



# **NORDISK ARKITEKTURFORSKNING**

Nordic Journal of Architectural Research

**1-2015**

**THEME ISSUE  
EVERYDAY TECTONICS?**

## Nordic Journal of Architectural Research

ISSN: 1893–5281

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PGS ISESS Account no: 4190325-3, Postgirot Bank Sweden, SE 105 06 Stockholm

Published by SINTEF Academic Press

P O Box 124 Blindern, NO-0314 Oslo, Norway

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## THEME ISSUE

### EVERYDAY TECTONICS?

**MARIE FRIER HVEJSEL, ANNE BEIM, CHARLOTTE  
BUNDGAARD, ULRIK STYLSVIG MADSEN,  
MADELEINE GRANVIK, ANNI VARTOLA AND CLAUDIUS  
BECH-DANIELSEN**

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Most often 'everyday architecture' is considered as mundane and realized as part of the standardized building practice unaffected by the changes in architectural theory and criticism. This circumstance indeed also affects tectonic theory. In general the notion *tectonics* stems from geology, where it refers to the processes and properties of the Earth's crust. However, among architectural researches tectonics in architecture could be defined as «*the science or art of construction, both in relation to use and artistic design.*» Hence, the concept refers to that of uniting aesthetics and technique, conceiving construction as a spatial art form. Within architectural discourse thorough tectonic reflections are often considered as part of more advanced and high-end architecture that holds iconic status. There exist thus an increasing gap between the everyday building practice (commercial construction industry) that manages the realization of the majority of new constructions with an ever-shrinking involvement of architects, and a distinct theoretical attention towards the tectonic relation between architectural construction and meaning. This gap poses an increasing challenge to the quality of the built environment and to architecture as a discipline. Under the heading of 'Everyday Tectonics?' this special issue, which is a response to the open call for special issues posted on NJoAR's webpage, raises the question of how everyday architecture can be qualified by means of general tectonic considerations: How to address the pressing need for a

sustainable approach to architectural construction by tectonic means? How to tectonically deal with the increasing amount of aspects, technical systems and requirements, budget limitations, and construction technologies characterizing the general architectural practice? What is the future role of the architect in this matter, and how will it penetrate architectural education? What is the tectonics of the prefabricated house, the office block, the hospital etc.? How to apply new sustainable materials, technologies, construction methods, industries and means of fabrication in developing a tectonic approach applicable in an everyday context?

To provide a sense of dwelling: of being together, of joy, of contemplation, or even of being in love – is in our understanding the finest potential of architecture. By referring to the fundamental architectural task of the Greek, *tekton*, to unite aesthetics and technique, the development and application of tectonic knowledge is crucial in this matter as it forces the question of how we go about this task. Historically, the notion of tectonics has been applied as a critical and analytical means within architectural discourse describing the deep rooted meaning of the architectural work, an ‘honest’ approach to architectural construction and attributed the personification of the architect as a master builder. Consequently, the tectonic is often exemplified in unique, large-scale cultural works of architecture incorporating uniquely designed exposed structural elements and exceptional budgets. However, the critical architectural potential of the term tectonics reaches far beyond this general understanding and its established theoretical framework. It also reaches into areas of the everyday practice such as hospital architecture, energy renovation, low cost dwellings and the question of ‘the local’ as it can be studied in the five papers.

In his paper ‘*Renewal of post-war housing architecture*’, Claus Bech-Danielsen stresses the nature of this challenge by assessing Danish post-war housing architecture in relation to the concept of everyday tectonics. The massive developments of post-war housing architecture can be claimed to mark the evident emergence of the above mentioned gap between everyday practice and tectonic making in architecture, as these complexes were the result of an introduction of a highly industrialised construction process and a uniform understanding of the user needs. Bech-Danielsen’s paper discusses three different renovation approaches to these industrialised blocks and herein the need to attain a tectonic view at the original prefabricated ‘crane track’ construction in order to identify future architectural potentials.

Renovation is also the focal point in the second paper, ‘*Towards a tectonic approach*’, by Marie Frier Hvejsel, Poul Henning Kirkegaard and Sophie Bondgaard Mortensen. With this paper the three authors address

the impending architectural challenges related to energy renovation – in particular linked to the inevitable transformation caused by the additional layers of insulation that presently defines the construction techniques. By analyzing three historical examples; Adolf Loos' Villa Moller, Le Corbusier's Unité d'Habitation, and Frank Lloyd Wright's Johnson Wax Administration Building, chosen for their tectonic ability to exploit the technical 'principle' defining the building envelope also as an aesthetic 'gesture', the paper discusses the current architectural challenges related to energy renovation in a Danish context and the tectonic design method as an approach to these challenges in everyday architectural practice.

Michael U. Hensel's paper '*Thoughts and experiments en route to intensely local architectures*', exemplifies the need for the question of everyday tectonics to also penetrate architectural education. Hensel's paper examines what he calls 'intensely local architecture', discussing how everyday tectonics can potentially evolve from an in-depth understanding of and experimental approach to the local conditions. Hensel presents and analyses a series of small-scale experimental projects developed at The Scarcity and Creativity Studio, at the Oslo School of Architecture. Each in their own way, these projects – a bird observation shelter, a bathing platform, an urban event space etc. – open up a significant potential to discuss how an increased understanding of the local, herein site conditions, materials as well as craft traditions can inform the development of a locally specific everyday tectonics.

In the paper '*Tectonic vocabulary and materialization*' Marie Frier Hvejsel, Anne Beim and Charlotte Bundgaard seek to outline central challenges for future tectonic research related specifically to the Nordic context. The intention of the paper is to clad a discourse on the future of tectonic architectural research that addresses the conditions of everyday architectural practice. In this matter the paper focuses on the need to juxtapose theoretical studies, to bring the present vocabulary of the tectonic further, as well as to spur further practical experiments enabling theory to materialize in the everyday of the current practice.

Finally, in the paper '*Myth and ritual in the everyday tectonics of hospitals*' Tenna Doktor Olsen Tvedebrink is focusing on the everyday practice of hospital architecture, particularly focusing on the patient-eating environment. Through a re-reading of Marco Frascari's multi-sensual tectonic theories, the paper recalls the ethical role and task of the architect to help construct a happy everyday life for the users with the idea to offer an alternative perspective to the ethics of everyday. This alternative perspective provided by Frascari is simultaneously applied in a critical analysis of the present conditions of everyday hospital architecture exemplified in an examination of the patient-eating environment, hereby envisioning the need to develop an everyday tectonics that goes be-

yond engineering genius. Tvedebrink's paper is partly based on personal experiences some years ago, when she was hospitalized with her baby son who underwent a complicated surgery. The paper is thus an interesting example of a non-traditional and somehow subjective approach to a scientific paper. The chief-editors at *Nordic Journal of Architectural Research* welcome this kind of experimental papers and alternative ways of communicating research – as long as they include theoretical and methodical reflections as well.

We hope this theme-issue will form a point of departure for positioning, developing, and applying tectonic theory in future everyday practice of architecture. On the basis of the five papers it is possible to identify two prevailing challenges that need to be addressed in parallel: one being the theoretical question of how to learn from existing unique examples of tectonic quality and the second that of rooting and developing this knowledge through actual involvement with the current building industry. The possible strategies implied in the papers for addressing these challenges involve a repositioning of the question of the local ecology (including material resources, craft traditions and cultural characteristics), of sensuality, myth, ritual, and gesture in architecture. This not as a regressive nostalgic call for a reintroduction of old-fashioned craftsmanship or the master builder tradition as such, but as a proactive call for inventive ways of positioning these qualities as the founding principles of future industrial progress and digital developments within the building industry.

In this way the tectonic strategies of the future can embed an understanding of ecological, cultural, historical and technological aspects in the practises of our everyday lives.