Alessandro Biamonti

DESIGN & INTERIORS

Considerations on an evolving discipline between education and profession

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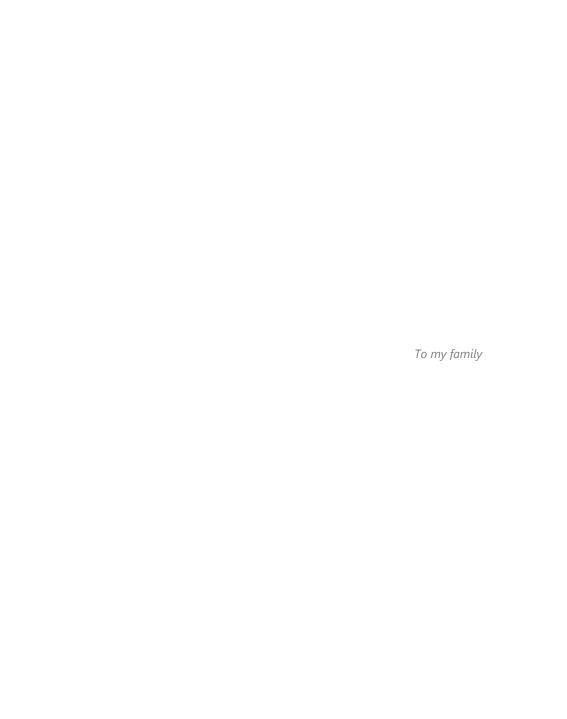
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This book is classified as handbook and was reviewed by Prof. Anna Anzani and Prof. Giovanna Piccinno.

Editor: Ruta Valusyte

To my family

On working as a designer, I imagined that someone had started to think that men can live for the sake of living and that, if they want, they can work – incidentally – to apprehend they are living through their body, psyche and sex

Ettore Sottsass

_Introduction_*Franco Bolelli*

I don't know if the statement "we are all designers" by Chris Anderson in his programmatic book *Makers*, is really the advanced present of reality or just a fantastic paradox (since paradoxes are often an elliptical form of reality), but a we have a certainty: Design is no longer and will never be more like before. This book unequivocally tells you.

Because Alessandro Biamonti knows perfectly well that in a world that has changed over the past twenty years more than in many previous centuries we can no longer plan and produce (and not even think, communicate, live) as we did just a short while ago. And he knows perfectly well that the wonderful story of Design is fine, the indispensable technical knowledge is fine, it's all fine what Interior Design is today, but in this era design can not remain within the perimeter of its traditional boundaries. No, it's not just about combining it with other inventive and expressive languages: it's about exploring and expanding the anthropological nature of design. When he says that the new challenge of design is the confrontation with an anthropological dimension, Alessandro is

enhancing design because he sees the power - as well as the need - to embrace ways of living and communicating, forms of perception and knowledge, technological innovation and biological nature, great visions and daily gestures, and in this way - through "his ability to give voice to hopes, ambitions, fears, desires of humans" - to embrace our entire existence. Because it is clear that the design has to express a pragmatic function of use, and aesthetic function and also an ethics: but too often we have forgotten that all these functions are but tributaries of a - superior and simple at the same time - function vital. We humans have profoundly changed - small children have gestures and cognitive patterns and a general perception of the world very different not only from their parents but also from those of their older brothers - the places we live and those we cross through have changed; So how could it not change the design that thinks, designs and realizes the essential housing dimension?

Alessandro here gives us a map of this change, gives us suggestions, provides us with paths and solutions: I would read it - and then read it again - with great care, what do you say?

0_Starting point

Interior design contains a sort of little curse in its name, as it is automatically associated to some form of "room".

Since some time, at least inside our research team, the design of the Interior has gone beyond the limits of the discipline – in the way subject is historically considered - confronting itself with new dimensions. Perhaps a new name would be advisable, but, maybe, it is the term "interior" in the sense of "living space" that has gained popularity in the last century.

First of all, from the physical point of view, by competing with a wider territorial dimension that in practice exceeds the limits of built architecture. This implies a wider view of the subject, which meets the new dynamics of contemporary society.

All this is possible within the present, inescapable dimension of contemporary global metropolis. An increasingly hybrid, dynamic, connected system that has to deal not only with space and physical issues, but also with the most demanding anthropological questions. The new challenge of the subject is this.

We are experiencing, therefore, an anthropological dimension that cannot be separated from technological evolution, but does consider it as part of the larger and inevitable human evolution. A dimension implying the concept of Habitat, "a set of conditions that allow the highest level of environmental comfort to a species", as a new benchmark. We are suggesting a revival of the subject, pushing it beyond its historical limits and helping assume a connective and qualified key role, in an ever changing, connected contemporary scenario. I like this, and I do not think there is an alternative choice.

1_The territory of design

Today, it is rather difficult to understand who is a designer and what he does.

In recent decades, but perhaps in the last two centuries, design has enjoyed a growing popularity. Popularity in part due to the combination of two important factors. On the one hand, design has been of enormous importance for the development of industrial production. In fact, the world of production had been able to convey its ideas of "well-being, modernity and progress", albeit with different cultural approaches, thanks to a solid alliance with the world of Design (creating a misunderstanding that we will discuss later).

On the other hand, perhaps more important, the effectiveness of design is probably due to its ability to give voice to the hopes, ambitions, desires, fears of human beings. This happens, and it has always happened in history even before someone called it Design, because design has always built scenarios in which ambitions, desires, fears, etc... come to life, take place and, sometimes, seek solutions. Scenarios consisting of rooms, environments, objects, graphics, words, that is to say, an experiential representation (not only physical

especially nowadays) of what technology allows us to do, allows us to produce.

In the last decades of our history, we had to deal more and more with the social consequences of the continuing development of communication systems. At first in consequence of the global spread of information technology and then owing to the rising of the Social Media phenomenon. This has allowed the creation of a new socio-economic scenario based mainly on access and on the sharing of information. Information, especially in its new and more and more intangible and volatile dimension, becomes the fulcrum of contemporary scenario. But it is a kind of information different from the one people had in the past, with crucial impacts on cities and industries, that is to say on all those stable elements of the territory which in the past centuries have allowed the growth of society, whose three-dimensional metaphor is represented by the concept of Metropolis. We use the term Metropolis because it no longer coincides with the old parameters of the largely urbanized Big Cities of the last century, today physically exceeded by putting together satellite towns, manufacturing districts, commuter areas, etc....

Today, this physical aggregation typical of the last century is linked to an extremely contemporary, cultural connection: every place, even the most remote one, is connected and part of the great, planetary, global network.

Therefore, the metropolis, when considered simply as physical evolution of the industrial cities of the last century, shows great difficulties to meet the changes in process. Difficulties that have an epiphenomenon in the raising of great issues peculiar to urban renewal, with a constructed reality unable to keep up with the new flows and therefore compelled to develop new ideas on the future of our metropolis in an age when information is the material giving them shape. A material increasingly elusive.

In the past, the great urban solutions had been searched in a historical secular dimension, an approach difficult to follow today and requiring new interpretations, new comparison tools, a new ability to listen and to empathize with the world. The old rules don't work.

Any programming and linear planning attempt has proved ineffective to contain urban developments, being it often difficult or impossible to foresee. Consequently today we have to go beyond the

compositional and typological limits of traditional architecture, which Modernity itself has somehow referred to.

We must move towards a new experimental approach, able to accept the challenges of contemporary world and to introduce an experiential dimension of places. The solutions that might not last long are useless. It is necessary, instead, a strategic approach able to develop temporary solutions to temporary problems. Reversible solutions that do not turn into new problems.

Contemporary sociologists explain how the Metropolis or generally a "high performing man-made environment" is the ideal place for a natural expression, formation and development of new anthropological models.

Perhaps this has already happened in ancient Babylon, in the Athens of Socrates, in imperial Rome, where our ancestors were given the opportunity to compare their anthropological dimension with important moments of technological evolution and thought.

As for our present post-modernity (or second modernity, and this suggests that we can also expect a third), we can take into consideration the clear and effective analysis of contemporary society

by Zygmunt Bauman, the source of some socio-anthropological models: the Flaneur, the Vagabond, the Tourist, the Player. Their apparent fragility shows an enormous capacity of penetration, endurance and resilience. They are new anthropological models with a high adaptability and reaction to the changing conditions of the contest.

This ability to analyze is nothing new for the humanity doctrines, since they have often given a profound contribution to understand society, particularly in the last centuries.

It suffices to think of the protagonists of the '800 and '900 novels such as *The Man of the Crowd* by Edgar Allan Poe or *Zazie dans le Metro* by Raymond Queneau, or movies such as *Metropolis* by Fritz Lang, *Blade Runner* by Ridley Scott or *Matrix* by the Wachowski Brothers, to realize the enduring key role played by humanity doctrines to understand the emerging anthropological phenomena of contemporary life.

These anthropological elements, as well as the iconographic references deriving from the humanities, have always been in a deep relationship with the world of design. This shows how serious is the

misunderstanding, generated by the Industrial Revolution, to consider design a technical discipline.

The debate throughout the last century on the adjective "industrial" associated to the term design has become worn out and dull. Those who dedicate their professional life to this activity know quite well that Design is a cultural phenomenon, part of the wider field of material culture.

An activity through which man, in history, has produced signs allowing us to understand today the ancient societies, through their use, costumes, pleasures, weaknesses. We know about disappeared peoples from what they have left during their lives. Vases, jewelry, tools, weapons, funerary objects make us understand how deep are the anthropological roots of the relationship between human beings and their living environment.

We all live in an ecosystem made of environments, objects and relationships. An ecosystem built by man as if it were an inevitable anthropological activity. An activity enabling men to go beyond themselves, beyond their limits, in a crescendo that, ideally, could lead us from the cave paintings, the first example of communication, to biotechnology, the last human expansion. A succession of scenarios

where humans in order to make appropriate use of the continuously developing technologies, felt they needed *something* someone began to call Design at a certain point.