C. CRISIS, INDIVIDUAL, ORGANISM AND TYPE. THE OPEN CHALLENGES OF URBAN REGENERATION

Nicola Marzot

Technische Universiteit Delft (TU Delft), Netherlands
studioperforma.marzot@gmail.com

One of the founding principles of the so-called ‘processual typology’ is the identification between ‘reading’ and ‘project’. As noted by Saverio Muratori in one of his seminal texts, perceived as a forerunner of the urban studies to come, this connection arises from the inherent intentionality of all human behavior, specifically, from its inescapable projectual bearing. The aforementioned identification should therefore be understood as the subordination of ‘reading’ (which is always intentional) to the legitimizing presupposition (the intention) conveyed by the project itself (constantly intending). However, this principle of legitimation can face a crisis. Hence, this is where Urban Morphology comes in as an autonomous discipline that investigates the underlying causes of this crisis and which, particularly in Italy, has sparked a fruitful long-lasting and internally articulated debate. If the ‘reading’ is always intentional and if the intention is the outcome of the project, the loss of the principle of mutual subordination implies the loss of the “why” of things and of our actions, or of their intimately political motivation. Therefore, this crisis as a loss of values is an inevitable opening to ‘nothingness’. If, however, in the Russian Tendency, this opening is seen as an end in itself (the ancient Greek σκοπός), that is, the freeing fulfilment of the identification between “reading” and “project”, in the “processual typology”, and in Gianfranco Caniggia in particular, it becomes the necessary transit to find a new form of future identification. The “processual typology” therefore views the crisis as the engine of History. This is evident in general terms in all epochs, but is particularly confirmed in contemporary times through the abandonment of disused building stock and the consequent phenomenon of urban regeneration. This is, in fact, an incremental process triggered by the financial crisis of 2007; accelerated by the pervasive diffusion of information technologies in the workplace and consolidated with the pandemic event, because of which the emerging urban contraction has freed a substantial stock of real estate from any pre-existing constraint of instrumentality, making it available again for experimental purposes. As a result, the urban landscape of the European city has become increasingly fragmented, incoherent and internally torn, due to the pervasive incremental expansion of terrain vague infiltrated among the fragments of the urban fabric in constant proliferation, where the former progressively assume the character of infrastructures at the service of the latter. The paradoxical aspect of this process is that the act of crisis that separates “reading” and “project” simultaneously arises as a field of the possible, or rather the pure potential, of future relationships of reciprocal determination. The latter will
therefore materialize through the continuous renegotiation of the relationships between the fragments themselves, according to a process of profound sharing that will make them inextricably linked. While some current literature on the phenomenon ideologically and prejudicially tends to separate these aspects as distinct and figuratively autonomous, almost interpreting one as the negative pole of the other. Nonetheless, the growing interest in reclaiming abandoned places confirms their high regenerative potential, opening, in fact, to an unprecedented and fertile season of design. For the purposes of the reasoning carried out here, it is important to note how this project, which is in the process of development, whose effects cannot yet be fully measured, elucidates several questions that direct the ‘processual typology’, helping to critically illuminate its underlying assumptions, such as the notions of ‘individual’ and ‘organism’. The ‘individual’ referst to the inseparable relationship between the living being and the world it exists in (from the Latin individuum, meaning ‘not divisible’, which translates the corresponding ancient Greek term ἄτομος). As such, nothing can be said about the living being or the world outside of this relationship. It follows, therefore, that a) the living, as well as the world, in itself are not knowable and b) that only the living/world relation is knowable. Similarly, nothing can be taken away and/or added to the relationship that does not affect the terms resulting from the relationship itself and vice versa, nothing can be taken away and/or added to the latter that does not affect the quality of the former. Knowledge of the living is therefore approximated to that phenomenal-existential limit constituted by its concrete ‘grasp’ on the world, which therefore guarantees its possible understanding (from the Latin comprēhensīo, compound of cum- and prēhensīo, from prehendĕre, meaning ‘together’ and ‘grasp’). The individual, therefore, fully expresses that ‘being in relation’ from which, by successive approximations, all derived terms are generated, among which, for our purposes, both ‘subject’ and ‘object’ take on a particular meaning. Because of these premises, regeneration, which is at the same time human and urban, immediately reveals its unprecedented character. It happens at the moment in which, bringing the interest of the relationship to the center, it gives it the value of a founding event through which it begins to give “form” both to the agitative dimension, which has not yet reached the rank of completed subject, and to the realizing dimension, aimed at obtaining the recognisability of defined object. The shared project is, consequently, the regenerative project that, in its phenomenological unity, tentatively reveals, that is to say, proceeding by trial and error, the emergence of three terms, the intermediate of which corresponds to the conventional character of the “type”. The notion of ‘organism’ is closely related to that of ‘individual’, being in some ways inseparable. The use of the term (from the ancient Greek ὀργανόν, meaning ‘instrument’) clearly evokes ‘that which as part of a whole’ also presents itself as ‘a whole articulated in parts’. The becoming of the “organism” is therefore evoked by a process each phase of which repeats the
relational presuppositions of the one that preceded it and, in turn, stands as the origin, “relatively” open, of the one destined to follow, according to a modality that recalls the rhetorical figure of the chiasm. Within this process, which is necessarily finalistic in character, by virtue of the progressive closure of its field of possibility, the project remains as a relationship that progressively implies its terms and is conditioned by them. Processual typology translated the understanding of the phenomenon synthetically evoked, arriving at a description of constructed reality ordered asymptotically according to (strictly relational) ‘degrees’ and ‘scales’. Gianfranco Caniggia’s work has brought a new level of systematicity to this approach, with buildings, fabric, city and territory seen as “parts of a whole” - the (knowable) anthropic space resulting from the interaction between body and environment (in itself not knowable) - individually understood as a “whole articulated in parts”, each of which is the provisional and perfectible outcome of a relationship: elements, structures, systems and organisms. In this way, processual typology confirms not only that we can only know what we experience, but above all, that the latter is always ‘situated’, i.e. necessarily conditioned by precise circumstances of space and time. Urban regeneration takes this awareness to an unprecedented level of clarification. As a relation, i.e. a project, it articulates a whole, unknowable and indivisible (abandoned objects and bewildered subjects who, by virtue of the condition of ‘disgrace’ into which they have fallen, are no longer bearers of value) into parts, scalarly differentiated, knowable and reciprocally separable (regenerated objects and subjects). However, this can only be achieved by crossing a space of diminishing undifferentiation and indeterminacy (from the maximum degree of origin to the minimum degree of the beginning of a new historical epoch). Regeneration therefore emphasizes this interval, phenomenologically showing its richness of implications as well as its implicit fragility, not always destined to achieve the desired result. The novelty character of the regenerative process is therefore that of operating between different historical epochs, and the relative materials, revealing their uncertainties, ambiguities and exceptionality, to show the depth of the intuition contained in Muratori’s seminal text recalled in the introduction. The title *Life and History of Cities*, not by chance, draws the reader’s attention to the relationship between two non-comparable conditions, which only the relational capacity of the project can bring into a relationship of reciprocal tension. Nevertheless, this also implies the impossibility of reducing the nature of the project itself to the world of ‘representation’, conditioned by the subsistence of ‘language’, and the need to search for its (historical) premises within the aforementioned interval. Regeneration, both urban and human, cultivates intermediation as a founding condition to be taken care of, not yet bound by the regulatory system of a socially constructed reality. Regeneration is therefore distinguished from any other transformative strategy by its ability to establish itself its own rules and full decision-making autonomy through the making of the project. For these reasons, regeneration cannot be confined within a given formal system, which
programmatically exceeds, and requires a “state of exception”\textsuperscript{20} in order to unleash its potential. In the history of national town planning, such recognition was legitimized, for the first time, by the Law of the Emilia-Romagna Region, no. 24 of 2017, titled ‘REGIONAL DISCIPLINE ON THE PROTECTION AND USE OF THE LAND’. In a particular way, art. 16 “Temporary Uses”, establishes the possibility to intervene on the disused building heritage through a process of agentive claim derogating the constraints provided by the discipline of uses, standard and building regulation applied to the control of current production. It is, therefore, a condition of experimentation in potency that, at the end of a period of suspension of all forms of cogency, no longer than a five-year period, will have to be translated into action, based on the outcome achieved through the regenerative negotiation project. The project, understood as the search for a point of equilibrium between multiple instances, both material and immaterial, thus becomes the inescapable premise for the attainment of a stabilized conventional value, i.e. the ‘type’. The epochal scope of this recognition not only definitively overcomes the aporias of a Modernity incapable of coming to terms with the social, political, economic and cultural significance of History and its articulation in ‘phases’ and ‘cycles’.\textsuperscript{21} Above all, it also confirms the primacy of processual typology in giving a full account of the process of transformation of the city and the territory according to a model that, temporarily interrupted by industrial society, today finally seems to be regaining its course.\textsuperscript{22} The persistent call for the circularity of the project,\textsuperscript{23} the reduction of land consumption\textsuperscript{24} and the recycling of the existing building stock,\textsuperscript{25} as well as of the related materials, no longer instrumental to a historically consolidated reality,\textsuperscript{26} are clear and unequivocal signs of a cultural revolution that has now translated into a widespread civil conscience. In this perspective, uncertainty and fragility become the symptoms of an unprecedented project, subjected to progressive decantation and aimed at the pursuit of a common good no longer rhetorically understood but rather ‘individually’ shared, in the profound meaning that the term implies, as we have tried to argue. A project whose understanding presupposes an inevitable simplification of that interval of experimental suspension, now commonly referred to as regeneration: a necessary transition.\textsuperscript{27}
NOTES

1. Anne Vernez Moudon, the first president of the ISUF (International Seminar on Urban Form) since 1997, coined the expression. It is currently used internationally to indicate the strand of studies and research on the form of the city deriving from Saverio Muratori’s teaching, in order to enucleate its distinctive trait of continuous critical renewal of inherited building structures, compared to other schools of thought, similarly interested in the study of urban phenomena.


7. It is therefore, in the processual typology, an entelechy (from the ancient Greek, compound of ἐντελέχεια, from ἐν- τέλει-ἔχειν, meaning ‘in itself’, ‘purpose’, ‘possessing’), i.e. an internal purpose in the becoming of the process itself.


10. In this perspective, the project is configured as a relational practice with an experimental character, which, by tentatively renegotiating the relationships between the parts, alters their full meaning, semantically and expressively disorienting them from their founding relationships, being contextually conditioned and altered by them. This specific way of understanding the project is not reducible, as many think, in the terms of a structural reading of the project, as it precedes it, constantly placing itself between the unspeakable and the sayable, which is, separating them by holding them together.


12. In this perspective, it’s worth recalling how even the term ‘concept’ (from the Latin conceptus, composed of cum- and căpĕre, meaning ‘together’ and ‘to grasp’) clearly bears traces of the ontological primacy of the material grasp over the relative conceptualization. The same discourse, not surprisingly, applies to the German begriff, which derives from the verb greifen, with the value of ‘to grasp’.

13. The individual, thus described, seems to correspond to what in Leibniz’s philosophy is called a monad, in that it has in itself the perfect organic end of its development.

14. It follows that the crisis of the relationship between ‘reading’ and ‘project’ presupposes that of the type, which precedes it, i.e. the dissolution of the constitutive link (as relational) through which the terms implied in potency are progressively translated into act, becoming ‘subject’ and ‘object’ respectively.
15. It is, therefore, a paradoxical ‘ephemeral permanence’, since in the becoming of the organism, the project understood as a relationship is preserved through the continuous transformation of the terms involved. These, in turn, are nevertheless related in a manner that is always different from the one that triggered before, and perpetuated after, the process, which is always the same even though it is not the one.

16. In this sense, it differs from processual typology. While the latter emphasizes the type’s character of stability, as a conventional, collectively accepted relationship that defines its terms by successive gemmations, the former emphasizes the ephemeral and transient character of the individual, implying a condition of reciprocity in constant becoming, of which nothing can be said, but which in its organicity can only be evoked. This relationship well expresses the Latin meaning of *spatium* as ‘distance’ and ‘interval’.


21. Regeneration, although it constitutes an autonomous strategy of intervention, recognized as such since the 2010s, actually expresses the way in which, in a process perspective, one transit from a previous cycle, whose impulses have now been exhausted, to the always-fallible possibility of the next one.


27. The philosophical approach that best interprets the meaning of regeneration is the one developed in Mario Perniola’s reflection. In this perspective, we recognize ourselves in the words with which Giuseppe Patella recalled him in the pages of *Rivista di Estetica*, n.70 (available online): “...In this sense his (Perniola’s, ed.) could be defined as a philosophy of between, of the intermediate, which strives to think of that “in-between” that represents precisely the mediation that separates but also the distance that unites, that middle ground that indicates both a state of separation and a movement of approach. A philosophy of *transit*, to recall precisely one of those concepts elaborated in one of his pioneering books of 1985 (*Transiti. Come si va dallo stesso allo stesso*), in which the relationship between the inside and the outside, the here and the there, between staying and going is thought of neither in terms of radical opposition nor in the manner of a dialectical resolution, but in the form of an intermediate that holds the terms together through the emergence of their distance...”
BIBLIOGRAPHY


