Abstract introduttivo al seminario a cura di Krunoslav Ivanisin.

CONCEPTS_PARADIGMS_CONDITIONS

Usual way of discussing typology in architecture is to situate architectural objects in a chronological line, with each object representing a step in the continuous evolution of the respective kind of edifice. In this kind of taxonomic classification, which is common in art history, architectural objects are classified to form types according to their shared characteristics (formal, structural or functional), using existing models borrowed from other disciplines: biological anthropology, linguistic or evolution theory. It would be more useful for understanding the development of architecture and more instrumental in the construction of new architectural forms to tackle this issue without the constraints of linear historical development, seen from a broader perspective that also includes aspects of the general social and cultural conditions that works of architecture ultimately embody. Understanding "office space typology" requires an insight into the formal characteristics of work spaces and the buildings that contain them, along with an array of subsidiary, representative or public spaces.

This brief analysis of office space combines steps in its historical evolution with the corresponding spatial and cultural concepts, and the conditions in which white- collar work is performed. The resulting sequence of ARCHITECTURAL PARADIGMS provides the architectural name for the taxa, which are the functional, morphological and historical types of office space, associated with the corresponding working methodologies, technological and wider cultural developments, and organizations of the urban space.

Lloyd's of London is a British insurance market whose history constitutes an important trajectory in the development of present- day global capitalism. Its present spatial condition is the conditioned interior of its headquarters in London's City. Its popular image relies to a large extent on the forceful outside presence of Richard Roger's building, and its foundations are the immaterial flow of finances and data at the global scope. A century ago, Lloyd's insurance market resembled a large marketplace lit from above, with groups of tables housed under a single ceiling- something we would still recognize as an office space. Yet its original spatial condition was somewhat different: the insurance market began in *Edward Lloyd's coffeehouse*, where sailors, merchants, and ship owners began to gather around 1688. The *London society of Underwriters*, which was to form the insurance market, came to be known as Lloyd's as a result of its members' habit of meeting there. A coffeehouse is not immediately recognizable as an office space. However, it is in spaces like this that important business deals are made to this day.

Early precedents of the office spaces we know include a shop in a medieval city or a monk's cell in a remote monastery. The first architectural paradigm is the **PROVISORY**: that same coffeehouse, or a tent in the picturesque countryside in which some general decided the course of a battle. The spatial and social conditions of this rudimentary office that preceded the formal architectural

articulation of the office **"SPACE"** might be described as *domestic*, and its basic cultural condition as *pragmatic*.

Next step, related primarily to the growth of the market, was a move to the **PALLACE**: a virtually endless corridor with rows of rooms on one or both sides. Although fixed in form, this kind of spatial organization was extremely flexible in use, providing suitable spaces for different activities. Its entrance halls and (*baroque*) staircases provided representational spaces that accommodated the aspiratuions of the emerging elite. Johann David Steingruber's *Architektur-Alphabet* of 1773 is a compendium of imaginary palaces with floor plans correlated to the letters of the alphabet. Buildings based on less radical floor plans constitute the downtowns of virtually every city in the (Western) world. The spatial division of the working process into separate rooms merely developed into the so-called "individual work station", the origin of the contemporary office furniture industry. The vertical growth of business palaces has changed our skylines, starting in American cities. The development of towers was closely related to major technological improvements in construction processes and the daily use of buildings.

The systematization of individual workstations into a line, along with the important contribution of mechanical engineering, led to the dominance of another paradigm: the **WAREHOUSE**. Like the rooms and corridors of the palace, warehouse floors were easy to pile one on top of the other to form the next kind of tower.

Frederic Winslow Taylor's *Principles of the Scientific Management of Labour* was published by the American Society of Mechanical Engineers in 1911. Taylorist principles were soon to be applied in the industrialized societies of the Fordist world, to production and office work alike. The layout of the workplace was no longer dictated by the window as a source of natural light. A warehouse could extend horizontally, supported by the construction industry's ability to enclose ever greater spans, creating *total* spaces suitable for *free plan*, *open plan*, and similar spatial organizations. The cultural concept of positivism led to the construction of artificial environments where everything, including sound, was controlled in order to increase productivity. As early as 1904, an organ was installed and music was played to rouse the workers in the vertical, churchlike space of Frank Lloyd Wright's *Larkin Building*. The peak of this kind of sound conditioning was reached with generic "elevator" music, also known as "beautiful" background music in the 1960s, when the belief in endless progress was at its greatest.

The world of mechanical repetition has found its "neutral" architectural expression in the omnipresence of the structural grid. The campus, made up of pavilions that can house anything, placed in an a priori, harmonious spatial order generated by the structural grid itself, was considered the ideal model for unlimited urban growth. No wonder Ludwig Mies van der Rohe's design for the *Bacardi Headquarters* in Havana proved equally suitable for accommodating Berlin's *Neue Galerie* contemporary ("abstract", "geometric"…) art collection.

Critics of the "scientific" approach to everyday human activities include Charlie

Chaplin's *Modern Times* (1936) and Jacques Tati's *Playtime* (1967), the latter showing how the prestige of office work has fallen to the level of blue- collar manual labour. Much more positive about the productive society that gives its entrepreneurs and innovators maximum freedom was Ayn Rand's novel *The Fountainhead*. A warehouselike floor, high up in a skyscraper- with a view over many similar skyscrapers- provided a perfect spatial setting for the film version of 1949.

Probably the most radical spatial application of Taylorism as a tool for the rationalization of everything was the *Bürolandschaft*: an unobstructed, continuous horizontal pattern of office tables, office chairs, even office plants, organized to optimize the flow of paper: **"ENVIRONMENT"** rather than "SPACE". Conceived by the German management consulting firm *Quickborner Team* with Eberhard Schnelle, it annihilated spatial hierarchies, aiming for permanent flexibility where everything was movable and versatile. Naturally, the massive introduction of computers into office work that soon followed and the progressive digitalization of data put an end to the importance of the flow of paper. Moreover, it has diminished the formal importance of the office space itself. Seen from the distance of time, the Bürolandschaft represents a decisive step toward the dissolution of office space into something similar to ecosystem, in which the multiple relations are far more important than the actual physical shape.

The shift toward less formal concepts was catalyzed by the multitude of critical approaches to social and cultural issues. The impact of the social sciences on the formation of the new paradigm is comparable to that of the mechanical engineering in the positivist times. Socially engaged experimental approaches in and around *Team X* materialized in the complex **AGGLOMERATION** that combined the *bricolage* technique and the "natural" growth of the oriental *kasbah* with the technological sophistication and bigness of the contemporary airports. This short episode replaced the *total* with a more *domestic* condition, this time informed by the "high efficiency" of participatory "teamwork".

Guy Debord's *Psychogeography* of the fragmented, discontinuous contemporary city provides the background for another paradigm, more adaptable to the immaterial information **"FLOW"**: the **LOUNGE**, resembling a waiting area in a hotel or the terrace of a café bar. The rapid development of information technologies and means of communication and transportation constitutes the basis of new post- Fordist cultural and spatial concepts. Mobile offices, home offices, and even the resurrected medieval workshops resonate with the demands of flexible capital and the needs of the mobile labour force. Office space is sliding back toward a more *"natural"* condition. Social sciences are now insisting on the recovery of the material environment. This time, however, an ever sounder contribution is provided by environmental sciences. At least since the 1970s oil crisis, "progressive" and "regressive" standpoints alike have addressed the topic of sustainability in architectural discourse. Office spaces frequently provide the ideal playground for experiments in environmentally concerned architecture.

An informal meeting in a high-end glazed interior, creative brainstorming in a former factory hall, and video conference in something that could be described as

a childish villagelike film set: these are some of the episodes that reflect the contemporary, "informal" idea of office work. What they have in common is the intention of recovering a more natural or more domestic state of things.

Like the debt that the aerodynamic shape of Norman Foster's environmentally friendly office tower owes to Buckminster Fuller's long- ago multilevel *Streamlined Dimaxion Shelter*, the LOUNGE is not so different from the PROVISORY at the beginning of this text. However, the intention here is not to prove that the loop has closed, or that the post- Fordist condition is equivalent to its pre- Fordist counterpart, though it is hard to deny the many similarities. The intention is to present a loose matrix of multiple chronological and wormholelike links that describe the spatial condition of contemporary office space , in which the above paradigms coexist.

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