

To include control in our observation of form inevitably introduces a socio-political implication. That kind of implication also goes for the study of economics, which is about control as well and is not without reason called the 'dismal science'. The link is familiar to practitioners, of course, and perhaps wisely circumvented by them, but must be accepted by researchers of built environments. Yet strictly speaking we do not need to know *who* is in control. We are primarily interested in patterns of control.

More disturbing perhaps is that we learn that an autonomous environment does not sit easily with architectural ideology. The stability implied by deeper control hierarchies of form and space contradicts the belief that good art demands full top-down control. Territorial reality, which in history is a source of architectural elaboration of gates and other forms of transition, is now denied contemporary expression, because we prefer to maintain the illusion of free flowing spaces without

boundaries of any kind. Finally, sharing of form among designers, by way of type, pattern or system, was always the source of coherence in the built environment, but now is believed to be detrimental to self-expression and originality.

Note

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The historico-geographical approach to urban form

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Karl Kropf's article in this issue (pp. 105-20) presents an in-depth analysis of different methodological approaches in studies of urban form. His aim is to identify possible common tools of analysis. The part of the article that interested me most was his analysis of studies by British geographers, in particular those by M. R. G. Conzen. Though the work in this field by geographers is not a topic on which I have special knowledge, I took an interest in the Italian translation of Conzen's monograph on the town of Alnwick¹ a few years ago and I was determined at that time to learn more about this important scholar. I was, incidentally, fortunate enough to meet Conzen in Birmingham in 1997. I propose to focus my observations here on the relationship between studies of urban form carried out by English geographers and those carried out by both architects from the Italian typo-morphological school and Italian geographers.

In the second chapter of his monograph, Conzen examines closely the methodological principles of urban and territorial analysis. Many statements he makes are in perfect accord with the methods and

concepts of the Caniggian school. I should like to begin by commenting on some excerpts from Conzen's text which reveal that he came to the same conclusions, and at the same time, as those of the typological-process-based school in Italy.

'Towns have a life history. Their development, together with the cultural history of the region in which they lie, is written deeply into the outline and fabric of their built-up areas' (p. 6). This affirmation, that the history of the city is written into the fabric and outline of towns as we see them today, constitutes the basis for conducting morphological 'readings' at the scale of buildings for the simple reason that only in this manner can we understand what preceded what we see today. 'Even where plots have been altered...the plot pattern as a whole is full of residual features from earlier periods and may in fact appear unaltered in all its essential characteristics' (p. 7). This standpoint is well founded, for the permanence of ownership divisions is a fundamental element in urban analysis: these are the most difficult outlines to transform and from them, therefore, we can individualize, through a process moving backwards

in time, the original structure of a particular aggregate. Hence 'an evolutionary approach, tracing existing forms back to the underlying formative processes and interpreting them accordingly, would seem to provide the rational method of analysis' (p. 7).

The definition of urban form analysis – as a study of the evolution of the urban fabric – coincides with the concept of the typological process which is one of the fundamental elements of typo-morphological studies. Various other related statements by Conzen are consonant with the typological approach. 'Each period leaves its distinctive material residues in the landscape and for the purpose of geographical analysis can be viewed as a *morphological period* (p. 7). 'The formative processes underlying areal phenomena must be demonstrated if concepts of general significance are to be produced'. 'The present townscape is the accumulated record of distinct morphological periods' (p. 9). 'It seems rational, therefore, to proceed broadly by cross-sections in time' (p. 9). The individualization of distinct morphological periods, in which, through in-depth analysis, one can reconstruct the many features pertaining to the course of evolution in any given geographical area is fundamental. It allows us to compare the structure of different areas by looking at the time phases through which the present fabric has formed and moreover contrast eras and features even in places distant from each other.

That comparisons of the analyses of English geographers with those of Italian typo-morphological scholars, largely architects, exemplify major commonalities is becoming increasingly appreciated. However, it is useful to add to these comparisons some thoughts on the Italian school of geography, which has an age-old tradition of study and research promoted by Florence's own Accademia dei Georgofili, founded in 1753.² Here we find commonalities with *both* the Conzenian school *and* the Caniggian school.

In a time closer to our own, the Florentine school of geographers was led by Prof. R. Biasutti³ who in 1924 began studying rural buildings. He went on to publish numerous essays and articles on the topic. Having set up a research series on the ethnological geography of rural dwellings in Italy (*Dimore rurali in Italia*), in 1938 he published his first volume on rural dwellings in Tuscany, entitled *Casa rurale in Toscana*.⁴ The series developed over the following decade and about 30 volumes were published on the different regions and sub-regions of Italy.⁵ Individual research papers were published based on the common method of analysis

established by Biasutti. Each study began with a description of site topography, geology and flora and fauna and went on to consider human intervention, including a synthetic analysis of different agricultural uses. There was then a detailed examination of a sample of rural buildings. The buildings were studied by means of a comparison of 'models', but they are in fact precursors of the investigation of 'types' as practised today by architects of the Caniggian school.

In accord with this positivist framework, Biasutti constructed models of the different characteristics of rural buildings. These are enriched by the particular attention given to the constants and variants found in their construction, and by in-depth study of their temporal stratification by means of diachronic analysis of artefacts. Thus we get close to the concept of 'type' as a construct present in the minds of men – in a certain area and at a particular historical moment – before the building is brought into existence. The 'type' is the concise concept of all components necessary to make the building and it is the product of the cultural legacy from those preceding us and providing an expression of the contemporary civil society. The classifications and comparisons in these publications constitute already typo-morphological analyses which can be compared with 'readings' of existing buildings with a view to optimizing contemporary projects that we, as practising architects, are asked to produce.

There is little doubt that the research carried out by the Florentine school of geographers emerges from a milieu shared by British geographers. It also seems that the Italian school was not, as had been thought previously, tied to a provincialism typical of much Italian cultural expression, which is often an attempt to keep up with more up-to-date developments imported from other countries. Instead, in the case of both geographers and architects, they were part of international developments. This is demonstrated by a debate in 1946,⁶ in a journal edited by the architect G. Michelucci, on a proposal by M. R. G. Conzen in the *Town Planning Review*⁷ on the constitution and definition of the then new science of town planning. In this debate the views of Italian workers in the field are presented and also a paper by the famous linguist B. Migliorini on the appropriateness of the neologism '*geoproscopy*' proposed by Conzen.

Notes

1. Conzen, M. R. G. (1969) *Alnwick, Northumberland*:

- a study in town-plan analysis* Institute of British Geographers Publication 27 (Institute of British Geographers, London) 2nd edn.
2. The academy was founded by Abbot Ubaldo Montelatici with support from the Grand Duke's Government: today it still brings together scholars and specialists in the field to discuss and resolve pertinent problems and it publishes a prestigious scientific bulletin.
 3. Biasutti (1878-1965) was a student in Florence and then Professor at the University of Naples. From 1927 he was a member of the Academy of the Lincei in Florence.
 4. Biasutti, R. (1938) *Casa rurale in Toscana* (Forni, Bologna).
 5. The direction of the series, published without interruption until 1970, was awarded to two students of Biasutti: Prof. G. Barbieri and Prof. L. Gambi, distinguished Professors of Geography at the Universities of Florence and Bologna.
 6. The debate, instituted by D. Adriello, can be found in the journal *La nuova città*, No. 6/7 (1946) 52-6.
 7. Conzen, M. R. G. (1938) 'Towards a systematic approach in planning science: geoprospect', *Town Planning Review* 18, 1-26.

Housing associations and built-form conservation in the Netherlands: another gap to bridge

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A number of contributions to this journal have drawn attention to the need to bridge the gap between urban morphological research and practice and to the ways of meeting this need. The weak link between organizations responsible for built heritage conservation and urban morphologists engaged in research with a direct bearing on conservation is especially unsatisfactory. As an urban morphology researcher who has recently moved into practice in the Netherlands, I am struck by another lacuna in this field: namely, the minimal representation of *woningcorporaties* in the Dutch conservation debate. These 'corporations' are probably best understood in the English language as 'housing associations' – the term used in these comments.

A large percentage of listed buildings in the Netherlands are owned by these associations. Though exact numbers are not available, it is thought that they own several thousand of the listed buildings designated by central, provincial and local governments. The number is likely to rise further now that the Dutch government, like a number of other governments, has turned its attention to buildings and monuments of the period since the Second World War, many of which are owned by housing associations.

A number of housing associations are already playing an active part in the restoration of buildings and are beginning to consider more seriously their role in the field of heritage and conservation and their social responsibility towards it. Nevertheless,

the majority of them still have to formulate their policy on how to deal with these often vulnerable objects.

An example of a housing association that values its listed buildings highly is Van Alckmaer voor wonen, a small association in Alkmaar that owns about 3000 dwellings. Approximately 40 of these are either listed buildings or 'characteristic buildings' (*beeldbepalende panden*), considered by the local government to have particular value, often because they are situated within a conservation area. This association has gained considerable experience restoring and adapting listed buildings for new uses. One of its main objectives as described in its charter is to 'contribute actively to obtaining and preserving buildings of historical, art historical and/or local value'. Local built heritage is acquired, restored and, in most cases, made habitable. Prospective occupants of a listed building are only granted leases if they show genuine enthusiasm for living in a restored historical building.

This is but one example of a Dutch housing association putting effort into the restoration of the built heritage. A network of housing associations owning listed buildings has recently been established. This group aims to increase expertise amongst associations through exchanging information, knowledge and experience.

Housing associations are important actors and stakeholders in conservation of the built heritage in the Netherlands. They have developed expertise in