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PROJECTING CONSISTENCY AND NARRATIONS FROM THE QUANTIFIABLE

SPATIAL CONFIGURATIONS
FROM ECONOMIC AND LEGISLATIVE CONTINGENCIES

KORNEL TOMASZ LEWICKI

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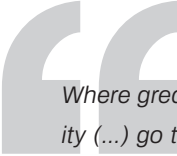
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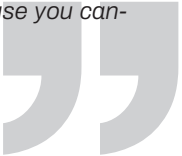
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Where great affairs are carried out by authority (...) go through with the play that is acting the best you can, and do not confound it because another that is pleasanter comes into your thoughts. (...) If ill opinions cannot be quite rooted out, and you cannot cure some received vice according to your wishes, you must not, therefore, abandon the commonwealth, for the same reason as you should not forsake the ship in a storm because you cannot command the winds.



Thomas Moore, *Utopia*, 1516

The Attitude of Architectural Intelligence

Foreword by Giovanni Multari

Architecture finds itself poised between lofty ideals and tangible restrictions, suspended between the aspirations of design and the realities of operational contexts. Increasingly, the architectural project is shaped as the outcome of a collective and multifaceted process, one in which diverse interests, voices, and contributions converge and intertwine. Within this intricate framework, governed by regulatory requirements and constrained by economic parameters, limitations may be perceived either as impediments or, conversely, as latent resources waiting to be activated.

This ongoing negotiation between visionary intent and pragmatic context constitutes a central and enduring challenge for the architect. It is a challenge that demands not only creative and technical competence, but also a capacity for mediation, an ability to navigate and reconcile divergent and sometimes conflicting demands. In this complex interplay, the architect assumes the role of mediator as much as designer, constantly seeking a balance through which constraints can be transformed into operative elements, lending the project both coherence and meaning.

In this sense, architecture does not emerge as a univocal or immediate response to a need, but rather as an act of thoughtful mediation. The value and strength of the architectural proposal reveal themselves through its capacity to engage with, and respond to, constraints. It is in this critical engagement that the project redefines what is possible, not despite but precisely through the necessity imposed by context.

The research developed by Kornel Tomasz Lewicki engages deeply with this duality, exploring how economic and legislative constraints—typically seen as limiting—can instead serve to enrich the architectural process. His investigation is anchored in a clearly articulated methodological framework composed of three interconnected stages: Setting, Process, and Output. Through this structure, Kornel offers a lens through which to understand how such constraints can be effectively integrated into architectural reasoning, contributing to the internal coherence and integrity of the project despite the complexity of its external conditions.

Kornel was not my direct scholar. We met through his PhD project and, from the very beginning, it was clear that his international education and cultural background brought perspectives that enriched the dialogue and research process.

Working together was an opportunity to discover new perspectives, to engage with a multiplicity of approaches and modes of thinking. Over the years, we got to know each other better through numerous academic collaborations, from international research projects such as Erasmus+ Recube, or Academic visits in Hong Kong, Warsaw and Brussels.

These occasions, often outside the usual teaching dynamics, have allowed us to create a deep and stimulating dialogue, enriching both of us from a human and professional point of view.

This book investigates architecture's ability to respond to the challenges posed by economic and regulatory constraints, referred to as design contingencies. His research is developed in a precise tripartite structure, a conceptual framework through which to explore how quantifiable constraints can effectively inform and guide design decisions.

The SETTING chapter introduces a systemic understanding of the contexts in which contemporary architecture moves, reflecting on the increasing complexity and interdisciplinary influences that shape design.

PROCESS represents the critical heart of the analysis: here an approach of constantly questioning the hierarchies between the various factors is developed, constructing a coherent narrative that includes, rather than marginalises, the limitations imposed. Through four case studies – including two student housing project in Paris by Eric Lapierre and Baukunst Bruther, the residential building in Tirana by Baukuh and the multifunctional LoBe complex in Berlin by Brandlhuber, Petzet, Emde and Burlon – he analyses architecture as a critical act, a dialogue in which limitations become instruments of coherence.

OUTPUT finally focuses on the practical application of these ideas, examining how the project can maintain coherence and relevance even when confronted with 'rigid' external parameters.

One of the most significant aspects of this research is the ability to link theory and practice, a quality that I have also particularly appreciated in relation to my own professional experience and that I foresee for Kornel in future.

As a practising architect, I have always considered the contingencies of a project as necessary stimuli, capable of generating innovative architectural solutions. In my daily practice, the project is constantly confronted with constraints that define and orientate choices. I am reminded, for example, of the work on the Pirelli Skyscraper in Milan, commissioned by the Lombardy Region in the early 2000s.

Ponti, in his *Amate l'Architettura*¹, spoke of the necessity to «obey the building», a notion suggesting that architecture should emerge from the internal logic and requirements of a structure, rather than being externally imposed. This principle informed our approach to the restoration, where each intervention, from the aluminium and glass façades to the interior renovations, was guided by a rigorous philological commitment. The goal was to preserve the original proportions, materials, and architectural vocabulary, while at the same time adapting to contemporary functional and safety requirements. This approach resonates profoundly with Kornel's methodological perspective. In both cases, we see that working within constraints, such as respecting a building's historic identity while adapting to new demands, can activate what Jeremy Till has called «architectural intelligence».² In the restoration of the Pirelli building, Ponti's idea that good architecture must arise from an intrinsic dialogue with the specific characteristics of the building was realised in a project that preserved identity even while responding to changing contexts.

Kornel's research demonstrates that a similar coherence is possible even in a domain dominated by calculable parameters and external influences. His work makes a compelling case for the idea that design integrity need not be sacrificed, even in the face of heterogeneous and sometimes conflicting constraints.

His methodological rigour and global perspective are further reinforced by his active engagement in a wide range of academic and

1 PONTI G., *Amate l'Architettura*, Quodlibet, Macerata, 2022.

2 TILL J., *Architecture Depends*, MIT Press, Cambridge, Massachusetts, 2013, p. 167.

professional settings. Through his participation in workshops, summer schools, and collaborative research ventures, Kornel has continuously tested his hypotheses in diverse environments, maintaining a consistently open and inquisitive mindset.

Particularly noteworthy are his contributions to internationally esteemed platforms such as STATION+ at ETH Zürich and Hortence Lab in Brussels. These experiences have allowed him to confront some of the most pressing questions facing contemporary European and global architecture, validating the relevance and robustness of his research.

What the reader will find in this volume is the culmination of a mature and rigorously structured investigation, one that faces the complexities of contemporary design practice with clarity and confidence.

The book concludes with a section which encourages an open, ongoing discourse where constraints are no longer seen as imperatives, but rather as generative tools that can support a consistent and coherent architectural narrative.

Through this work, Kornel has constructed a meaningful body of research, one that not only interrogates the assumptions of design thinking but also offers new paths forward. His contribution is both timely and valuable, and I am confident that it will inspire reflection and dialogue among scholars and practitioners alike.

00.

Origin Constellations

00.1 Of Doubt and Drive

This is my first book. Expectations high, doubts many.

With no attempt at legitimizing forms of imprecision or lack of consistency I rather want to express personal and profound uncertainties towards the complex issues at hands.

Nonetheless, having defended a three-year period of PhD I feel the need of concluding this chapter. Not much as a finished product, but as an act of turning the page and requesting the same topics loaded with an accumulation of knowledge, new awareness and personal experience.

Conscious of the necessity of long-term engagement and timespan verification of hereby postulated affirmations, I hope this book will serve as a catalyzer of discussion and will stimulate critical viewpoints on my approach towards architecture. In this sense, I wish to have a chance to deepen my insight on the topic and, in a near future, evolve the content of this book.

I started a PhD with the conviction that for a practicing architect it represents a further form of challenge and chance of growth within the profession. Nevertheless, I believe one has to be driven by some sort of personal hunger otherwise employing such resources into a product that does not bring tangible professional return simply does not make sense. It is with this same attitude that I conducted this research and intend continuing the journey.

My greatest gratitude goes to the University of Naples Federico II, which embraced my proposal within the International Student Scholarship programme in a historical moment of great uncertainty.

To STATION+, ETH Zürich for their generosity at sharing thoughts during my academic guest researcher period.

To HortenceLab at the ULB Bruxelles for giving me the chance to live close to relevant contemporary processes and getting in touch with professionals.

Lastly, the warmest thanks go to the twin souls who supported, both operatively and psychologically, the path I have undertaken.

00.2 Approaching Lines

Global diversity has rendered it unfeasible to establish a universally applicable architectural theory [01.1].

Quite paradoxically the state of uncertainty and heterogeneity led to a simplification of processes and strictly sectorial expertise engagement, targeting the reduction of risks an unassailable factual argument around the choices [01.2].

In architecture, agents originally outside of the discipline's interests became more and more relevant and constraining: the increasing bureaucratization, the lack of engagement into risk and uncertainty, the strive for return on investment and, consequently, the production costs reductions, are factors which architects face on a daily basis [01.3].

Furthermore, in relevant architectural processes, it often occurs that influential figures make pivotal decisions long before architects are invited to participate in discussions [02.1].

This is because such discourses are typically regarded as having no direct impact on the project's progression and are instead considered predetermined and restrictive; whereas, if systemically thought, they could contribute to the process and result beneficial to the consistency of the architectural project [02.2].

As the employment of heterogenous parameters can be formally and systemically expressed in many ways their direct categorization appears problematic, yet it is possible to suggest a few fields of interest and their resulting outputs [03.1].

Processes which embrace such a complex systemic route seek their final value in the consistency and linearity of the rhetoric narration around the final delivery, rather than concentrating solely on the object itself [03.2].

The claim that quantifiable parameters are not to be imperative agents, rather tools for building consistency of the project [04.1] and a taxonomy of recurrent terms [04.2] describing the attitude towards the act of projecting constitute an open-conclusion of this book.

In fact, many have attempted at delineating a transmittable and linear method of making a project of architecture. Fortunately enough, others claim that there is nothing to learn properly, rather one can attempt at becoming, at best, increasingly skilled and masterful in navigating hand in hand with a reservoir of personal experiences of architecture and analysis of past successful processes.

In this constellation working on built and recent projects appears inevitable as from a rhetorical question of Bart Lootsma in the occasion of *Positions on Emancipation*¹: «How can teaching architecture prepare for practice without itself degenerating into a form of practice? Architecture exists by virtue of a conceptual distance from the arena it ultimately operates within, as a hard-earned space to think before doing»².

Architecture from within, and, in relation to other disciplines and contemporary practicing conditions, has to rely on the executed as from the words of Marti Aris:

if I have learned anything after so many years devoted to these themes, it is that any attempt at theoretical construction in our field must, from the outset, assume an auxiliary role, a secondary condition, subordinate to the works, which are the true repositories of knowledge, both in architecture and in any other artistic activity³.

Nevertheless, I strongly back the claims of those who question and innovate the process of making a project constantly. I'm fascinated by the reading of the figure of Anaximander by Carlo Rovelli who «sets in motion the process of rethinking our worldwide – a search for knowledge based on the rejection of any obvious-seeming certainty, which is, in fact, one of the main roots of scientific thinking»⁴.

1 HERTWECK F., *Positions on Emancipation Architecture between Aesthetics and Politics*, Lars Müller Publishers, Schengen, 2017.

2 LOOTSMA B., *Theory and Practice*, in HERTWECK F., *Positions on Emancipation Architecture between Aesthetics and Politics*, Lars Muller Publishers, 2018, p. 210.

3 MARTI ARIS C., *Variations of Identity Type in architecture*, Edition Cosa Mentale, Barcelona, 2021, p. 7 [1st ed. 1993].

4 ROVELLI A., *Anaximander: And the Nature of Science*, Allen Lane, London, 2007, p. XII.

**Aiming at an
objective basis for
intricate spatial
arrangements that
transcend convention
and contribute
to establishing a
consensus among
the various actors in
the process.**

