types are shared properties within a culture. Everyone - builder, designer, user, is familiar with them. Yet types such as the Venetian Gothic palace, the Amsterdam renaissance townhouse, the Georgian terraced house, or the Pompeian courtyard house were never formally described by those who made and used them. Types only exist in a social body." J. Habraken, "The Control of Complexity," *Places* 4, n. 2 (1987), p. 7.

5. It is important in this context to note that dialect is the opposite of idiolect the set of characteristic language habits of a single individual or a small group of speakers. Idiolects are the architectural languages of the contemporary architects of the star system, whose poetry far from being referred to a body of established traditions is purely self-referential.

6. Rudofski, B. *Architecture without Architects. A short Introduction to Non-pedigreed Architecture*, New York, Museum of Modern Art, 1965

7. Glassie, H.H. *Vernacular Architecture*, Bloomington, In. ,Indiana University Press, 2000.

8. Steele, J. *An architecture for People: The Complete Works of Hassan Fathy*, Darby, Pa., Diane Pub co, 1997.

9. Steele, J. *The Architecture of Rasem Badran: narrative of People and Place*, London, Thames and Hudson, 2005.

10. From asymptote, a line which appears nearer and nearer to a curve but does not meet it within a finite distance.

11. See Dell Upton. "The Power of Things: Recent Studies in American Vernacular Architecture", in *American Quarterly*, 35/3, 1985, pgs. 262-279