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Nas nuvens também crescem raízes

Even in clouds roots are born



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Designing toward the future. The project as a tactical tool.

The problem with design

While the philosophical implications of architecture have often been inquired, and from different points of view – with the aesthetical one being the most diffuse – the philosophical turn in design studies is relatively recent (Deregibus, 2018). One could be bewildered by the fact that, while the artistic side of architecture has raised so much interest, architectural design has been treated mainly by specialists, just as it was a procedure, a facility or a technical application, more than the *constitutive* part of architecture.

This misconception reflects a traditional corporative vision, with a pupil learning from a mentor, gradually mastering tools and finding his own way after a decade of apprentice (Greene, 2012). Just as a painter learns to paint or a sculptor learns to sculpt, an architect learns to "designs", one could say. But the difference clearly emerges in the lack of correspondence between the name and the verb: quite all artists' names have a clear connection with what they actually do (e.g., painting>painter, sculpting>sculptor, dancing>dancer, playing the piano>piano player or pianist, composing music>composer, photographing>photographer, directing>director), but this rule does not work for architects – having "designer" a different and broader meaning. Such correspondence often has a strong relationship with specific tools (a painter uses brushes, colours and canvas, for example): but the rule doesn't apply to architects. Even if tools have a dramatic relevance, as often underlined (Ford *et al.*, 2017), architectural design cannot be described as an application, nor does architecture depend on its technical base. On the one hand, because the technique is quite unclear in architecture: should it refer to technological and structural knowledge or form and shape, to the ecological footprint of his building or its urban impact, Or to all these things, and even other ones? On the other hand, many renowned architectures show critical technical fallacies, so it is challenging to see technical value as essential for architecture (Deregibus, 2020a). Architecture could even exist regardless of the technique, as shown by the utopic architecture - from the cases of Jacques-François Blondel, Etienne-Louis Boullée and Claude-Nicolas Ledoux to Archigram, Cedric Price and Kiyonori Kikutake (*ibidem*). And even if, most usually, architectures require to be built and that constructive side is crucial – think about Santa Maria del Fiore in Firenze, the Sydney

Opera House, the Pompidou Center or the Meiso No Mori (Deregibus & Giustiniano, 2020) – this practical side does not seem to raise much attention. It is considered a matter of competence at most. This conception confirms a romantic view of architecture, where the artist imagines the final building from the very beginning, and the main problem is to follow his indications (as obscure as they may be, as masters are notoriously cryptic). Technical matters would then be nothing more than the *management* of the translation of concepts into forms.

Strictly connected to this vision is the tendency of seeing the conceptual phase as the product of a single, inspired mind, clearly positioned in time and space. We are so used to thinking that architecture is conceived by an individual or a single entity (whether it is Michelangelo or MVRDV) that we frankly ignore all the other involved actors, even if they quite entirely take on the project. We continue to look at the artist as the master though in most architectural firms, nowadays, even the conceptual phase is shared – that's the essence of the brainstorming stage. Authorship seems to imply an individuality of some kind. And this author seems to live outside the world, fully displaying his own artistic concept with no constrictions or limits imposed. Narrations look at the result as it was the pure effect of the artist's will even when the projects are strongly influenced (in other words: always) by the clients (Clemente, 2000) or by others (for example, the changed economic conditions, as happened to many skyscrapers in the mid-east). The same happens when an architect inspires the preliminary design of a project that is then developed by others (for example, the Pompidou Center was conceived by Renzo Piano, Richard Rogers and Gianfranco Franchini, but was then entirely developed by ARUP). Or when the architect designs a part of a complex but is considered the primary author of the whole intervention (for example, Torino Esposizioni is known as work by Pier Luigi Nervi even if the concept and the general plan are by Ettore Sottsass and Roberto Biscaretti di Ruffia). Reflecting on authorship shows that many people could claim a kind of partial authorship. For example, the client commissioning the work, the planner setting the urbanistic rules that allowed (or not) some shape, the building company proposing some variations (Deregibus, 2020b) are actual "authors", as they genuinely influenced the final result - perhaps even dramatically.

Furthermore, a specific problem of architectural design is time. Even a work of non-architectural art could last ages or even centuries: to name an extreme example, the piece "Organ²/ASLSP" by John Cage was designed to be played "As SLow aS Possible", and also if a nine-hour recording could sound long enough, a performance started in 2001 in Halberstadt was designed to last for a whopping 639 years. But buildings' construction typically lasts for years, often decades and seldom centuries: in general, the timescale of architecture tends to be very long (Deregibus, 2020a). Think to the polemics about the Sagrada Familia (for instance, Bohigas i Guardiola, 1972): could we continue to say, after its more-then-150-years construction, that its author is Antoni Gaudì?

Moreover, even if the author remained the same, a so long timing changes the relationship between the concept (the designed architecture) and the final building (the actual one): the world will have changed meanwhile. For example, an economic crisis could stop the construction or impose massive changes, as happened for the Jeddah Tower and similar projects (see Deregibus, 2020b). In such cases, we should even say that those changing elements gained a kind of authorship on the final building.

Lastly, it's worth noticing that even if the term design concerns all fields, and that's why so much has been said about it, the architectural design seems to be inextricably related to a stylistic question (see Margolin, 2015; Buthayna, 2018). The attention tends to shift toward the *results* of the design activity more than the design activity itself (e.g., Modern design produces Modern architecture; the experimental design by Gregg Lynn produces Blob architectures). This is a peculiar way of looking at the conceptual side of design, as if the relation between aesthetic and sense, and between inspiration and result, was crystal-clear (Buchanan & Margolin, 1995).

These reasonings lead us to say that the ontological nature of architectural design concerns not only its result and its authorship but also the way the design deploys and the project can actually influence the process, *all along* with its own definition. Obviously, such an idea relies on, or rather, deal with the radical heteronomy of architecture – architects usually don't pay, nor authorise, nor build their building, nor do they calculate the structures or the systems (Deregibus & Giustiniano, 2020): thus, anyone believing that architecture can be described and qualified on a pure compositive and stylistic way may find our proposal incomprehensible, if not totally senseless. Conversely, from the ontological relation between the act of designing, the product of this act – which is a project and, eventually, a building – and architecture, a tactical and strategic potential emerges: and design becomes the exploiting of this potential.

A matter of future

Essentially, design is about imagining something in the future: something new or different than usual. Typically, in our life, we act by devising routines (Deregibus & Giustiniano, 2020), exploiting our analogical skills (Melandri, 1968) for dealing with events. For example, tomorrow morning, you will probably wake up, wash you and have breakfast just like any other day. But when something changes our patterns, or when we need or want something new, we also plan the way to get it. Indeed, it's easy to see that in the purpose itself – e.g. the will to try a new restaurant for dinner – there is a part of design – we have to choose the place, evaluate if it fits our schedule, if we have money enough, how going there and so on. Some of these problems can be easily managed, while others require accurate planning: then, most obviously, unexpected events may change or

invalidate our plan. Because, indeed, the main problem of the future is that, well, *we do not know it*. We cannot decide it, nor can we invent it: and that's precisely why we continuously plan it. Therefore, *design* is about making predictions based on the knowledge of the purpose of the system (Dennett, 1987) – indeed, what Dennett calls design refers to a fusion of form and functions, while titles what we mean *intentional stance*. So, anytime we desire or need something, design is about making rational hypotheses for changing this intention into reality.

From this point of view, designing is not (just) about concepts: it is a practical need, for any action requires some management of its development. But this management does not come *after* the conceptual phases: indeed, it innervates it, and the problems we hinted at immediately become evident. It has been said that, as the project is made by documents and communicated using documents, design activity is all about producing documents (Armando & Durbiano, 2017) that are relevant due to their being a trace of the process' evolution (Ferraris, 2009). For example, the agreement between the client and the contractor is made possible by documents describing the result – something that stays on the "practical need" side of design: these documents may be sketches, technical drawings, writings, images, simulations, tables or similar. I disagree with this interpretation. The documents will change during the process: their value depends (for the most) on the relative power of the actors of the process itself (Deregibus & Giustiniano, 2019). They do not fix any point, nor do they prove anything. Instead, they are a punctual representation of a *work-in-progress* state whose evolution could either follow an evolutionary line, or not. In other words, more than about producing documents, design is about controlling what makes the documents effective and meaningful.

Then, even if we could look at the project's development as an almost continuous progress, the process is usually divided into a sequence of phases. There are various design levels, from preliminary concepts to construction drawings, even in small projects like house renovations. Obviously, the articulation of these levels and their afference to different systems (normative, social, economic and so on) is much more complex when actors and stakeholders increase. Still, the concept itself doesn't change too much: in the first phase, when the design is preliminary, some very tedious initial verifications join with the creative moment of the process. By one or more proposals, the architect develops the so-called *concept* of the project, that is, the general vision of what the result will be. Or rather, what it should be. Using the terminology of system theory, we could say that this concept implies a first act of distinction (Luhmann, 2002) between the project and all the other, endless, unexpressed and even unexplored alternatives. In other words, any act of design is both a decision and a threshold. For example, by proposing a tall building in a preliminary phase, without even designing any further detail, the architect (or is it the client?) already excludes a vast series of alternatives: a smaller facility, a horizontal development, a hypogeous solution and

many other solutions. This distinction becomes very clear if we consider that, habitually, there is even a pre-preliminary phase. Indeed, feasibility studies orient the design among the endless alternatives, whose exclusion relies either on the intentional stance or the ability to make rational analogies with other cases. Hence, by making this distinction, the architect defines a *desired state in the future*, defining its *expected* qualities and, by contrast, the *unacceptable* one. The terms are here quite relevant: indeed, as we cannot predict the future, the project is more a hope than a promise. A whole series of accidents could change the project's conditions so that the *unacceptable* qualities could become *unexpected but required*, so *accepted*, affecting the entire project and even causing its complete revision (Deregibus, 2020b).

Maybe one could be tempted to think that accidents and unexpected events are pretty rare: perhaps even that they be avoided with reliable risk management. But this wishful thinking must be halted forthwith. In any project, there are many unexpected events: it's an ontological condition, and for architecture, compared to other arts, the unexpected plays a much more prominent role. Yet, not all things are unexpected! We (almost) know how a beam works, so we're reasonably able to predict its behaviour in quite all conditions, and the same happens with system engineering. Most important, we are pretty capable of predicting the actual appearance of the building. Generally speaking, we could say that it's possible to predict those things with a solid scientific and technical nature, like structural calculations or renderings. However, even in those cases, something can go wrong, like in the case of London *Millennium Bridge*, where the crowd's effect was spectacularly underestimated, or the tragic fire of the *Grenfell Tower*.

More specifically, a design could (possibly) work within its system – the system constituted by its initial conditions and distinctions: therefore, accidents coming from inside the system can be somehow predicted or, at any rate, supposed. But when unexpected come from the *outside* of the system, that is, from other systems – which are indeed the environment of the project's system – consequences cannot be even imagined (Deregibus, 2021a). Examples of these external systems are rules and norms, budget, stakeholders' rights, political changes, to name a few. For example, in Italy, in 2018, there was a normative change concerning how to calculate structures for resisting earthquakes: the new norm came after a series of disasters, so it could appear to be a *good* accident. But the problem is that the new safety level was so difficult to achieve that, in many cases, respecting it became too expensive or complicated. For example, a massive project for renovating *Torino Esposizioni*, a 60.000mq structure built between 1940 and 1960, stopped because the new requirements would have doubled the renovation cost. So, an accident coming from an external system influenced the design so much that it failed.

The dark side of the models

As we saw, we can reasonably say many things about the future, but it's impossible to predict it: thus, the project is ontologically lacking. But the problem with design is precisely that, traditionally, *the project aspires to be a prescriptive model of the future*: the project's concept acts like a relatively undefined but ideal architecture, so the project becomes a model (in scientific terms) of that ideal. Town plans are probably the best example of this prescriptive model: they last and work for a long time, during which the conditions that led to the original design (and initial strategic decisions) cannot but change: thus, they will provoke variations to that original design which, like a waterfall, will lead to even further changings. Then, if the aim was to describe and norm the future – that is, precisely the supposed aim of town plans – then the design would be ontologically wrong, as it would impose fixed points which couldn't fit the unexpected evolution of the present. In other words, it would model *an ideal* future-of-the-present: a deeply desired, but impossible, state. Such design would oppose (or better: would like to oppose) the project to the events: any variation could only be a problem, a deviation from the ideal project (Jullien, 2004), and would clash with the prescriptive project. Clearly, it is possible to anticipate acceptable variations or define how to manage changes in the project: but just as clearly, changes could be way greater, thus constituting a forced deviation from the ideal path. In all the traditional projects, the sequence of phases strives to be an incremental and gradual approach *toward that ideal project* (Deregibus & Giustiniano, 2021): or rather, the architect hopes that they will be as such.

But, as we saw, as unexpected as possible, from an ontological point of view, design is traditionally more steered at defining prescriptive models of the future than refining architectural features (i.e. the shape). This means that, in the case of unexpected events, the first qualities to fall will be precisely the aesthetic ones, as they quite exclusively rely on the designer's artistic status rather than objective arguments, are the first to fall (Deregibus & Giustiniano, 2019). In other words: we mainly characterise architecture on its aesthetic quality, but these qualities are the weakest ones, as they don't have a scientific, normative background. If a structural or a safety norm changes, the shape will most commonly change as well, maybe in a dramatic way. Only rarely do aesthetic features outlive significant changes, winning the “opposition to the events” – as it happened for the Sidney Opera House. Quite never – just for important historical monuments or very symbolic buildings – there will be a derogation to the rule for preserving the architectural features.

This *weakness of the form* directly comes from the combination of the traditional idea of design and

the sequence of phases we hinted at: in fact, the sequence of acts of distinctions of the project gradually (inconstantly) defines a system whose complexity we systematically simplify in a model. With the result that the project *becomes* that model. Think to a usual design process, analysing it using system's theory as defined by Luhmann (2002). From the very first line, the architect starts making distinctions (for example, the line could represent a wall, or a street, in some scale and with a certain degree of approximation); the second sign (the second distinction) both rely on and tests the validity of the first one, and so on. Each distinction limits in some way the endless possibilities of the open world, narrowing them and inferring some acceptable or unacceptable character of the project (for example, that the wall can stay here, more or less, but not too distant from here). These distinctions gradually define a system, that is, an interrelated series of constraints that fix the project's features. Sometimes, a new distinction will be incompatible with the new one, and the whole system will have to be adapted, recanting some of the assumptions and rebuilding the system again. At the end of the process, the system will be entirely consistent with the actual building (Deregibus & Giustiniano, 2021). But this kind of design process (the traditional one) has a dark side. Any time we make a distinction, we take for granted the previous ones and tend to consider more a constraint than an opening; more a definition than a field of validity; more a prescription than a potentiality. In other words, we tend to consider the position of that wall as shown by the sign, even if we already know that we can safely change it: *we stop thinking of the sign as a phenomenon and transform it into a fetish* (Husserl, 1970). That's when we start building a model instead of designing.

The problem is that models are ontologically fragile: they (possibly) work just *within* the system. Or rather, the model defines a new system by *excluding* all *unexpressed* potentialities of the acts of distinction. Indeed, we can see that a distinction indicates all possible futures-of-the-present (Luhmann, 1996), i.e., all possible evolution of the present situation that fit a field of validity implicit in the sign itself. Conversely, in a sneaky way, the model imposes a present-of-the-future, i.e., a specific evolution of the present whose reliability can be hoped at best (Deregibus, 2021a). Consequently, it conceals all other potentialities of the situation. As long as we consider the system itself, the trick could work: maybe the design will be less than successful, but we will not even be sure about that – in fact, we wouldn't see any alternative. But, as we said, problems typically come from irritation *between* systems, i.e. from outside the specific system of architectural design (or, to be more precise, the specific system defined by the design distinction as taken on before the unexpected problem). And due to the extreme heteronomy of architecture and the number of possible irritations, then we can say that the distinctions of the project, by defining a model, *at the same time* originated the conditions for the failure of the project itself, for example, when a stronger actant (Greimas, 1987) bursts into the process, or a norm changes. Because these unexpected events

will be ontologically out of the model, both during the design process (Deregibus, 2021a) and after the building: affecting the way the building will be unexpectedly lived (Deregibus & Giustiniano, 2021). This means that the project does not truly model the future, since it obviously cannot predict it: but rather, the *expectations toward a desired future*: consequently, it is ontologically *false*. Hence, models result from an illusion of control, and the traditional nature of design – that is, to build models – is also the leading cause of its failure.

From *ideal* to *ideal*s

It could now seem that this "modelling stance" of design should be contrasted in any way: furthermore, it could seem that, as predictions are impossible, design was senseless or, at least, irrelevant. Obviously, this is not true. Just as relativity theory didn't necessarily impact all the fields of traditional physics – as its effects were valid at the infinitesimal scale – the traditional way of design still works quite well. That's why, every day, buildings spring up, cities develop, and bridges or towers do not collapse. No model can avoid the unexpected, but we can be quite sure about a beam's resistance (thanks to safety factors and continuous experiments). But speaking about architecture and architectural design, as architects' role lost much power from the postmodernity onward (Deregibus, 2018), modelling design is a problem more than a resource. In fact, modelling reflects a problem-solving attitude, as beam design clearly shows. But in the case of architectural design, in competitions and private works, "questions" (e.g. which shape a building should have) are always vague and ambiguous. The low quality of too many buildings (i.e., the vagueness of their design) is a consequence of considering architecture like decoration of a solution. If the problem is uncertain, the solution will equally be weak and prone to many changes: subsequently, architects will be less and less considered (Deregibus, 2021b) precisely due to their inability to face problems by giving realistic, credible answers, and this professional deficiency makes their aesthetic proposal even weaker.

Therefore, either we accept this inefficacy, reducing the project to a mere base for its own variations (as they say: "plans are useless, but planning is indispensable"): or we change the usual way of intending design. And the first pass toward a new way of intending design is to avoid *the ideal of ideal*.

We said that the so-called conceptual phase likely tends to crystallise an ideal building. Simultaneously, the sequence gradually should increase the project's precision, pushing the event toward that precise design. It's worth noticing that even that primitive, original, ideal project comes from a blurred request, a continuous shifting between various hypotheses on the future. Is it better to build a new library or a theatre? Is it preferable to make it on the seaside, or to respect some

distance? Is it desirable to spend less or have a better building? Theoretically, architectural contests and competition seem to attest that it is possible to answer such questions way before the design's conceptual phase: accordingly, architecture should likely shape these answers more than the questions. Nevertheless, most times, even in competitions, there are many changes between the victory and the actual completion of the building (an extreme example is the *Piedmont Region Headquarters*, in Torino, which moved 5 kilometres away from the competition site). Most obviously, in all cases, such as the renovation of buildings or cities, or new complex or public buildings, or even smaller, private interventions, such variations are unavoidable and even predictable. The whole process then assumes a radical contingential nature (Deregibus, 2020b), in the sense that in every moment, everything can change so that the *whole* process could deviate – or rather, the entire system of the process is irritated. Rules can change, people and stakeholders – even unknown ones – can intervene, and accidents can reduce the budget or increase timings: all the project's supposed invariants can move (Deregibus & Giustiniano, 2019). In such a situation, architects' possibility to have a role depends on their ability to be significant, that is, to find the right questions more than the correct answers: but the modelling attitude only allows a rough definition of questions, being so concerned with answers.

Therefore, the usual way to face this indeterminacy is risk management, usually seen as project management's essence (Frohnhoefer, 2019). We cannot here discuss the whole theory: nevertheless, we will hint at the critique by Luhmann (1996), who stresses the risk/hazard distinction – where risk is dependent on someone's choice, while hazard is not. Risk management tries to assess risk sources, or rather, the possible known risk sources: this means that while the identifiable dangers are those that someone's decisions already changed into risk, other potential risk sources remain unnoticed. Indeed, the way hazard transforms into risk is vastly underestimated. Most management tends to hide the (ontological) possibility of failure by masking unwanted events using percentages – that is, with an apparent control over those events, something that immediately should recall the so-called Murphy's law (Bloch, 1977). The effect is that we manage the so-called *known knowns* – which is obvious: but such an approach cannot truly help against the unexpected – the *unknown unknowns* (Okashah & Goldwater, 1994). Again: risk management is not senseless and can be very useful – just as models. Only, it cannot overcome the idea of controlling the future and the approach toward an ideal project.

Another possibility is the participatory way of design, as the design thinking method exemplifies. As other methods, design thinking was born as an effective way of managing and innovating companies, industries, and processes (Martin, 2009; Brown, 2009). Then, architects borrowed this method, applying it in architectural design: but differences are obvious – the first is that doing a project is so complex that users' choices are always inducted (Hill, 2012). Therefore, such a

method's efficacy in architectural design can be high, at least in small contexts, but it cannot face complex processes or unexpected situations (Deregibus, 2021b). Moreover, the results will go toward a safe mediocrity, as compromise relies on reciprocal clearing – or, in other words, on a shared and diffused level of dissatisfaction. Therefore, architects would inevitably evolve from legislators to interpreters (Bauman, 1987), as the results will always be within the premises: within actants' prejudices and fetishes.

However, there exists another possibility: to skip the whole idea of ideal, going beyond the modelling approach by looking at design as a continuous management of the *radical contingency* (Deregibus, 2020b) of the process for exploiting the potential of the situation. "Radical contingency" means that everything can be different, since no element of the projects is fixed or indisputable: or rather, that considering some factors as fixed is always a choice and not a matter of fact. Such an approach does not look at the phases as they were a gradual approach to the result precisely because everything can revolutionise the project *at any time*. So better would be to develop a design approach flexible enough to question any project element, with the only precept of avoiding their *facticity* (Meillassoux, 2008). Like the Husserlian fetish, facticity is the tendency to give for granted the appearance of a phenomenon. An example could be the tendency (and temptation) of applying norms most slavishly, neglecting the fact that the norm is a distinction itself: so, there are endless things that do not break the rule, without at the same time reflecting its facticity (see Derrida, 2003). Another example could be the infatuation of architects for their first design, as it was the only possible one, even if many alternative designs could work: as any competition shows, many different projects answer the very same question with various shapes. Being strongly concerned with modelling, facticity fosters the opposition between the project and the events, forcing them to become consistent (Deregibus, 2020b). Even more, rarely this consistency can be compelled – even Frank Lloyd Wright had to give up the golden finishing of the Kaufmann house despite his immense influence: budget control won against aesthetics.

Thus, a more effective architectural design requires *renouncing the ideal*, accepting and even exploiting the fact that *there are many ideals*, depending on the moment and the changes. As the ideal always has a referent (with reference to something or someone), and the reference is contingent, then the ideal must also be contingent. Therefore, design must change from the construction of prescriptive models to a flexible, continuous act of shaping – we could say, "from walking to sailing" (Shrivastava & Persson, 2014).

Shaping the future

For passing from *ideal* to *ideals*, a *continuously variable ideal*, the design must develop coherently with the so-called potential of the contingency, instead of modelling the contingency and its future. Among all the plausible evolution of the contingency that can be foreseen or hypothesised (the futures-of-the-present), the "potential" is the development that seems *the most favourable one*, as the contingency shows a *propensity* toward it (Jullien, 2004). In other words, the potential is the best *future-of-the-present* merely because it has the highest possibility to become the *present-of-the-future* (the actual evolution of the present as it will be). At any moment, in a process, it is possible to "sense" this propensity – is the client more or less disposed to expend? Is there any social tension toward or against some buildings? Is there an inclination for implementing technological innovations? Anything can influence this propensity, and that's why it continuously varies: consequently, it cannot be forced nor modelled (Deregibus, 2020b). At the same time, design, other than following the stream, chasing the changes and trying to limit them, can influence them by using the project itself: or rather, precisely by evolving the project all through the process. In other words, *it is possible for design to continuously set inceptions of potential in the process*. Obviously, this capability comes at the price of renouncing the idea of an ideal starting concept to reach. Quite the opposite, it requires to move the ideal, even dramatically changing it when needed – that is, when the propensity of the situation goes against the previous ideal concept. Hence, instead of defining an initial model for an ideal architecture, the project happens together with the process, adapting itself to the ever-changing contingency while, at the same time, influencing it. Therefore, the project develops its strategic value by turning its weakness – its ontological indeterminacy – into its most effective resource (Deregibus, 2021b).

In the last four years, this approach has been studied and practised by the *Masterplan*, a research group of the Politecnico di Torino whose name intentionally refers to what usually is a document (a "masterplan") and changes it into a design process (De Rossi & Deregibus, 2020). At least three things of tactical design must be highlighted.

The first is the importance of time and timings. As the propensity may change at any moment, the project too must pass from the strict sequence of incremental phases to a continuous shaping, continually discussing previous steps along with the changes. The attitude should be *formative* (Pareyson, 1954), in the sense that the design should define its rules all along the process, revealing its validity at its end. Admittedly, the phases continue to exist from the practical

and normative perspectives. Still, the design attitude must overcome their division for anticipating possible accidents, or rather, as predicting is impossible, for making the project *flexible enough* to overcome accidents. Consequently, a swift, ideally continuous re-design is essential.

The second is the political value of such an attitude. In simpler processes, *spatialising* – or changing the requirements into spatial, architectural features – is essential not only for proposing solutions but also for understanding the client's deepest desire. And even if architects are not usually conscious of the tactical power of the project, they actually exploit it quite habitually. In more complex cases, spatialising the various stakeholders' positions can highlight their most genuine intentions and interests, as all actions affect space and spaces. In these situations, architects tend to use the project more to propose an image of the final building. Instead, they could exploit the tactical dimension of the project for influencing and even orienting the process. For example, for introducing the topic of quality of public space from the very beginning, they could suggest imaginaries or highlight less evident elements. Even better, they could use architectural solutions that can improve the quality of public space for spatialising *other* requirements: thus using the polyvalence of the space for incepting a character (e.g. the quality) into the project while "following the stream".

The third is the peculiar relation between design and form. As we have seen, traditional design is mainly concerned with the style of architecture: thus, the obsession with the shape. But accepting the contingent nature of the project clarifies that the result can be, at most, *conjectured*, not *decided*. This assumption could lead to a pretty frustrating consequence: the renounce of the importance of the form. It could seem, in other words, that any form fitting the process would be good enough (Carpo, 2017). Why spending energies and money for producing an architecturally relevant shape if the process could dramatically influence it? Better could seem to plan buildings as a result of the external suggestions, whatever could it result. This approach is much more widespread than it could appear: indeed, quite all the buildings' production works this way. But this cynical vision comes from the misunderstanding and underestimation of the tactical potential of the project. The form has its own meaning: on the one hand, it is the physical convergences of the different needs; but on the other, it goes beyond these instances, gaining an autonomy given by the fact that, *after* the process, its life will continue, alone (Moneo, 1989): the form itself, thus, becomes a need. Hence, exploiting the tactical and strategic dimensions of design does not exclude architecture's creative, formal dimension. Instead, it frees it from being self-referential (and therefore weak), as orienting the whole process allows the architect to shape the form *while* shaping its conditions of possibility. The shape continues to be the last referent of design: but in a tactical approach, instead of a single, ideal form, there will be several ideal ones. Instead of an abstract, pre-imposed aesthetic ideal, the ideal must rise all along the process: otherwise, the result will be a building, but not architecture.

Shaping utopias

History shows that the utopian concept weakened in the last century, shifting toward the nostalgic recollection of a past as legendary as false. At the same time, the negative view of the future, the dystopia, pervaded imaginaries (Bauman, 2017). This change follows the evolution of post-modernism, the gradual mistrust of the future, the so-called end of ideology (Bell, 1960) and the raising individualism that hamper a shared view of the world: to the point that, from being the shape of an ideal future, utopia became a way for violence (Popper, 1986). Again, the problem is the concept of *ideal*: utopia, or the expectations of a better future, has too often been the way for justifying even violent and extreme actions. All the ideologies of the last century relied on the premise of a better world, an ideal one indeed: and the same could be said for religious extremisms. Thus, the relation between utopia and traditional design is much stronger than it could appear, as *both aspire to define an ideal future*: we could even say that the conventional project continues to pursue utopias, as anachronistic and ineffective as it could be. However, the fall of utopias corresponds with the rising of dreams of a different kind: small-scale, minimalist utopias, whose horizon is not the ideal world but the individual's scale (Zoja, 2013). Such mini-utopias cannot but spread in our society, even if they rely on a (quite overoptimistic) irenic ethical ideal. In fact, the basic idea is that endless small actions can change the world step by step, no matter what they are aimed at: the individual utopias should ideally join somewhere, in an ideal world impossible to pre-determine, but that must be gradually discovered. Obviously, some trends can orient single thoughts, like the ecological utopia described by Callenbach (1975). Still, the difference is that this new version of utopias could likely avoid the totalitarian pretension of classical utopias reported by Popper. Now, it seems that these minimalistic actions could automatically produce a better future – that's the "protopia" concept (Kelly, 2016), indeed a quite problematic vision, not by chance coming from the wealthiest part of the world. Interestingly, just as the traditional utopias corresponded with the traditional design, these new minimalistic utopias match the tactical design. Only the ability to shape the future with a multi-idealistic approach is consistent with the mini-utopias, since it does not aim for a mere agreement between the stakeholders, but mutual reinforcement of the requirements.

Space constitutes the sole joining between the actors. Thus, a tactical design, instead of picturing an ontologically false future – the traditional utopias – can exploit the ever-changing potential of the situation for *designing toward that future*, shaping utopias all along any process.

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