The Model *Type* : On the Theory of Andrea Palladio & Karl Friedrich Schinkel

Danann De Alba

If it is true that architectural theory is first and foremost the architect's vision of an ideal architecture, then within that theory, we should find a stance on what is the ideal "*type"*. It is understood that for a theory, one may expect first and foremost a *philosophy* of design, that is, a set of rules and expectations for what constitutes the ideal approach to designing and building architecture. Additionally, one may expect a *style*, or how the theory visually and conceptually expresses itself in practice, regardless of program. But if a theory is fundamentally linked to the practice of the architect, then there should also be an ideal *type*, a particular program or use —in the simplest terms, a kind of building— that is representative of the architect's theory and philosophy. The architect should in their theory include, implicitly or explicitly, a hint of which kind of program is most representative of their ideas.

We all associate particular *types* of buildings with certain times, places and people. Indeed, it seems we often chose to associate cultures primarily with particular types of buildings, even more so than styles, tectonics, materials, architectural symbols or methods of construction. The *Wooden Pagoda* with Japan, the *Skyscraper* with modern Capitalism, the *Castle* and the *Cathedral* with Medieval Europe, the *Stepped Pyramid* with Mesoamerican culture. And, of course, we do much the same with specific architects and their theories. Indeed, for example, it is impossible to think of Palladio without *the Villa*.

Andrea Palladio is an architect with few historical equals. He is among those architects who managed to leave a legacy measured in quantity as much as quality, and unrivaled philosophical and artistic rigour. His work, covering all kinds of different areas —Churches, Palaces, Villas, Public Buildings— remains closely tied to the principles of Classical design, inherited from Vitruvius and Alberti, all while remaining pragmatic and practical, with each design solution tailored to its context remarkably well. This is all disclosed, of course, in Palladio's *Quattro Libri*

dell'Architettura —The Four Books of Architecture—, where Palladio describes both his theory and practice succinctly, but in detail.

The *Quattro Libri* cover most aspects of Palladio's work and theory. The first chapter covers matters of construction, materials and other practical matters in architecture, as well as particular elements in buildings, such as windows and doors, walls, staircases, and columns. Additionally, the classical orders are covered in the first book. The second book exemplifies Palladio's theory by discussing and illustrating residences, or *villas*, of his own design. The third book covers matters of urban planning and infrastructure, citing both contemporary and historical examples. The fourth and final book concerns temple architecture, with examples and illustrations of historical Greco-Roman temples and churches contemporary to Palladio. What is notable, however, is that in the whole of Palladio's writing, only the second chapter is dedicated primarily to his own work. As we have seen, the second book is dedicated exclusively to residential villas. And furthermore, of all the building examples in Palladio's writing, nearly all are contained within this one book. Despite his noteworthy role in developing religious and civic architecture, even Palladio himself treats such work almost as footnotes in his architectural career. And as we shall see, this is no mere happenstance. This focus on the villa as the exemplary *type* of architecture reflects Palladio's theory of architecture and the historical context of his work.

Palladio's focus on residential villas appears quite insignificant to the modern reader accustomed to centuries of architectural practice and discourse focused on residential architecture. Yet when considered in its historical context, Palladio's particular focus on *villas* was unusual, and, as we shall see, quite transformative. Indeed, Palladio was revolutionary not only because he helped reintroduce classical architecture, but specifically because he designed primarily private residences.

However, first we must consider how *The Villa* fits into Palladio's theory. Palladio's treatise is fundamentally focused on producing an ideal architecture. In Palladio's theory, as with his contemporaries, the ideal architecture is represented primarily through the expression of forms. In particular, Palladio puts a particular emphasis on proportions and geometric relationships. Indeed, the majority of the descriptions for Palladio's work in the *Quattro Libri* are explicitly

composed primarily of relationships of forms and proportions. One must ask why this is the case. After all, proportions, though important, are rarely quite so important in modern design practice, yet for Palladio, they seem to have an outsized role. The reason behind this choice is central to Palladio's theory. To Palladio and his contemporaries, beauty in architecture arose directly from geometric harmonies. These harmonies are implicitly and explicitly analogous to harmonic notes in music, as well as to known mathematical relationships (the golden rule, for example) that exist in nature (which, of course, are themselves the source of acoustic harmonics). It is worth noting that at the time, mathematics was understood primarily through geometric relationships, so these concepts would have been obvious to Palladio. It thus follows that beauty in the visual and spatial sense would also arise from geometric harmony. This concept was so obvious and ingrained into the architectural thought of that era that it was used as a philosophical tool in understanding the very nature of the universe. The very movement of the cosmos, the fabric of the universe, was understood in terms of a perfect geometric harmony: the harmony of the spheres, *Musica Universalis*. As such, an ideal architecture, a perfect architecture, should be built on these same universal harmonies. And in Palladio's theory, the beauty of *ancient* architecture came about from their insights into these harmonies, and emulating their geometric expression would thus produce an ideal architecture. Thus, if Palladio wanted his patrons to live an ideal life, he must set that life within the frame of an ideal, ancient, classical architecture.

All this is perhaps not all that remarkable in and of itself. After all, many architects were exploring these ideas at the time. What particularly set Palladio apart was that he chose to apply these principles to residential design. To understand why that is important, it is necessary to contextualize the historical context of Palladio's work. Prior to the renaissance, for over a thousand years, the only significant expressions of architecture as a proper art or science were in religious architecture. Major religious buildings were among the few occasions in which architects could truly explore the theory and expression of ideal forms and theories in architecture. Gothic cathedrals reflected the very nature of the cosmos, and promised to bring christian audiences closer to God through a grand, beautiful and powerful architecture. Yet when it came to private residences, practicality, not beauty or theory, was the ruling architectural force. Even the residences of the nobility were primarily functional designs. Only the work dedicated to God himself was worthy of a higher form of architecture and beauty.

Yet, this started to change in the beginning of the renaissance. With the rise of both a new merchant class and a humanist mode of thinking, the cultural focus in Europe began moving away from the Church as a collective institution and towards exceptional individuals: politicians, merchants, artists and others. And, unsurprisingly, architecture followed suit. This corresponded with a renewed interest in classical antiquity and in its architectural heritage. Thus, when Alberti wrote his own treatise in the mid 15th century, his theory represented this cultural shift in two key ways. For one, the use of classical architecture was a challenge of the long standing tradition in the church to reject any kind of pagan architecture, which could only be reconciled through some unusual but clever additions by Alberti to the canon of classical architecture. Secondly, Alberti introduced his highly refined view of architectural practice into his residential construction. Suddenly, the *palazzi* of the nascent Italian upper class would be at the same level as churches and civic buildings.

However, in his theory, Alberti primarily addresses how to integrate his own theory into the existing Christian architectural practice of the time. Alberti thus worked more so on religious buildings than residential ones. Consequently, in his writing, a large portion relates primarily to temple architecture. Palladio, on the other hand, would take this one step further. Palladio developed a more rigorous, universal and precise architectural theory, and then incorporated it not only in churches, but primarily into houses: urban *palazzi* and country *villas*. This was a profound change in architectural practice. Palladio brought his theory of architecture into the personal lives of his patrons and furthermore integrated a rigorous theory of form and proportion in such residential architecture. With Palladio, private *villas* were not only linked to the grandeur of Greco-Roman antiquity and the Church through their visual language, but were set on the same level of cosmic importance.

In his villa designs, Palladio takes great care to lay down these ideas in every aspect of the design. Disregarding the conventional designs of his time, Palladio instead produced very particular designs that fit his theory of architecture. Spatially, his villas were organized in a uniquely hierarchical sense. The experience of visiting a Palladian Villa: the welcoming portico, with wings extending out to each side, in tandem with steps up to an elevated platform, a

classical gesture that conceptually and physically elevated the house's owner in relation to their domain, and the entry into a grand hall, a final public space, often full of fine artwork, expressing of the prosperity, achievement and cultural affinity of the villa's owner; they all served the singular purpose of elevating the experience of the domestic realm to a grander level, worthy of the humanist spirit of the time. The very design: the symmetry, the proportions, the concealment of utility spaces, the classical language, all pointed to a harmony with the principles of nature and the perfection of man's work in Palladio's mind. Additionally, Palladio understood and carefully constructed the relationships between the building and its surroundings to follow and enhance these ideas. Views and panoramas are carefully orchestrated in order establish a harmony between man, building and nature, and to ensure the villa's owner is both conceptually and physically in command of his domain, able to take it all in at a glance, and fundamentally inseparable from his surroundings.

It is thus that Palladio's villas are a excellent representation, in architectural form, of the moment in time in which Western Europe shifted from a society centered on the Church above all, to one that put particular importance the individual and their achievements, that valued the arts and sciences, and a human-centered, rational view of the universe. In this sense, the villas were the ideal type of building for Palladio, and for the society around him, because they were the home of men, not of God, and in this new historical paradigm, Man, not God, was the ideal to follow.

Taking the villa as his model *type*, Palladio endeavored to create an architecture fit for the new humanist paradigm that it was helping create. The Palladian villa, in every sense, exudes the renaissance humanist ethos. Firstly, it did so by adopting the grand architecture of the ancients. This carried with it not only the visual association with the great works of the past, but also what they represented: a legacy of power, of grandeur, of craft and, of course, of the deeds of past great men. Palladio embraced the connection, wittingly or unwittingly, between the palaces and temples constructed and lived in by the great statesmen, philosophers, scientists and generals of ancient Greece and Rome, and those of the Renaissance. Secondly, Palladio ingrained his own ethos into the architecture, setting it apart from that of the ancients. As already mentioned, his villas were designed with geometric precision to abide by the perfect harmonies of a *Musica Universalis*. Palladio would not abide by simply copying the architecture of old, but would make

sure his designs fit his ideal, both one of geometric perfection, but also that of a model for living in his own time. By crafting every detail of the villa to the utmost precision, he would create a perfect model of architecture, where he, the architect, the artist, would have absolute command over the design, and by proxy, enable their patron to have command over their private domain.

For the next couple of centuries, as the humanist ethos that began in Palladio's place and time prevailed, grew and spread, Palladio's model architecture, which also represented an idealised model of living, continued appealing to many great minds. And as we have seen, that is only the natural result of an architecture in such harmony with the ideas of its time and its creator. But with the understanding that the villa as the ideal *type* of architecture cannot be detached from Palladio's own theory and time, we can not fully grasp the relationship between the *type* and the *theory* without looking at that of another. And when it comes to understanding that connection, none stands out more than that between the Altes Museum and its architect Karl Friedrich Schinkel.

To understand Schinkel's theory of architecture, we must consider his own period of history, marked by increased urbanization and industrialization. The rapid transformation of society through the 18th and 19th centuries produced a general anxiety through the population. Any theory of architecture at this time must surely be concerned, just as everyone was, with both the great possibilities of technological, political and social change and the fears of what ills such changes brought. Schinkel, and his benefactors in the Prussian state, responded to the collective social anxiety by producing a new model of public architecture. Once again, the imagery of classicism would be employed, but unlike with Palladio, its grandeur and powerful associations would not suggest the empowerment of a single individual, but that of society as a whole.

Beyond style, however, the very choice of public architecture in itself was perhaps more profound. Schinkel and the Prussian state saw in architecture the power to alleviate the social ills of their time and build a stronger national image. And no project represents that better than the Altes Museum. The museum would be a whole new category of civic architecture dedicated to the people, by the state, in order to build a national identity, display the products and treasures of art, science and imperialism, and anchor public space. Schinkel's choice to build civic

architecture became an expression of own conviction in the use of architecture as a tool in molding and bettering society.

Before Schinkel designed the Altes Museum, the museum was not a *type* in itself. Just like Palladio had done centuries before, Schinkel had to create a new model *type* fit for his own theory of civic architecture. Thus his design for the Altes Museum expresses, in the most quintessential way, what Schinkel believed made the ideal civic space of the 19th century, and every design decision in the building was deliberately orchestrated to that end. Schinkel's insights of the relationship between the city and the building, derived in many ways from his own rigorous study of the built environment and of art, translated directly into his design of the museum. Schinkel carefully coordinated the material, stylistic and massing choices of the buildings around the Altes Museum in relation to the Museum. The landscape was carefully considered —just as Palladio did in his villas— to enhance the experience of one's movement around and into the museum. In the building itself, the particular design of the portico was dramatically but carefully designed to enhance the relationship of the building to the city, the museum to the public, and the architecture to the culture. A massive colonnade worthy of a grandiose civic architecture, not for nobles or for God, but for the people. A ceremonial staircase of the kind once reserved for palaces now used for the public to transition from city to museum. The portico as a *stoa* and a transition space between the public realm and the museum where people would begin to experience the cultural program embedded in the very architecture of the space. Every gesture was planned as a means to enhance that fundamental relationship between the public and this new cultural institution. That said, still Schinkel went even farther, using his experience in *painting* panoramas, to create new *architectural* panoramas, connecting the building with the city, so that the connection between public and museum was not just conceptually, physically and visually present.

Schinkel's dedication to such a theory of architecture, grounded in the cause of civic and social development, is demonstrated quite well in the Altes Museum's design. The massive portico would open the museum up to the city, and invite in the citizenry. Whereas the portico in the Palladian *villa* would invite guests into a grand space ideally suited for the renaissance man, the portico of the Altes Museum would invite in the people of Berlin to witness the greatest works of

mankind. And just as Palladio employed exceptional architectural craft and detail in order to create the ideal home for the individual, Schinkel did much the same to create an ideal space for the public. In this sense, both architects employed the same powerful architectural language in the service of their own wholly separate but nonetheless linked theories. Thus what really sets them apart stems not so much from different interpretations of style, but that of program.

Palladio and Schinkel are both remarkable in that they seem to demonstrate a deeper understanding of architecture as a powerful force in people's lives. Discussions over style and the particulars of how each architect expressed their chosen visual language belie the deeper architectural insights they were exploring. In the end, it was the architect's craft, their understanding of their own context and their own place in time, the rigorous philosophical framework around which they developed their architectural work, and the ability to understand the threads that unite architecture through different periods in time that define Palladio and Schinkel's remarkable work. It is so, that they were able to create entire new building *types*. These kinds of insights are what made these architects' work both deeply contextual and impressively timeless. Instead, we must understand Palladio and Schinkel not just by their chosen style, but also by their choices of what they built and why they built it. In that sense, it is clear to see why emulations of Palladio or Schinkel so often fall flat. Devoid of the complex insights made by these architects, and detached from the context that created them, they lose any of the qualities that made the originals so effective. Palladio and Schinkel understood that it is not enough to simply take an existing architecture language and reuse it, but rather that it was essential to find what elements could integrate their own architectural theory with a greater historical thread —In their case the language of Classicism—, and develop from that a theory appropriate for their own place in time. It was not enough for Palladio and Schinkel to emulate the ancients, they instead learned to adopt the insights of classical architecture and then mold them in a way that produced an architecture of their own time and place. These insights may very well be as useful to the architects of today just as it was for Palladio and Schinkel.