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# DETAIL AS A GLIDER: ETHICS AND TACTICS IN ARCHITECTURAL DESIGN

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The lecture investigates the systemic and formative nature of architectural detail, highlighting its multifaceted ethical dimension and revealing its tactical potential in the whole process, especially in complex contexts. The first part of the lecture presents the idea that architecture can emerge as a systemic, multi-layered mutual irritation between a series of forms. In fact, on the one hand, architectural design is about imagining spatial and formal concepts; on the other, it is about acting in an intricate system of norms and constraints – structural, technological, functional, emotional, political, economic, and so on – each defining a different form. Therefore, even if narratives tend to show architects as *dei ex machina* blessed with genial intuitions, which projects are direct projections of, architectural design is also, and mainly, about the processual dimension of the project in the system of architecture. Here, a pareysonian, formative dimension emerges, and the idea that necessity comes along with the condensation of the process without strictly relying on it. In the second part, we explore the strategic role of detail in architecture through the lens of ethics, using the traditional categories of ethics of principles and ethics of responsibility. Here, the formative dimension shows the necessary balance between the two tensions, originating an ethics of responsive cohesion that can be pursued precisely and solely in the detail design. The detail, more than an engineering translation of architectural will – which would turn it into an expression of hope – or a solution to a problem – which would result in the mere convergence of all the constraints – could be seen as the conceptual open space left by all the “fields of unacceptable” implicitly defined by the various forms: hence, in a systemic approach, it could become the way for setting priorities within the ongoing system of the project. In the third part, we delve into the transformative potential of detail in architecture. The systemic field of unacceptable not only produces but also necessitates a synchronic approach to

design, giving the detail a tactical edge. As the system evolves, so do the forms. Instead of the typical, gradual increase of precision that goes along the various phases of the process, the detail enables the anticipation of potential issues, thereby impacting the direction of the process and making formativity performative. This way, it could become the most potent tactical weapon for architects during the project’s development.

Eventually, some examples of architectural details, concerning particularly awkward recent projects, will show how the detail’s systemic and synchronic tactical dimension in pursuing an ethics of formative responsive cohesion. The glider, beyond being a mere flying object, symbolizes the (original, ethical) hacker culture. In the systemic world of architecture, where technical competence often seems to limit the role of architects to the aesthetic definition of formal concepts and general indications, detail is the key to navigating the free space of different systems. It ‘fissures’ the apparent density of norms and technicalities, setting an ethics of formative responsive cohesion for architectural design.

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