

TYPOLOGIES IN PHOTOGRAPHY

C. Güven İNCİRLİOĞLU

Received : 17. 5. 1995

Keywords: Photography, Typology, Taxonomy, Classification, Fine Arts.

Certain trends in recent photographic art, their relation to the idea of typology and to architecture motivated the writing of this essay. Physiognomy, as the content of portrait photography and as an analogy for the nature of photographic images of any kind, is relevant to the issue of typology.

The curatorial profession in the world of art aspires for interpreting, grouping and physically exhibiting a number of artworks by one or more artists, mostly around a theme or a relevant problematic, an issue. One such exhibition that I will refer here, which traveled the United states in 1991 and 1992, is called '*Typologies: Nine Contemporary Photographers*', and was curated by Marc Freidus. Among the 'nine', more than half were German who made series of photographs of 'types' (of buildings, interiors, people, streets, landscapes, etc.). Within this group are Bernd and Hilla Becher, a husband and wife team, of great significance for this essay.

Bechers have been photographing industrial plants, water towers, blast furnaces and some vernacular architecture in Germany since late 1950s. Before looking into their work, one must understand the motive behind the curatorial task, that is, the theme of Typology.

Freidus, in his introductory essay for the exhibition catalog, defines typology, in a simplified form, as a collection of members of a common class or type:

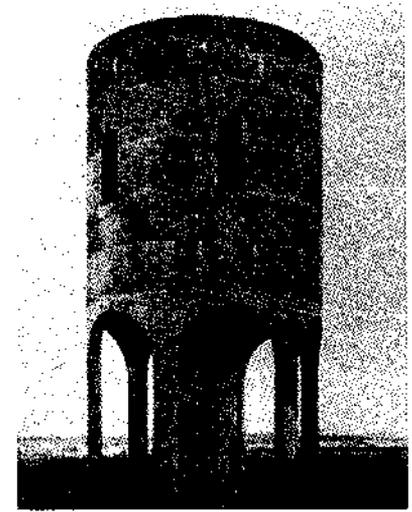
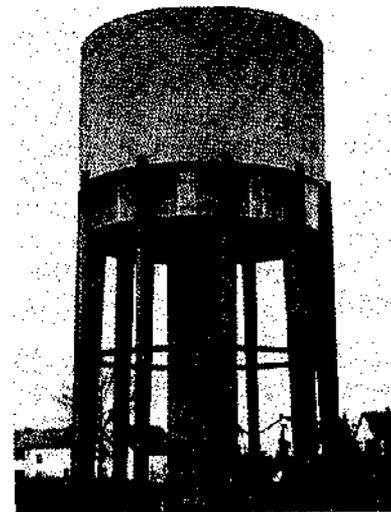
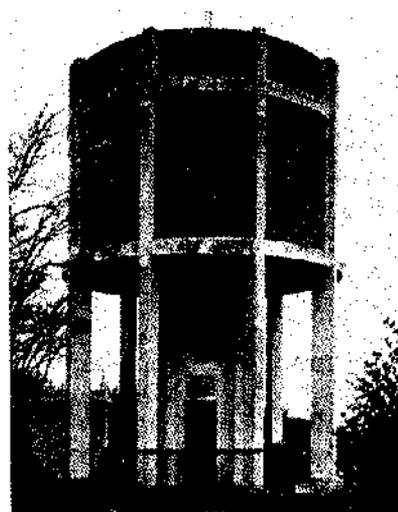
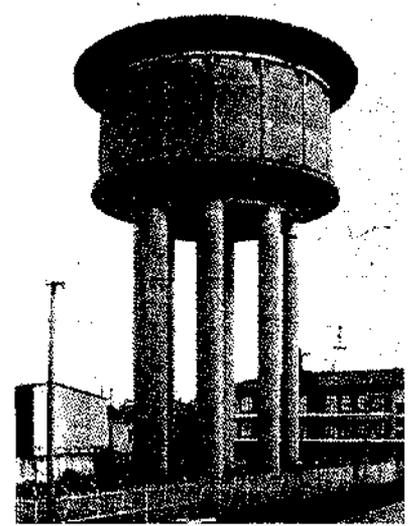
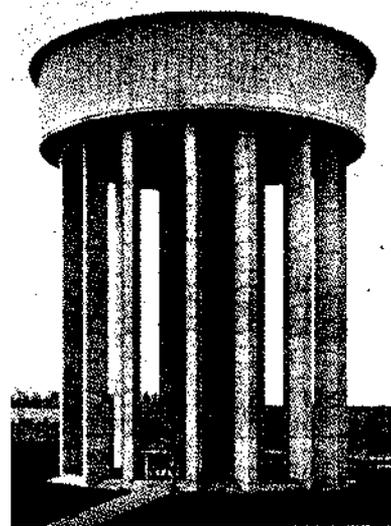
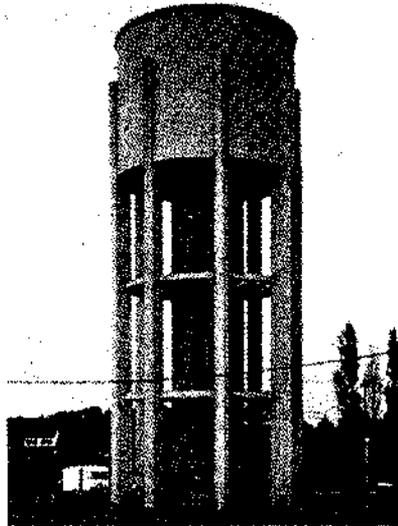
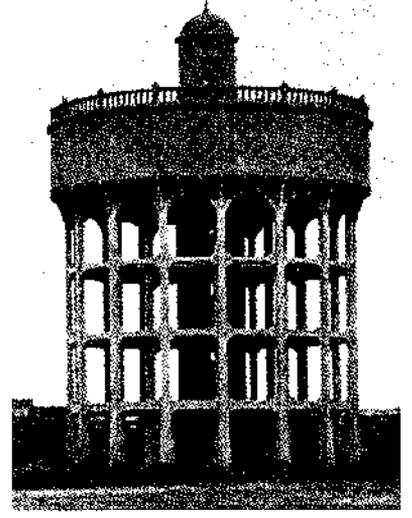
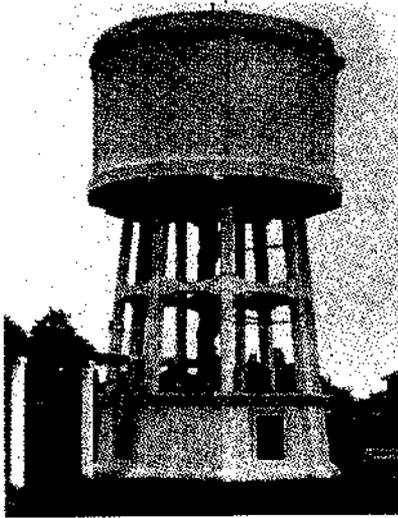


Figure 1. Bernd and Hilla Becher: 'Water Towers', Sonnabend Gallery, New York, 1988.

It could be a grouping of physiognomic types, vernacular buildings, or species of monkeys. A typology is assembled by observation, collection, naming and grouping. These actions allow the members of the class to be compared, usually in search of broader patterns. These patterns may reveal biological constants if the subjects are living things, or social truths if the subjects are human creations (Freidus, 1991, 10).

Indeed, seemingly more suitable for scientific methodology rather than an artistic endeavour, the term typology poses a challenge for the common appreciation of art. In other words, it is a challenge for the view that completely separates the informative means for sciences and arts. However, typology for scientific purposes is apt to be appropriated by artists for the very reasons attributed to the term by the scientific mind. In close inspection, a lot of artists have, for a long time, produced artworks in a series, or (in a loose usage of the term) of a certain type. But the type mentioned here has close associations with the idea of style. Once one can see the style and the norm to be interchanged in artistic production, new possibilities begin to emerge. Since its beginnings in 1830s, photography as a tool for artistic and scientific representations, has been a most appropriate medium for this purpose.

Aside from natural sciences, the use of the concept of typology is frequently employed, not surprisingly, in the field of Archaeology. It may not be coincidental that the works of Bechers are sometimes labeled as Industrial Archaeology. William and Ernest Adams, in their book called *Archaeological Typology and Practical Reality* give a synthetic and scientific definition of the term typology. These definitions are synthesized after a lengthy introduction on type, class, typehood and the like:

A typology is a conceptual system made by partitioning a specified field of entities into a comprehensive set of mutually exclusive types, according to common criteria dictated by the purpose of the typologist. Within any typology, each type is a category created by the typologist, into which he can place discrete entities having specific identifying characteristics, to distinguish them from entities having other characteristics, in a way that is meaningful to the purpose of the typology (Adams and Adams, 1991, 91).

For the purposes of this essay we should refer to Adams' book for a number of times, starting with the idea that there is no qualitative difference between scientific thought and everyday thought (Adams and Adams, 1991,40). Indeed our sensory perception of the world leads the way to categorize or to classify different appearances and phenomena, objects and mental constructs. Here, one should note the differences between classification and typology:

A typology is a particular kind of classification, made for the sorting of entities. A type, unlike other kinds of classes, is also a sorting category... Classifying is, very simply, the act of creating categories; sorting is the act of putting things into them after they have been created. One is a process of definition, the other of attribution (Adams and Adams, 1991, 47).

From here on, we can start drawing parallels within the discursive field of arts, again based on the Adams' theoretical foundations. The first one is the subjectivity in creating of the typologies, as the authors suggest that every type is both discovered and invented:

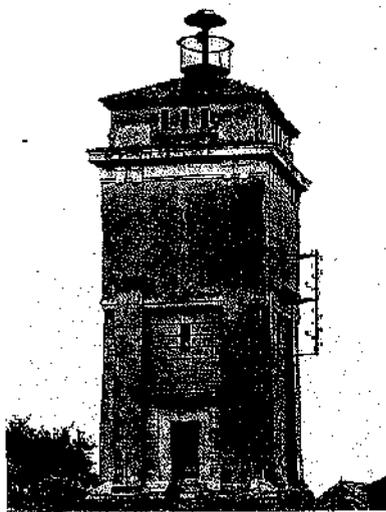


Figure 2. Bernd and Hilla Becher: 'Water Tower', La Combelle, Puy-de-Dome, France, 1981.

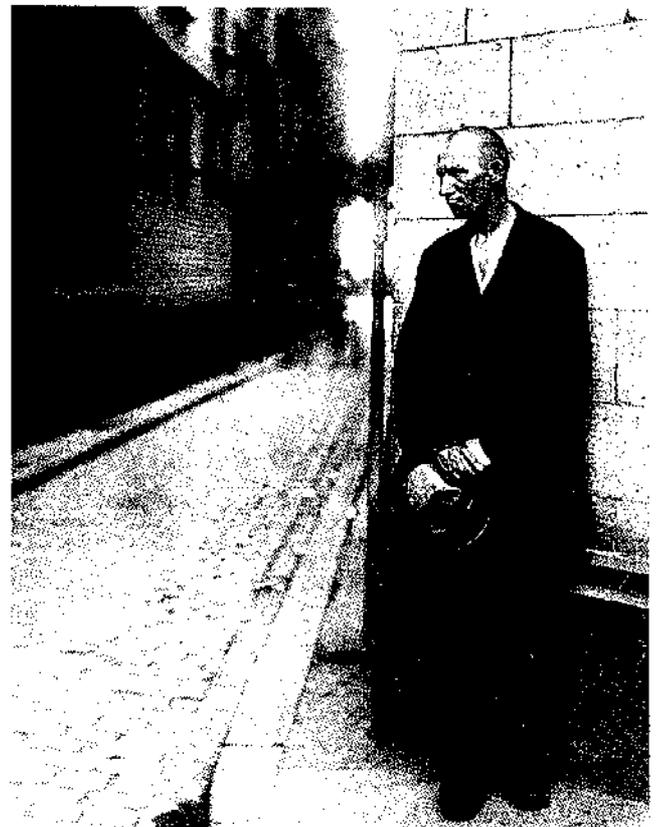


Figure 3. August Sander: 'Young Farmers' Westerwald, ca. 1912.; 'Master Mason' Köln, ca. 1932; 'Rural Bride' ca. 1921-22; 'Unemployed Man', Köln, 1928.



Figure 4. August Sander: "The Architect Hans Poelzig, Berlin, 1928.

The physical members of the type (at least in the case of archaeological types) are discovered, while the mental conception and the description of the type are formulated, or in other words invented, by human minds (Adams and Adams, 1991,33).

A second parallel is to be found in the representational character, as a type involves a combination of material, mental and representational (verbal or pictorial) dimensions (Adams and Adams, 1991,30).

The third, and perhaps the most important parallel is drawn out of the field of semiotics, as typology is considered to be a restricted language and the terms *langue* and *parole* are incorporated into this language system:

We will suggest that formulation of any type involves a continual feedback, or dialectic, between its physical, mental, and communicative aspects... At least in open typologies, types evolve through use and experience like the words in any other language... *Langue* consists of the underlying structure of the typology, its purpose, the variables and attributes that have been selected in accordance with that purpose, the rules of generating types on the basis of those variables and attributes, and the idealized type conceptions that have been generated thereby. *Parole*, in the case of types, actually involves two different kinds of performance. First, as in all languages, there is a communicative performance. Our type concepts have to be put into words before they can be communicated to others, and this process of verbalization itself affects the concepts. We will refer to this as type representation. But in the case of types there is also sorting performance: an ongoing dialogue between ourselves and the artifacts, so to speak. That dialogue may affect our type concepts even more than does the communicative performance (Adams and Adams, 1991,50).

1. August Sander's original list is quoted in Ulrich Keller, who wrote the text of the book edited by G. Sander (1989).

Thus, loosely laying the foundations for the legitimacy of the typological approach as a generator of a discourse, and so an artistic strategy, and without going further into the problematic field of semiology, we should start looking into important works of well known photographers. The first to be mentioned here is August Sander, a German photographer who undertook the seemingly impossible mission to photograph the representatives of every social class, profession, and the like (shortly a portrait atlas) among German people, roughly between the years 1910 and 1935. Perhaps, the impossibility of the task stems from the subject itself (the human beings) which poses the most complex problem for the idea of a typology. From a humanistic point of view, one may even get terrified with allusions to earlier pseudo-anthropological photographs of different races of the world, that mostly helped racists, rather than scientists. The photographs from Sander that survived the Nazi prosecution proves to be the opposite, and their relevance for today's viewers is indispensable as mentioned by great many contemporary historians and art critics. Without any help from social scientists, Sander formulated his typologies in a so called semi-medieval guild system, a mental construct of his own. In his life-long project titled *Citizens of the Twentieth Century*, the portfolios are arranged so as to start with the Farmer (the earthbound man), going into the Metropolis (the high civilization), and coming down to The Last People (The idiots, sick and insane). By no means a hierarchical order of social status, the headings for portfolio groups is listed as below (1):

- The Farmer Germinal Portfolio
- The Craftsman
- The Woman
- The Professions
- The Artist
- The Metropolis
- The Last People

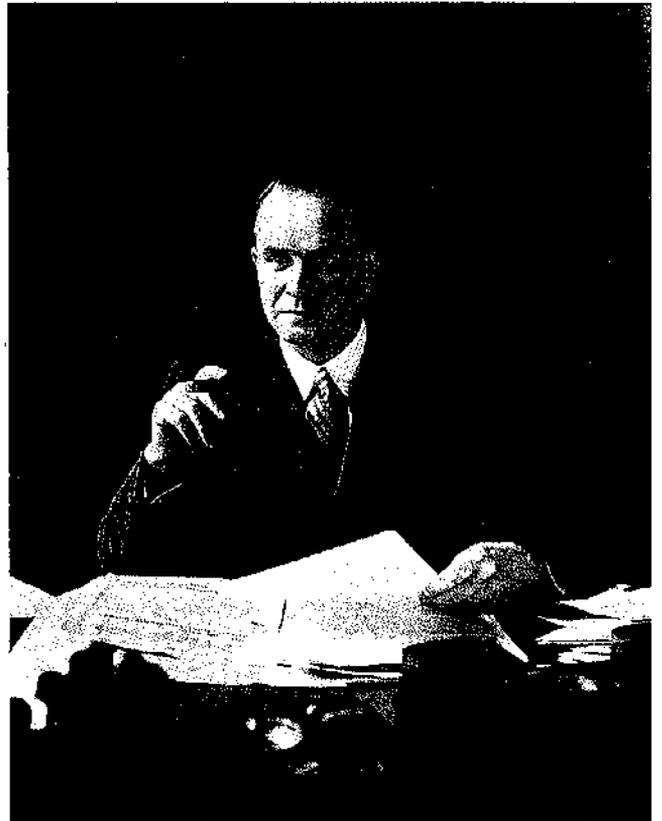
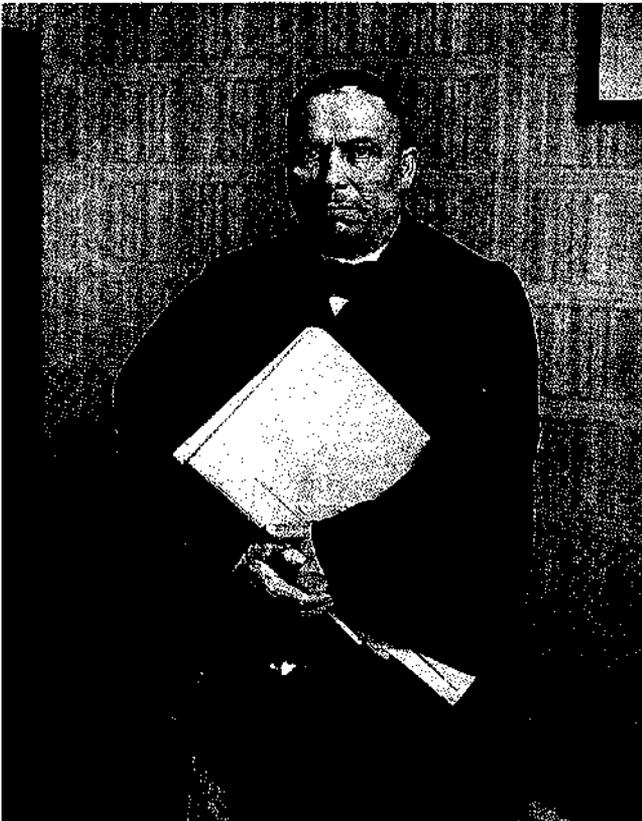


Figure 5. August Sander: 'National Socialist', 1938; 'Secretary at a Radio Station' Köln, 1931; 'Lawyer', 1931; 'Banker' Köln, ca. 1932.

For purposes of further clarification, the portfolios (intended to contain 12 photographs each) under one of these headings can be laid out as an example for the working method of an artist:

- The Woman
- The Husband and the Wife
- The Woman and the Child
- The Family
- The Elegant Woman
- The Woman in Intellectual and Practical Occupations
- The Woman as Domestic
- The Woman as National Socialist

According to Keller (G. Sander, 1986, 36) the last two are later additions to August Sander's original 1924 handwritten list. All in all, the complete portfolios were to contain 540 photographs, but Sander's work was cut short by National Socialists, who confiscated much of his work in mid 1930s.

Within the artistic *zeitgeist* of Germany between 1910 and 1930 that favored experimentation, expression and political commitment, it may seem odd that August Sander pursued quietly his long term ambitions that were scientifically laid out and objectively executed. However, the later German photographers who work in a similar vein prove that this is not a coincidence. Without relying on the stereotype of the industrious German, one may perhaps claim that there is something about the land (*heimat*) that grounds its people on certain sense of objectivity. At the same time, whether Sander was against the grain of his times is explained by Ulrich Keller:

In Sander's effort to understand people as products of their respective environments and occupations there is a clear challenge to the middle-class ideal of the autonomous personality, which Sander himself had propagated throughout his life. As Sander declared often enough, he wished to represent the type. However, he sacrificed the autonomy of the individual only in favor of a larger social framework, namely a half-medieval guild structure that held the romantic promise of support, security, and personal fulfillment for everyone. In this, of course, he strayed far from the realities of the Weimar Republic. Where Sander imagined true order, others saw contradiction and disorder; history has proved them correct... (Keller, 1986) (2).

2. This quotation is from Keller, as stated in G. Sander's edited book of 1989.

The other examples to be mentioned in this essay are of Bernd and Hilla Becher, as briefly described earlier. The concept of physiognomy (the physical appearance) should be handled within the realm of portraiture, types and the nature of photographic images. Without doubt, the most significant use of photographic process since the beginning has been in portrait photography, that is, the cult of personality as observed on the mute surfaces of photographs. Not only the image of a person in a photograph is the center of attention, but also the enormity of meanings (half illusory) attributed to the physiognomic details, to the pose, the clothing and especially the hands make the portrait a prototype for reading into all photographic images, even the most abstract ones.

As banal metaphors of everyday use, one can easily speak of say, 'a portrait of a building' or the 'physiognomy of a landscape', in photographic terms, expecting as though the very essence of the object will reveal itself within the sharp details of photographic image, just like the person's character supposedly do in a good portrait. But further away from these highly polemical metaphors, and specifically concerning this essay is the connection one can suggest between the concept of typology and that of physiognomy as the physical look of the thing, at least

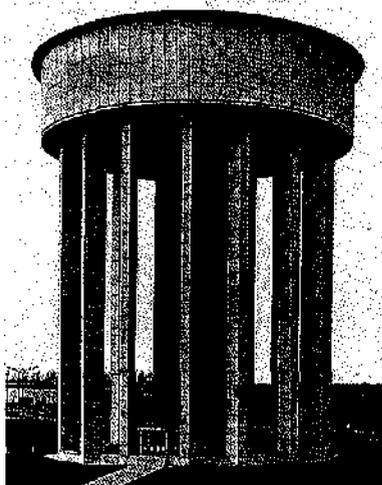


Figure 6. Bernd and Hilla Becher: 'Water Tower', Kwaadmechelen, Belgium, 1971.

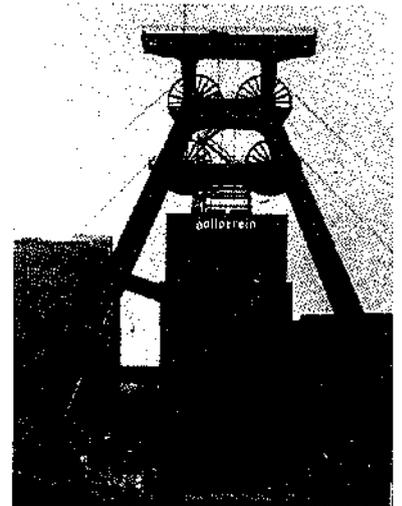
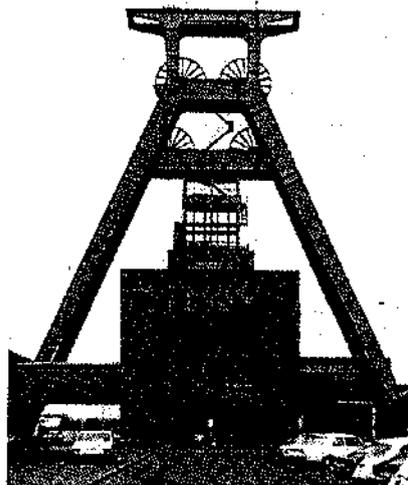
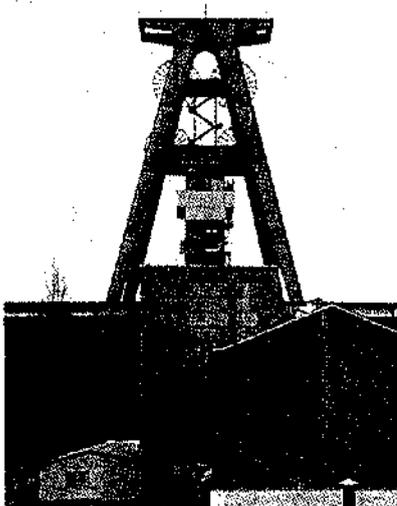
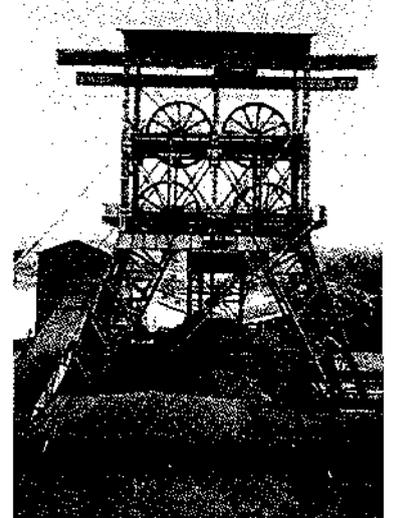
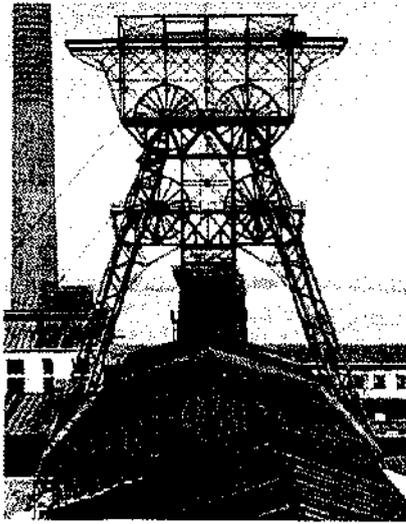


Figure 7. Bernd and Hilla Becher: 'Winding Towers', Daniel Weinberg Gallery, Santa Monica, 1983.

since Darwin. After all, what else do we have to understand about the world around us? This naively positivistic viewpoint, for all the different reasons, has been observed in Becher's work by many critics in what was to be 'the post-modern condition'. Put in other words, and in the form of a question; what happens when the artist takes his/her subjectivity out of the artwork, as the true scientist does, and abandons the artistic style in favor of a norm or a type? What if the artist replaces the aesthetic judgment with the control of variables that determine the look of an image, just as in a scientific experiment? For one thing, the artwork that comes out is not about scientific truth. In any case, this is what Bechers have been doing in the past several decades. In their most comprehensive typology of Water Towers, the photographs were all made from the same angle of view, at a certain time of the day, under an overcast sky that supplies the most uniform lighting, and the image of the subject occupied a certain size on the photographic paper which allows comparison among the members of the type. Regardless of the intentions of the artists, the unexpressiveness in their work has been contextualized by artistic authorities within Minimalism and Conceptual Art of recent times, mostly another curatorial matter.

The enormous task of adequately relating these matters to the field of architecture is beyond the scope of this essay. However, a few remarks can be made in the light of Bechers' work and furthermore, on the methodology of architectural profession itself. When the photographic image is handled as a means of architectural representation, one can simply think of Bechers' approach to be apt for recording typologies in built environment. But it should be noted that this approach, leaning towards the archaeological, is perhaps a concern for architectural historian and may have practical implications for the architectural publications and presentations. Moreover, at the turn of the millennium and within the pluralistic diversity of architectural forms, one can hardly imagine a photographic archive of this sort, let alone the impossibility of classifying this diversity. No wonder that Bechers called their first series of water towers 'Anonymous Sculpture', because only the anonymous-industrial or vernacular architecture seems to have the coherent physiognomy (here, form truly follows function) to be the members of a singular type.

This brings us to the implementations of the concept of typology on the architectural production. Without getting much involved in the extensive studies on architectural typology since J. N. L. Durand, one can note that typologies as a strategy for architectural design, for the production of space, is expected to have much broader practicality than as an artistic means (Villari, 1990).

Within the given physical realities of the third world, and especially the case of Türkiye, one would say that this concept is especially suitable for producing the continuously needed residential buildings, given that the social, cultural and financial parameters to determine at least one side of the typology of housing are laid out clearly (a possibility?). But then, whether the 'machines to live in' within the short history of modernist utopia in the west proved to be tragic still remains to be evaluated.

The last point to mention about the concept of typology in photographic art is about the display of the series of photographs. On the one hand, this aspect can be related to the subject of contextualization, in the museum, gallery space, or in a book format. It is a contextualization induced by the channels of distribution. Thus, when Bechers' work is shown in a museum of applied arts, the meanings it acquires are expected to be somewhat different than when it is shown among other works of conceptual artworks. But then, this is not surprising for us, the cultivated viewer, as we are used to the fact that media especially works on the



Figure 8. August Sander: 'The Painter Gottfried Brockmann' Köln, 1924.

contextualization of each and every photographic image produced, except for the very private family snapshots.

On the other hand, and of more importance for us, is the way that the series are displayed on the wall, in groups or in a book format; in other words, the mode of presentation chosen by the artist. As a significant strategy for the typologist, Sander for example, intended his photographs to be reproduced in a book format, within the portfolios mentioned above. Bechers, on the other hand, grouped their series on the wall either in a grid format (*i.e.* three high and three wide), or in a linear fashion. Still others, Edward Ruscha for example, chose to display his work, *Every Building on Sunset Strip* (1969), exactly in the same linear structure as they appear in reality. If sorting is a function of typologies one step ahead of classification, these choices allow us, the viewer, to make a comparative observation among the members of a type, analyzing their similarities, and also, their differences. The representations of a type work to ensure accuracy in relative rather than absolute terms (Adams and Adams, 1991, 56).

As a mental construct, we have mentioned that the typological approach can offer the possibilities to construct a discourse for the artist, just as it does for, lets say, a social scientist. In the case of photography, this has been frequently observed as a resistance against disappearance, or loss. Put in other words, it is the will to classify, record and preserve the expendable. In Sander's work, this was the social structure of Germany on the verge of death and destruction, and in Bechers' the last remnants of an industrial era, once praised and now long obsolete in the age of information. Today, in an era of rapid change and especially in a mood of incurable nostalgia (another media hype), one would take the easy way to ascribe the function on photographic image. But much more important than this utilitarian view, the typologies in photography assume a critical purpose in this mediatic age.

To stress the necessity and urgency of this piece of writing, and to avoid a conclusion in a polemical manner, or to construct the whole argument against a rather abstract entity, or to place art as opposed to media, it is necessary to recall the idea of type in relation to advertising media and its nemesis, the political propaganda. When one thinks that both propaganda and advertising employs photographic images for (and perhaps only for) the creation of stereotypes, the issue becomes clearer. Whether in the representation of *Aryan Race*, *The Civilized World*, *The Typical Orient* or *Black Africa*, or, by the same token, the ideal male or female body, the home beautiful, the rich, the poor and the society in general, both apparatus work on the idea of 'sameness'. As an antithesis, the photographic typologies, inversely show us the differences among the members of a type (and not a stereotype) much more than their similarities. Observed side by side, neither two of Sander's *Craftsman* are same (or even similar), nor any of Bechers' anonymous buildings. After all, if a truth is to be revealed through a real artwork, in this case, it is to be found among the nuances (not the contrasts) of the physical appearances, if it is not all black and white.

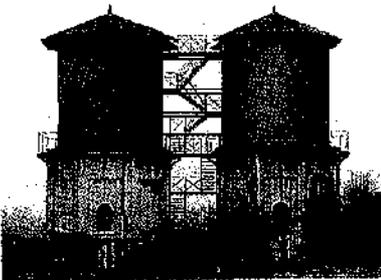


Figure 9. Bernd and Hilla Becher: 'Water Tower' Hagen-Vorhalle, Germany, 1963.

FOTOĞRAFTA TİPOLOJİLER

ÖZET

Alındı : 17. 5. 1995
 Anahtar Sözcükler: Fotoğraf, Tipoloji, Taksonomi, Sınıflama, Güzel Sanatlar.

Genellikle bilimsel amaçlar için oluşturulduğu varsayılan 'tipoloji', ortak bir 'sınıf' veya 'tip'e ait olan elemanların gözlemlenmesi, toplanması, isimlendirilmesi ve bir araya getirilmesi ile ortaya çıkar. Arkeoloji ise, bir kavramsal sistem olarak tipolojik yaklaşımın sıkça kullanıldığı bir alandır. Doğa bilimlerinden bazı bakımlardan farklı bir şekilde, arkeolojik tiplerin hem keşfedilebilir, hem de akıl yoluyla icat edilebilir olması, tipoloji kavramının sanatlarda ve özellikle de fotoğrafik görüntü üretilmesinde bir yöntem oluşturabileceğini gündeme getirir. Çünkü bu durumda, basit bir sınıflandırmadan farklı olan tipoloji, bir söylem oluşturmak için kullanılabilir.

Fotoğrafın sanatsal açımları içinde, başını Almanların çektiği bir grup da bir kısım 'tip'ler belirleyip, geniş bir zaman aralığında bu tiplerin üyelerini mümkün olduğu kadar sistematik ve nesnel bir biçimde fotoğraflamışlardır. Bunlar arasında, yüzyıl başında Almanya'da yaşayan her toplumsal sınıfı ve mesleği temsil eden bireyleri görüntüleyip bir 'portre atlası' oluşturan August Sander'i bir öncü olarak görmek gerekir. Bernd ve Hilla Becher ise, 1950'lerden günümüze kadar getirdikleri tipolojik serilerde Avrupa ve Kuzey Amerika'daki su kulelerini ve diğer endüstriyel mimarlık tipolojilerinin örneklerini sergilemekte ve yayınlamaktadırlar.

Sanata da ait bir strateji olabilen tipolojilerin önemini belirlemek için şunları sıralamak gerekir: Birincisi, böyle bir yöntem fotoğraf görüntülerine ilişkin olarak 'biçim' problemine bir çözüm önerir. Bu durumda da sanatçının fotoğraf görüntüsünü belirleyen ışık, çerçeveleme ve kamera açısı gibi seçenekleri kişisel tercihler yerine normlara bağlaması gerekir ki, tipolojiyi oluşturan fotoğraflar yan yana geldiğinde karşılaştırmalı olarak izlenebilsin. Böyle bir yaklaşım, bu türden işlerin yakın geçmişte Minimalist ve Kavramsal Sanat gibi kişisel bir ifadeden uzaklaşan sanat türleriyle beraber ele alınmasını gerektirmiştir.

İkincisi ve daha önemlisi ise, özellikle fotoğraflar söz konusu olduğunda, tipolojilerin daha önce bilimlere ait olduğu varsayılan bir bilme biçimini sanatın içine taşımış olmasıdır. Tipolojik fotoğraflardaki sunum, her zaman için benzer olduğu düşünülen nesnelere (veya fizyonomilerin) aralarındaki benzerlikleri abartıp bir 'ideal tip' üretmek yerine, benzerlikleri ortaya çıkarıp izleyicinin fiziksel çevre ile olan etkileşimini biraz daha güçlendirir. İçinden hızla geçmekte olduğumuz medyatik bir imaj döneminde ise bunun önemi açıktır.

REFERENCES

- ADAMS, W. Y., ADAMS, E. W. (1991) *Archaeological Typology and Practical Reality*, Cambridge University Press, Cambridge.
- FREIDUS, M. (1991) *Typologies in Typologies: Nine Contemporary Photographers*, Newport Harbor Art Museum Publication, Newport Harbor, California.
- SANDER, G. ed. (1989) *August Sander: Citizens of Twentieth Century*, text by Ulrich Keller, MIT Press, Cambridge, MA.
- VILLARI, S. (1990) *Durand, J. N. L.: Art and Science of Architecture*, Rizzoli International Publications, New York.