

is more acute in suburbia, where building is even more expedient and repetitive.

Typological design is also less likely to produce visual chaos in the built environment than Modernism. Buildings of the same type naturally tend to rhyme more with each other over time and space. Cities can once again be more legible and therefore more understandable to their inhabitants and guests. They are vital not because they are a breathless collection of novel and exciting buildings, but because they are an understandable hierarchy of buildings that are big and small, important and unimportant, vernacular and monumental, background and foreground. When understandable to their citizens, cities can again help record, legitimize, transmit, and extend the values of culture and community.

Does typology dull architectural creativity? No, but it does put limits on it. Like many ordering systems, it can actually liberate and unleash more coherent creativity. The type offers a known framework in which creative change can take place, either during the initial design process, during construction, or after occupancy. It frees the designer to concentrate on changes that truly make a difference rather than on the superficial or arbitrary invention of form. It limits originality for its own sake—the kind of novelty into which commodification, marketing, and avant-gardism can degenerate. The Modernist imperative to innovate ultimately became just as tyrannical as the former imperative to follow tradition. Typologists can be original and go beyond the ordinary, but only at the appropriate scale and when extraordinary circumstances warrant it. They do not feel that they must be original with every design problem. On the other hand, they must guard against being too slavish or derivative in their replication of a given type.

Typology has a different attitude toward change over time than Modernism. High-style Modernist buildings tend to be unique responses to specific programs for particular users. With the exception of some high-tech and most loft buildings, they usually start out specialized, with interiors and exteriors that are hard to adapt to the subsequent uses that will be invariably asked of the building. Types are not overspecialized and are usually more adaptive. The palazzo, the basilica, the Georgian townhouse, the Cape Cod cottage, and the loft warehouse are examples of versatile architectural types. Not all types are this adaptable, but most buildings based on types are general enough to be customized over time. In a sense, they start out conservative, conventional, and traditional and become radicalized

over their life. High-style Modernist buildings, on the other hand, often start out as radical and are made to become more normal over time as they are changed by their users.

A question of scale (toward a theory of scale)

Typology has also shifted the scale at which the freedom to invent occurs. Instead of sculpting a figural statement (a “duck” in Robert Venturi and Denise Scott Brown’s terms) at the building scale, a hallmark of the Modern Movement, a typological design is often concerned with the room. Rooms with a capital “R” take on the importance that Modernism tended to lavish on the circulation system. (Such elements as stair towers, corridors, and elevator shafts are often externally expressed as bold and conspicuous elements in Modernist buildings.) Related to this re-emerging interest in discrete rooms is a renewed emphasis on architectural elements such as the door, column, and window, which need not be thought of as standardized components.

At the middle scale—that of public space—typology also brings discipline and hierarchy to creativity. Typical alley, street, avenue, and boulevard sections, as well as time-tested block configurations, are deployed in site-specific ways. Spatial variety is possible at the urban scale, because public spaces are treated as particularized outdoor rooms that can also be site-specific. They are not treated as generic streets and plazas. Nor are neighborhoods, districts, cities, and regions seen in standard or universal terms. In a sense, typology trades freedom, uniqueness, and creativity at the scale of the building, neighborhood, street, and block for freedom, uniqueness, and creativity at the scale of the architectural details and of the whole city. It’s a trade that makes for more predictable buildings but less predictable cities.

Although Modernist buildings are free, original, and creative at the building scale, their details tend to be standard and generic; their hollow-metal door jambs and steel and aluminum knobs, window jambs and trim, railings, and light fixtures are typically uniform from project to project. Indeed, Modernism actually championed standardized industrial production. Perhaps the pioneers of the Modern Movement instinctively and subconsciously realized that, with the advent of standardized mass production, they had better be creative at a larger scale.

Modernist functional or Euclidean zoning segregated the city into zones of single uses, greatly