

## Affordances of Architectural Typology

Politecnico di Milano, Milan, Italy

Deadline: May 31, 2023

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Affordances of Architectural Typology. A Call for Papers (by Drawings).  
Andreas Lechner (TU Graz) and Gennaro Postiglione (Politecnico di Milano).

Dear colleagues!

With this Call for Papers (by Drawings), we would like to collect contributions for a publication we will publish with the independent publisher Thymos Books in 2024. This atlas of Affordances of Architectural Typology will address both practitioners and scholars of architecture, and will be composed of contributions from both practitioners and scholars of architecture. Borrowing the key term of James J. Gibson's ecological psychology, we understand affordance as the surface of the composition and layout of a building that directly constitutes what it affords. The correlation of architectural typologies with affordances is thus an index of longevity, as it illustrates how a building adapts to or enables different uses and habitation over time. With this call, we invite your suggestions for the inclusion of project documentation of building and research projects that illustrate this correlation. We want to explore processes of transformation through plans, sections and elevations of building adaptations, arguing that it is within drawing that we form and transform, adjust and reuse, upgrade and upcycle, i.e. that we read, negotiate and readdress "value" and "meaning". (Gibson, 1979)

### 1. Future Heritage?

As we increasingly intervene in existing buildings and structures, not only the modern dichotomy between 'old' and 'new' has become increasingly ambiguous. In a sense, and comparable to 'functions' that can follow almost any form if given enough leeway, our 'heritage' in the broadest cultural sense has expanded to include the whole of the (built) environment. Almost everything has become 'heritage' today (and thus mostly meets today's ethical and environmental imperatives). This has been widely and critically explored in architectural and academic research. Fred Scott's seminal monograph 'On Altering Architecture' and the volume 'Experimental Preservation' edited by Jorge Otero-Pailos, Erik Langdalen and Thordis Arrhenius are two prominent recent examples. Still the many different terms that are used to describe interventions to a building that go beyond maintenance show a certain confusion between 'refurbishment', 'rehabilitation', 'renovation', 'restoration', 'remodelling' or 'reinstatement'.

### 2. Typology (again)?

As contemporary architecture increasingly 'builds on the built' and turns more and more of its

attention to building adaption and the adaptive reuse of existing buildings, another aspect becomes apparent. In contrast to the many anecdotal cases of 'conversion' projects that are being published, there is little systematic and design-led research on the subject. The undeniable attractiveness of hybrid, structures and constructions that confront and redesign, reuse and juxtapose existing buildings, overshadow the need to question the shifts in architectural dogmatics, in modern conservation principles and in school curricula. Don't these shifts bring us back to the question of typology because this raises the question of the nature of architectural work, as the Spanish architect Rafael Moneo wrote in his seminal essay "On Typology" (Moneo 1979)? For Moneo, it is up to each generation of architects to use 'typology' to redefine the nature of architecture and its problems. As a direct index of politics, typologies allow us to understand how even the most mundane aspect of architecture - the disposition of primary structures and spatial elements such as passages, rooms and partitions - both determine a subject's experience of space but also forms our basis for any process of identification.

Our cross-reading of typology with affordance reacts on the one hand to the ecological and pedagogical imperative of bringing building adaption more prominently into the design studios. On the other hand "affordance" helps defining and sharpening the necessary update of our architectural expertise on a more general level, because: "An affordance cuts across the dichotomy of subjective-objective and helps us to understand its inadequacy. It is equally a fact of the environment and a fact of behavior. It is both physical and psychological, yet neither. An affordance points both ways, to the environment and to the observer." (Gibson 1979, 129)

### 3. Design-Driven / Drawing-Based

Affordance of Architectural Typology is a design-led research project that seeks to explore and develop design strategies that aim for resilient buildings while remaining fundamentally architectural in nature. It will highlight the different timescales that determine the material composition of a building's shear layers - primary structural systems can last for hundreds of years, while the surfaces, domestic services, furnishings, occupation or accommodation of a particular use are of a more temporary nature. These different time scales create a gap that we tend to bridge in our designs by drawing (or by drawing onto other techniques of abstraction). But it is this abstraction that allows us to imagine both past and future forms of habitation. This project focuses on these drawn plans of selected projects and how they allow us to record and imagine change over time. It is only through change that the vague, unchanging figure becomes visible. Doesn't this diagram or design principle in the plan and section simultaneously afford and outline a powerful solution and a unique architectural responsibility that helps us situate ourselves as hybrid practitioners between building, teaching and researching architecture? (Voet/Schreurs/Thomas, 2022)

### 4. Projects for submission

We are looking for projects that can illustrate this relationship between more or less open 'indeterminacy' and affordance. We invite architects and scholars to report on building transformations that exploit, enhance and restore existing typological qualities or produce a new quality within, vis-à-vis, on top of or through an existing building structure. We want to collect examples of these two forms of transformation - maintaining or restoring a typology and adding a new typological dimension - in three building categories or contexts:

CS-1. Monuments or "palazzo types" are undisputed, culturally significant and highly charged buildings. In this category, we are looking for changes in use and occupation over a long time that maintains (or enhance) the typological integrity of the building. Case studies that have undergone more than one transformation are mandatory in this category. As an example, we provide the complete history of Palazzo Gravina in Naples (from private Palazzo to Housing block, Public Building and finally to the School of Architecture). Another example of this category could be one of the Palazzo Rosso in Genoa.

CS-2. Institutions, civic or public buildings, mainly from the 19th century, are culturally charged buildings based on classical compositions. In this category, we are looking for conversions or adaptive reuses of former industrial, infrastructural, military or health structures. Cases that have undergone more than one transformation are preferred but not essential in this category. Also, in this category, interventions change the use of the building but may also change its typological integrity by adding and/or subtracting structure. Well-known examples of this category could be the Biblioteca de les Aigues in Barcelona or the Tate Modern in London. As an example, we provide Pousada de Viseu Hotel (former Hospital de São Teotónio) in Viseu, by Gonçalo Byrne.

CS-3. In the third category - 20th-century monofunctional buildings - we are looking for examples that were not initially culturally charged and that manage to transform their generic character - commercial, retail, office and warehouse buildings - into new spatial qualities that add a degree of generosity that was never intended and that now make a convincing case for even further changes in use in the future. One example is the Roskilde Festival Folk High School offices, designed by MVRDV and COBE. As an example, we provide The ED.G.E., a mixed-use multi-tenant complex (former Hotel Aerhotel built in 1973) in Milan, by Onsitestudio.

Submitted projects should not exceed an urban scale comparable to that of a palazzo - so neither a full perimeter block or neighbourhood nor a pavilion or folly will be considered. With the collection resulting from the call, we aim to reveal affordances and thus illustrate design aspects that help to future-proof building designs by inviting and welcoming change. These intrinsic qualities of design can be methodically applied in design education contexts that aim to produce resilient and sustainable architectural design solutions.

Abstract submissions should be sent to [typologyaffordances@gmail.com](mailto:typologyaffordances@gmail.com) as one single PDF (max 20MB) in A4 (file name: CS-1 or CS-2 or CS-3\_original name of the case study-Country; e.g., CS-1\_Palazzo Gravina-Italy) containing:

1) Page 1 with general info:

- Authors' names and surnames (in this order) and Affiliation(s)
- email of the Contact Author
- Title of the work (corresponding to the original name of the case study-Country; e.g., Palazzo Gravina-Italy)

2) Page 2: Short cv (max 100 words) for each author.

2) Page 3: Abstract (max 350 words) with a short description/information about the building transformations.

- 4) Pages 4 - XX: visual material at your disposal as the source of information (template structure) (drawings/images documenting the transformations) arranged in chronological order with details of the year/s of the transformation/s and its/their functional programme/s (a rough organisation of the original sources is enough, no drawing should be produced at this stage).
- 5) Last page: References.

The selected submissions will receive, together with the acceptance notification, detailed information about the editorial guidelines and the template for the visual documentation to be produced (in order to achieve the same visual presentation of the provided examples as they will be used for the final publication).

#### Scientific Committee

Matthias Ballestrem (Bauhaus Earth)  
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#### Key dates

31/03/2023: call for abstracts out  
31/05/2023: deadline for abstracts  
15/07/2023: notification of acceptance  
30/10/2023: deadline for the final submission  
15/12/2023: notification of the request for proofreading  
30/01/2024: deadline for the proofreading  
31/03/2024: publication available

#### Literature

James J. Gibson, *The Ecological Approach to Visual Perception*, London: Routledge 1979.  
Jorge Otero-Pailos, Erik Langdalen and Thordis Arrhenius, eds. *Experimental Preservation*, Zürich: Lars Müller Publishers 2016.  
Fred Scott, *On Altering Architecture*, London: Routledge 2007.  
Caroline Voet, Eireen Schreurs, Helen Thomas, eds. *The Hybrid Practitioner: Building, Teaching, Researching* Leuven: Leuven University Press 2022.

Reference:

CFP: Affordances of Architectural Typology. In: ArtHist.net, Apr 9, 2023 (accessed Jul 21, 2025), <<https://arthist.net/archive/39011>>.