



DETAILS. ARCHITECTURE SEEN IN SECTION

DETAILS, l'architettura vista in sezione workshop del corso di laurea magistrale in Architettura e Innovazione del Dipartimento di progettazione e pianificazione in ambienti complessi (Dppac) Iuav, organizzato dai proff. Umberto Trame e Marco Pogacnik.

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Introduction
to the study of detail
Marco Pogacnik

To avoid any possible misunderstanding I like to stress that architecture is not exhausted in the attention paid to details and I am afraid that, in secular terms, the detail is not even the place where the existence of God manifests itself. Why then dealing with an issue that the current director of the Biennale fought already twenty years ago dismissing it as a mere fetishistic exercise, an opinion perhaps still prevailing nowadays? Many concerns led us to pursue a research that promises to arouse much suspicion: a reflection on architectural language and its transformations from modernity to post-modernity, a passion for the built rather than an imagined architecture, the inconsistencies of a critical vocabulary inadequate to describe today's architecture and finally the idea that a school should participate in the debate on the great issues that effect the professional and intellectual life of architects.

The exhibition at the Biennale presents a semester long study developed by the undergraduate Iuav students together with a university research supported by a grant from Department of Architecture, Construction and Conservation (Dacc) Iuav. The aim was to describe the changes occurred in architecture during the last fifty years using a tool that could simultaneously highlight the formal, technological, building and structural aspects of these transformations. The choice that best satisfied this goal was to use the same 1:10 scale for all the drawings. The redesign of construction details offered a homogeneous series of documents which had comparable graphic layouts and the same scale,

thus facilitating comparative criticism which is essential to any interpretation. Our research task was therefore not only to define its own object, but also to 'invent' the documents to exercise on.

Among all the graphic tools available to architects (from conceptual sketch to rendering), the detail section is certainly the most regulated. The graphic conventions imposed on this type of graphical representation are such as to make it almost impossible for any form of 'fantasy' or individual 'creativity'. A detail in 1:10 scale is an operational tool, a pure construction drawing that must be absolutely unique in the content of its communication. If every artistic medium is characterized by ambiguity, polysemic character, rhetorical excess as the sudden minimalist silence, then the construction detail is the furthest thing from the art world. But art is also discipline, rigour, profound understanding of the fundamental language grammar one wants to use.

Entering a music school and walking along its corridors one is fascinated to hear the obsessive practice of young students required to rehearse a difficult score or the full range of musical scales. When we asked our students to redraw construction details of significant contemporary buildings we imagined them exercising like music scholars; performing scales and variations, obsessively repeating a passage until they would find the right notes without looking to the instrument. The didactic experience with the students confirms the usefulness of this approach and suggests to make it a customary educational practice.

The details drawn by the students have been grouped in three thematic sec-

tions: the Fundamentals, construction systems and enclosures along two sections of national character: Italian and Japanese.

Even if it is a bit outdated, I like to focus on the first one only, which is our interpretation of the constitutive elements of architectural language: column, frame and molding.

In this regard, I believe an architect should be as innovative as a linguist explaining that words are made up of vowels and consonants. Elements like lavatory, balcony, ramp did not seem adequate to our purpose which was to retrace the path of modernity from ancient tectonic (base-drum-frame) to new forms and articulations of space.

The 2008 installation created by Sejima - SANAA in Mies van der Rohe's Barcelona Pavilion is the most plastic representation of the critical issue we wanted to investigate. The acrylic panels used by Sejima are not framed nor tapering, they do not have a front or back, not an orientation nor they suggest gravity; on the contrary in his architecture Mies refers to all these elements even when he seems to subvert them. Nowadays it is often difficult to define a wall opening using the traditional term of 'door' or 'window' (it is not by chance that we generically call them 'openings'). These are lexical uncertainties that emphasize the transformations of our language.

A detail is mainly engaged in what the German theorists of the nineteenth century defined the Junktur. The term defines a construction joint (i.e. an expansion joint) but also the suture line that marks the intersection between horizontal floor planes and vertical façade planes, the line where the roof meets the perimeter wall, or a window opening is cut into the wall thickness. The details presented in the following

pages portray this elementary order.

As a counterpoint to the students' work there are the boards prepared by professional firms we consider internationally representative. Each office has been asked to submit a board with four significant details of their architecture and a brief statement explaining the significance and importance that details have in their design and creative strategies.

The offices' prompt response to our request makes us believe we have touched a sensitive point. Detail design is a mixed blessing for each architect following a project from concept to construction, it is an important viewpoint to look at the design process and the evolution of the construction site: to innovations such as BIM, Building Information Modelling, or to the establishment of design offices specialized in construction detailing and shop drawings. These transformations are affecting more and more a domain that Mario Carpo defined as the design authorship level. Is it good or bad if a project is increasingly becoming the result of collective work, sometimes even anonymous? Let us remember Adolf Loos' statement: Only a small part of the built environment belongs to Architecture, intended as Monumental Art. For everything else are worth the principles of good construction.

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