

Dyads of an operating thought: modification & continuity | project & morphology

Nicola Scardigno

Department of Science of Civil Engineering and Architecture, Politechnic of Bari, Via
Orabona 4, 70100, Bari, Italy

nicola.scardigno@poliba.it

Keywords: *modification, structure, order, project, morphology.*

Abstract

"The built environment which surrounds us is, we believe, the physical way of being of its history, the way in which it accumulates itself, according to different thicknesses and meanings, to form the specificity of the site not only for what that environment perceptually appears, but for what it is structurally. The place is built from the traces of its own history" (Gregotti V., 1986).

The Milanese architect's definition seems to allude – implicitly – to conceptual dyads concerning the architecture discipline: *modification-continuity* and *project-morphology*. Reflecting on each dyads' term, the essays intends to "conceptualize" the theme of the project bringing it back to an *eidetic* procedure capable of determining a "modification" – conceived in the manner of a "conscious" act of being part of a pre-existing whole – of the *things* state: both through the recognition of *structural rules* and the identification of *settlement principles* coherent with the *vocation* of the "environment" – or the settlement – hosting the project itself. The theoretical speculation will find concrete relapse in two projectual experiences facing with current issues of urban project: the fragmentation of urban periphery and the *re-signification* of a disused area inside urban fabric.

"The built environment which surrounds us is, we believe, the physical way of being of its history, the way in which it accumulates itself, according to different thicknesses and meanings, to form the specificity of the site not only for what that environment perceptually appears, but for what it is structurally. The place is built from the traces of its own history" (Gregotti V., 1986).

Such Milanese architect's consideration invites us to reflect on the architectural discipline through a dual *conceptual dyad* – that is, dyads of terms related to a form of thought operating in the furrow of essential conditions: *modification-continuity* and *project-morphology*. Modification is a way through which we define the quality of an action that by acting in a pre-existing condition measures itself with the world of finished things. Particularly – in the case of an architectural, urban or territorial organism – with that *morphological-material* condition from which we deduce the *grammatical structure* of architecture and, whose *becoming*, derives from the relationship between two notions which, of the *morphé*, explain the condition of *opposition-complementarity* which takes place to its inside – in the *longue durée* –, and therefore in relation to time. These notions are: modification – precisely –, corresponding to the *other becoming*, and continuity, unfolding of the other becoming. In short, a pair of terms that although – from a logical point of view – might appear contrasting to each other, in reality it seems they acting on a common fund, containing to each other in a latent form.

In fact let's think how it is the modification to ensure the *duration*: that is, the *continuity* which, through a *differentiating*, allows to the process not to be blocked. In other words, what survives, through the process itself, is no longer the "same", but that *becoming other*. Not therefore the inconsistent sign of what, being ephemeral, is deficient of reality; but rather what which, considering the *resistance* attitude of reality, of this latter retains its *consistency*.

It is not by chance Vittorio Gregotti, by associating the notion of modification to that of "belonging", alludes to the construction of a real "language of modification" i.e. to a place's "language of knowledge". This aspect refers to an *operativity* of the dyad modification-continuity to feed to the will to sediment the creative process on a structured context and substantially qualified by a threefold character: *organicity*, *transformation* and *recognisability*. Let's try to dwell on each of these terms that qualify a structure. About the character of organicity we intend to refer to the definition provided by Severino – to which, often, Matteo Ieva refers to within his teaching at the Polytechnic of Bari: "The difference between an organism and a simple aggregate of elements (for example a "heap") consists in the coessentiality of the organism's parts and in the mutual inessentiality of parts of the simple aggregate. If one is removed from a heap of stones, this, separated from the heap, remains what it was before – and the same can be said of the stones that continue to form a heap. If, on the other hand, a part is separated from the other parts of an organism (for example, a limb is cut from a living organism), only in the form of words the separate part is still what it was before, and this separation determines an alteration in all the other parts. (Aristotle observed that an arm detached from the body is only a "painted" arm, that is, it no longer performs the functions for which it is an arm; and the separation of the arm causes a physiological alteration of the whole living organism, which can also succumb)" (Severino E., 2011).

Beyond a clear distinction between the concept of organism and that of aggregate, this definition, especially by referring to Aristotle, invites us to conceive *organicity* as a character that alludes to a condition that is anything but static and figurative ended in itself. In fact, it is a concept that attributes "meaning" to architecture itself as an inexorable expression of a *transformative principle* underlying it. Muratori for example, by considering the organism as a "moral fact", says that "architecture cannot be made without a sense of the organism" (Muratori S., 1985). He, in particular, by associating the *organism structure* to a category that determines the process – both in its natural and human-civil aspects – he essentially clarifies the presuppositions at the basis of its double reading: spatial-distributive and temporal-evolutionary. In other words: he defines the premise at the basis of a *typological reading*, and thus structural, from which essential aspects rela-

ting to the aggregative-evolutionary processes it is possible to derive.

About the concept of transformation, it represents the *conditio sine qua non* a structuring activity – and therefore a structure – through its composition laws, it exists. In fact, if the laws of *composition* are by nature structuring, such a constant duality or, to be more precise, bipolarity of property, which consists in being, always and simultaneously, *structure* and *structuring*, explains the success of the transformation concept itself which is intelligible in the *misure* in which it is put into practice. Therefore, the quality of a structure of be *transformable* introduces a third character – of the structure itself: that of *recognizability*, and in particular the recognition of an order conceived as the *form's constitution law* – with the “form” intended as as the *visible* manifestation of an order –, precisely structured. So a concept, that of order, absolutely significant for the architecture and without which we could not talk about *form* as a way of being of order, but rather only of cumuls of elements – of “heaps” of things, by referring to Severino.

Now, in architecture, the concept of order refers to a dimension that we could define, at the same time, *synthetic-scalar* and *projective* of architectural “facts”. In fact, we recognize a first type of *internal order*, that is inherent to the architecture and therefore oriented to identify the *law of selection* and *organization* of the elements that make up the architectural organism. A second type of *relational order* between architecture and the context (urban or territorial) attributable to a *narrative arrangement* not coinciding with the mere description of the facts but rather with the narration of a critical-transformative condition of reality through the search for an operational dialectic between contingencies and latencies inherent to the natural and anthropic context within which we act. And a third type of order corresponding, instead, to that condition contained, *in power*, in the two previous types of orders and with respect to which we would be able to *re-signify* the *architectural thing*.

The latter type of order is defined by Vittorio Gregotti as the “other order”. That is, a *new order*, generated by a *creative-projectual act* through which the Gadamerian experience of *truth* is revealed by means the modification of the things *status*. It is essentially the *project order*; that is, the order determined by the *creative act* generated by the complicated dialectic between two categories of factors: those relating to what Agamben defines as the “impersonal sphere”, the “power of” (contained in two types of previously mentioned order, that is: the internal order of architecture and the relational order between architecture and context), which bypasses and precede the individual subject; and the intentional ones, the “power of not” (corresponding to the other order, precisely to the project), resistant to the previous ones and with which man – the designer – measures himself. In other words, we could say that creation derives from the relationship between that “genius”, the *true creative force* that pushes towards the *opera* and its expression, and the “resistant” character – the critical instance – of the one who tries to curb such a force-impulse in order to mark it with his own imprint (Agamben G., 2017).

The fact of substantially associate the creation act to a “resistant” condition corresponds to identifying the project's idea connected to the own intentionality, in a dialectic between *autonomy* and *heteronomy* in the relationship with what is inherited. This is the reason leads Vittorio Gregotti to brings back the creative act to aspects that are fundamental in order to make concrete and, in some ways tangible, that acting with resistance – for the purpose of recognizing itself as *singular* – of the designer. These aspects concern: “the recognition of father, brothers, children values, or of the story value on which it is necessary to open a dialogue, for each project, alternative to the present”; and “the constitution of a critical distance from the things state, as condition for constructing a truth's fragment of present” (Augè M., Gregotti V., 2016). In other words, it is like the *thought-project*, while setting itself on a *physical-metaphysical* substrate, was able to give to the *opera* that autonomy and that image of *truth* – according to Guattari corresponding to the “ethical-aesthetic autonomization” regime as only “criterion of truth imposed to the architect” (Guattari F., 2013) – which, in the present, makes it comparable to a *monad*, independent and equidistant from the world in which it represents itself – the place of architecture (the architectural organism, the city, the territory) – as much as by the maker, the architect, the designer. That is, by the one

who plays the role of *inter-press* and who, therefore, according to the Severinian meaning of *interpretation*, acts “in the middle of two”: “the visible form of the document or of the historical rest and the ‘historical meaning’ that is attributed to the visible form”. For example, the philosopher says by referring to the architecture of ancient world: “... the interpretation of an ancient Greek temple is placed between the remains of the temple and the representation of the characters of a certain Greek temple in a certain historical period, and states that the visible forms in a certain situation (stones, columns, steps) are the remains of the Greek temple which has those characteristics. The interpretation unifies these visible forms with their historical meaning. And it combines two different dimensions, because other are the ruins of an ancient temple, other is the temple (or the representation of the temple) of which, in the interpretation, only the ruins are left. The interpretation activates the two dimensions, in the sense that it transforms them into two expectations, it satisfies these expectations: the stones are transformed into the remains of a temple, waiting to be told of what temple they are the remains of; knowledge of ancient Greek architecture is oriented towards certain visible forms and put on hold to become properties of these forms. The interpretation takes place when these two expectations are fulfilled ...” (Severino E., 1989).

The cognitive tool through which to interpret the constructed matter is the *morphology*. The designer, by studying it, is able to bring the visible back to a more extensive meaning – i.e. the sensitive form to a process –, activating that level of “projectual reading” – of which Giuseppe Strappa talks about – acting on a dimensional scale and complexity of relationships higher than the single building element and of its form as an object. Through the morphological investigation it is possible to provide to the experience of the project the opportunity to recognize and enhance the *tensional relationship* internal at the first of the two dyads: *modification-continuity*. In fact, by promoting knowledge and interpretation of the constitutive signs, this tool – whether it corresponds to an architectural organism or to an urban-territorial fabric made of paths, aggregates, building types – can become a constitutive principle of the design act, because aimed to identify: both the relationship between “signifier” and “meaning” and therefore to substantiate, by attributing to it a concrete form, the otherwise indistinct and chaotic aspects of a pure vision; and to recognize – simultaneously – in the totality and individuality of the *ethical-operational* programmatic processes, the degree of adequacy of a *creative-transformative* act. From here we can see how the second project-morphology dyad basis on the idea that the design act, as a critical experience of “in becoming formal intentionality”, must dialogue with the “becoming”, that is, with what Aristotle considers as “permanent” and which has the value of “substratum”: the structure of the existing.

Now, the brief theoretical speculation on conceptual dyads is reflected in two projectual experiences that have faced current issues of urban planning. Particularly: with the theme of the periphery fragmentation of the contemporary city, the project for the transformation of the Milan Expo area - by G. Strappa (team leader), P. Carlotti, I. Taci, C. Tartaglia, D. Nencini, V. Buongiorno, G. Ciotoli, M. Falsetti, I. Del Monaco, V. Mattei, P. Posocco, M. Raitano, P. Marziano, G. Valeri; and with the theme of the re-signification of a disused area internal to the city (project for International Competition concerning Tallin city), by M. Ieva (team leader), N. Scardigno, A. Caporale, A. Camporeale, F.D. De Rosa, G. Volpe.

About the project for Milan periphery, the analysis of the forming phases of the territory has allowed to return a “new order” to the area by transforming and re-organizing the routes intersections into “knotting”: a term which indicated a “consolidation process” between routes and urban fabric and which corresponds to an accentuated building density. Particularly the project consists of a “restructuring route” which, by declaring itself extraneous to the geometry of the nearby centuriations, is configured as a new matrix of a “vertical fabric” which connects two new poles: Baranzate and Pero. It is clear – says the project team leader – that “the intention of the proposal to metabolize the modern tradition of public building, often operating as abstraction (Le Corbusier, Mayekawa, Reidy, Fiorentino), within a framework of “territorial realism”, but also that of resuming the utopian lesson of the “great extension”, using it in the renewed sense of tool

for reading and planning interpretation of the processual discontinuities occurring in the territory" (Strappa G., 2016).

In the competition project concerning the city of Tallinn, the reading of urban fabric's characters has allowed to identify the role of "linear nodality" of the abandoned area between the districts of *Pelgulinn* and *Kalamaja*. Therefore a "nodality" internal to the urban fabric to which the project has attributed the function of a multifunctional urban park. This took place by providing for a new "structuring" of the area through the intersection of existing routes and the subsequent identification of new "nodal places" of the city corresponding to a hierarchical system of "urban courtyards" defined by building volumes differently hierarchized – in height – according to the degree of specialization and position within the park. Among the urban courtyards, the "large square": the center of gravity of the entire park as well as the place where turn out to be "knotted": routes deriving from closed neighborhoods and a dense "built" characterized by an architectural language clearly projected towards what Matteo Levi defines a new "international rationalism".



Table 1. Project of Milan's Expo area. Collage of the first postunitarian cadastral map showing the roman *centuriatio* alignments (to left); formative phases of the territorial structure (to right). Design team: G. Strappa (team leader), P. Carloti, I. Taci, C. Tartaglia, D Nencini, V. Buongiorno, G. Ciotoli, M. Falsetti, I. Del Monaco, V. Mattei, P. Posocco, M. Raitano, P. Marziano, G. Valeri.

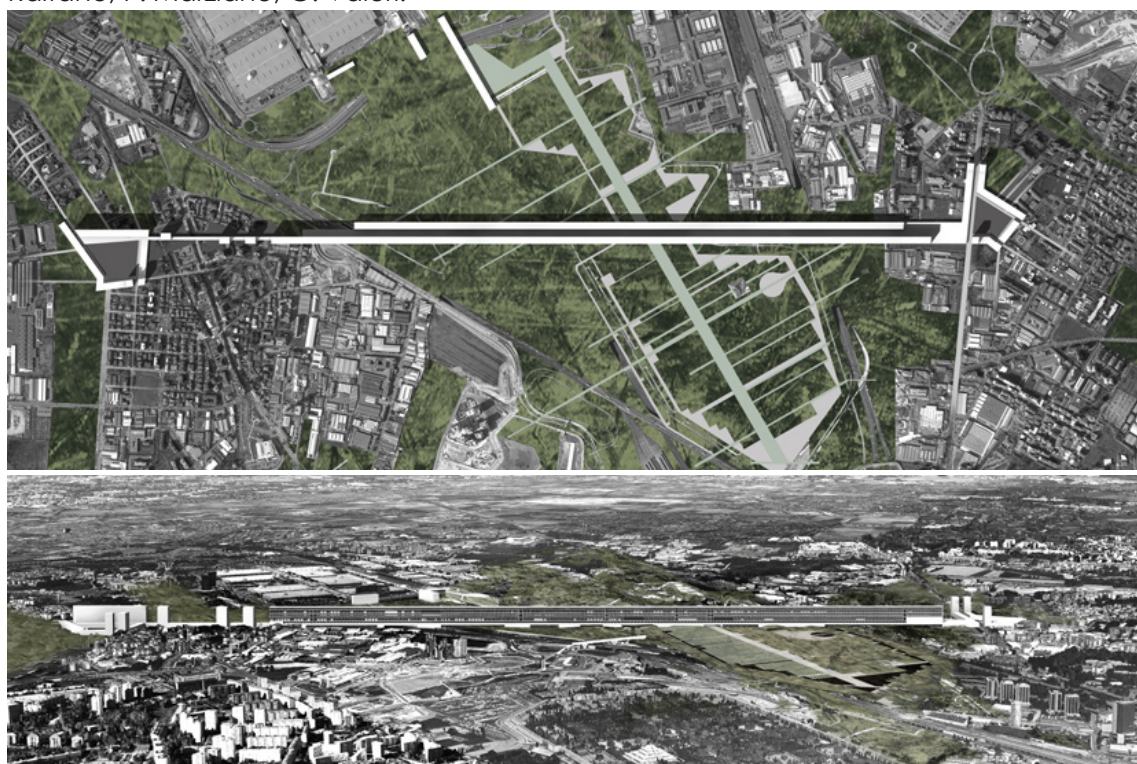


Table 2-3. Project of Milan's Expo area. Masterplan and territorial section showing the "new matrix" of a vertical fabric connecting Baranzate e Pero poles.

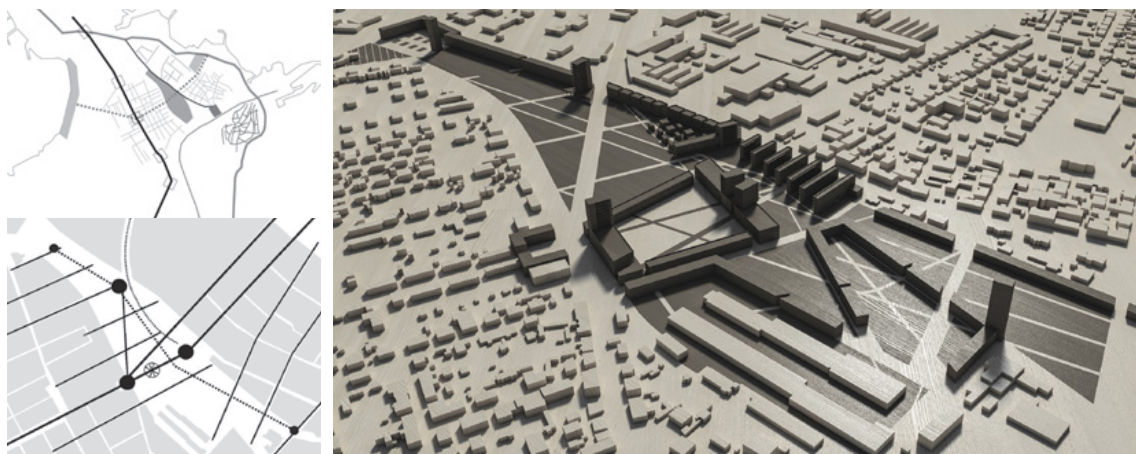


Table 4. Project for international competition: "New habitats, new beauties. Speculation for Tallin 2019". (to left) Reading of Tallin's paths hierarchies and ideogram indicating new area's structuring and project's nodality. (to right) project model. Project team: M. Ieva (team leader), N. Scardigno, A. Caporale, A. Camporeale, F.D. De Rosa, G. Volpe.

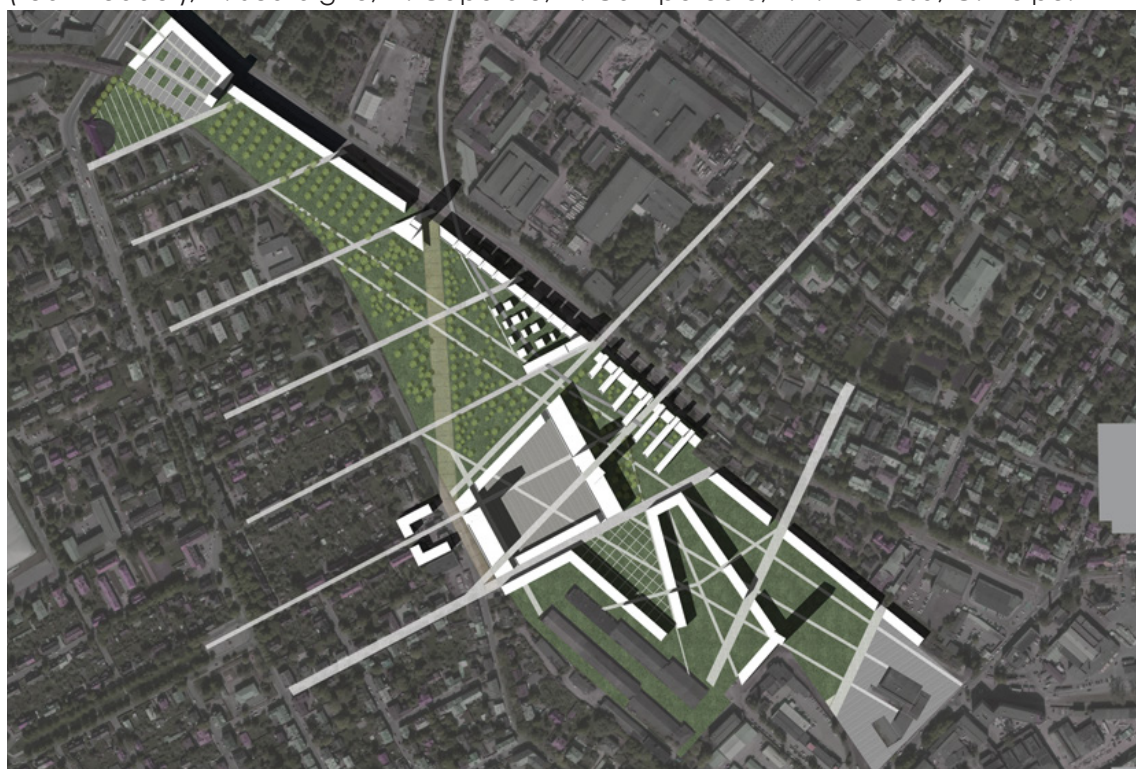


Table 5. Project for international competition: "New habitats, new beauties. Speculation for Tallin 2019". Masterplan of the multifunctional park.



Table 6. Project for international competition: "New habitats, new beauties. Speculation for Tallin 2019". Examples of special building (to left) and residential buildings (to right).

References

- Agamben, G. (2017) Creazione e anarchia. L'opera nell'età della religione capitalista, 37-42. Vicenza.
- Augè, M., Gregotti V. (2016) Creatività e trasformazione, 51. Milano.
- Gregotti, V. (1986) Questioni di architettura, 19. Torino.
- Ieva, M. (2020) 'Il senso di storicità della città-organismo', in: Architettura contemporanea e contesto, 15, (volume degli Atti del Convegno di Camerino, in fase di pubblicazione).
- Muratori, S. (a cura di Guido Marinucci) (1985) Una lezione di seminario. Per la preparazione alla missione di architetti e per la formazione di docenti in una scuola di architettura, 391. Reggio Calabria.
- Guattari, F. (2013) Architettura della sparizione, 44. Milano-Udine.
- Severino, E. (2011) 'Storia della filosofia e organismo', in La filosofia dai greci al nostro tempo. La filosofia moderna, BUR Saggi Rizzoli, Milano 2011.
- Severino, E. (1989) La filosofia futura, 193-195. Milano.
- Strappa, G. (2016) 'Nodi Urbani. Contributi al dibattito sul dopo Expo di Milano' (Urban knots. Contribution to the post Expo 2015 debate), in Paesaggio Urbano, 3, 13-17.