



PLACES & THEMES of INTERIORS

Contemporary Research Worldwide

Interiors Studies
FrancoAngeli

Places & Themes of Interiors Contemporary Research Worldwide

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Politecnico di Milano
Dipartimento di Architettura e Pianificazione DIAP
Dipartimento di Industrial Design, Arti, Comunicazione e Moda INDACO
Dipartimento di Progettazione dell'Architettura DPA
Dottorato di Architettura degli Interni e Allestimento
Facoltà di Architettura Civile
Facoltà di Architettura e Società
Facoltà del Design

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Book and CD-Rom editorship: Imma Forino
Paging by: Cristina Bergo, Francesca Murialdo

Editors

Luca Basso Peressut, Imma Forino,
Gennaro Postiglione, Francesco Scullica

with

Mariam Alsaigh, Cristina Bergo,
Francesca muraldo, Gaetana Russo

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Foreword

Cesare Stevan, Coordinator of PhD in Interior Architecture and Exhibition Design, Politecnico di Milano (I)

The PhD Programme in Interior Architecture and Exhibition Design at the Politecnico di Milano was established in 1990, partly as a remedy to the peculiar slump into which the discipline of Interiors in Italy had fallen during the 1980s: the cultural domain of Urban Design and City Architecture and the golden era of made-in-Italy Furniture Design (including forefront experiences by Archizoom and Memphis) are non-limiting examples of excellence in the previous decade, and represent as many stimuli towards an abandonment of interior space design in favour of city or single-object design. The explicit objective was preventing the disappearance of a central discipline in the architectural project, with a deeply-rooted Italian tradition that is represented by such masters as Franco Albini, Carlo Scarpa, Ignazio Gardella, Carlo De Carli, Carlo Mollino, Gio Ponti, Leonardo Savioli, Vittoriano Viganò, among others. With this objective in mind, a group of Italian Interior Architecture scholars undertook the creation of a school of excellence: the PhD in Interior Architecture and Exhibition Design, held at the Politecnico di Milano.

The main purposes of the school were, and still are, the creation of a specific consciousness of the historic critical and theoretical tradition of Interiors, stimulated by studying the works of the masters and investigating the disciplinary scientific production, together with processing an adequate historical-critic individual speculation, which is the contribution of each Doctoral Candidate to the enrichment of the existing critical literature. Basic education and research is followed by the preparation of the Doctoral Thesis.

This operative tradition also encompasses the research activity carried out by Doctoral Candidates of cycle 22. Unlike previous activities, that would primarily look to historical-critical investigations on past production, this research focused on contemporaneity. The present volume collects the offspring of a task that began in January 2007 at the Laboratory of the PhD programme in Interior Architecture and Exhibition Design. Throughout the first 18 months of the programme, a research activity was carried out that

included investigating and mapping current experimentations and theoretical efforts in the field of Interior Architecture at the main universities and research and excellence institutions worldwide.

The keys through this investigation, that is, the criteria for sorting the most relevant case studies from such an ample context, were the Domestic, Exhibit and Retail areas. These three disciplinary fields are significant in their definition within the disciplinary sphere of Interiors, and allow on the other hand an immediate perception of the avant-gardes that are proposed by contemporaneity. The objective of this research is to work out a global vision about the evolution of Interior Architecture, in its direction and momentum, followed by further and specific inspections as required by each of the three fields and spotted in the different national realities. These tasks are integrated by promoting the constitution of a permanent network of experts from international research centres, operating both in the spheres of education and professional practice and involved in theoretical and/or applied research. Such a forum is needed for the constitution of partnerships that are able to move in a perspective of international scenarios and cooperation, and are aimed at dodging risks of self-reference but also, and above all, at educating new generations to ample sharing on a global-scale.

The first synthesising moment of the work accomplished so far is represented by the international INTERIORS FORUM WORLD Conference 2008. PLACES & THEMES OF INTERIORS: CONTEMPORARY RESEARCH WORLDWIDE, hosted at the Politecnico di Milano, October 1-3, 2008, whose contributions are herein collected.

The Convention is an indispensable opportunity for direct confrontation on the state of the art in Interiors, as emerged from investigations by the Doctoral Candidates, and for stressing the significance of the human dimensions even in scientific relationships, according to a strong tradition in Interior Architecture that sets the person, with his/her humanity, at the centre of the project action. For three days, critical, theoretical and project experimentations will constitute the discussion panel, with the purpose of checking for the presence of trends and capturing local realities underneath global contexts, orientations and any unsatisfactory states in the discipline.

Living between Exhibit, Retail and Domestic

Luca Basso Peressut, Imma Forino, Gennaro Postiglione, Francesco Scullica,
Politecnico di Milano (I)

The research activity carried out by the Doctoral Students in Interior Architecture and Exhibition Design at the Politecnico di Milano, starting from January 2007, concerned the work in progress in the Interior Architecture field at the most prominent universities and research institutions worldwide, as witnessed by this volume and the corresponding convention, and originated from the desire of inserting their basic education and individual researches into an ample context, which may gauge itself against the global dimension of contemporary reality.

First and foremost, the investigation exposed the state of fragmentation in which the scientific community that gathers around disciplines related to Interiors lingers: a sort of archipelago of isolated monads, or at most clustered according to linguistic or territorial homogeneities, with relatively few relationships among themselves. A preliminary task of critical recognition of the state of the research highlighted then the emersion of some themes that expose a deeply social character in this discipline, so tightly connected to the everyday individual and collective lives; in the last fifteen years, this reality has been enduring fast and profound transformations, which inevitably recirculate the traditional acquisitions of the project culture in Interiors.

On one side, we can observe how new technologies have been playing an ever-growing role in the elaboration of the design process, not only as far as possible solutions are concerned, but rather as new ways for defining conceptual themes and modalities, and delving deep into the contents and related forms thereof, so as to define new usage scenarios. All this is especially apparent in the scattered communication processes related to techniques and ways for exhibiting; this sector is strongly expanding in metropolitan and «advanced» areas, as a component of business and cultural functions, in retails, in expos, as well as museums and temporary exhibitions.

On the other hand, we are faced with the eternal issue of the «man's house» and its deep significance for the existence and quality of life. The living emergence that affects extended regions all over the world prompts the

subject of living as the focus of a common reflection, although in different modes and measures, both in developing and so-called «Western block» countries. To everybody a home still appears as an utopia that is pretty far from coming true, even in more opulent nations (with the possible exception of Northern European countries, and partially Northern American areas); now more than ever, it looks like the discipline of Interiors is being stimulated to supply new answers that keep into account all cultural and economical constrains of the individual geographical realities.

The issue of sustainably solution emerged, as strictly connected with the previous two, representing the most constraining element when we look towards the future, yet at the same time also constituting a stimulus to renew studies and investigations on local living and building traditions (which marked a certain architectural streak, mostly in Italy, throughout the Sixties and Seventies) and the enormous wealth of specific and meta-design solutions that they encompass. Besides these emergencies, we were also able to detect the existence of a flourishing theoretical speculation activity, which keeps ostensibly aloof from the events of real life to refer exclusively to the world of ideas. We are dealing with studies and researches whose investigation object is the discipline, in its three declination proposed by the research that was accomplished throughout the PhD programme and by the convention (that is, Domestic, Retail and Exhibition), as well as its rules and developments.

Particularly in the exhibition sector, and partly in the retail domain, we can observe an hybridisation as imposing itself even more stronger, or even a subjection of Interiors to Performing Arts, as an offspring of a cultural hegemony that the world of Arts currently owns with respect to the world of Architecture. On one hand, these disciplinary transits enrich our reflection hints, and open our vision toward different horizons, but on the other hand they run the risk of merging the specificity of Interior Design into that of different operational domains, with a consequent weakening and a looming total eclipse of identities. Certainly, the Art domain is not the only one bordering with Interiors. Social and Psychological Sciences, as well as Economic Sciences, respectively represent as many opportunities for hybridisation or inter-disciplinary hegemony. Synthetically, we can maintain the establishment in recent years of a concept of operative knowledge and modalities that move by following networking strategies and favour inter-disciplinary connections.

From the design point of view, this multi-scale and multi-disciplinary Interior connotation prompts for issues of intervention articulation, which call for an involvement of ever-growing competences that must cooperate in adjusting the architecture of spaces, installation technologies, communication

systems (whether it is business, cultural or informational communication), to the users of living and to the audiences that attend the places where exhibitions are held; this will require a constant tuning of the relationship between each element and the interior environment of the individual portion (room, shop, hall, etc.) and to the general encasing represented by the building. Such a range of issues may find its tools for reflection and its design experiences in an audience of researchers and scholars that is getting more and more ample and correlated.

It is not a coincidence that, within the research programme that was carried out in the first phase of PhD, the mapping task was immediately integrated by the project of a web platform that could be able to serve as an interexchange lieu for worldwide research. Indeed, such a Forum was permanently aimed at scholars, researchers and all those who deal with design practice-theory and are affiliated to research institutions and universities, in order to function as a shared archive. The database should include material (protected by copyrights), and aims at becoming an indispensable reference site for the development of research on Interiors worldwide.

The international and inter-disciplinary foundation of the research lies in the keywords that emerge both from the first sounding step elaborated by the researchers-doctoral students, and the feedback represented by the papers that reached the International Call promoted by the “Places & Themes of Contemporary. Interior Research Worldwide” conference, which drive on one side to a geographic widening, and on the other side to a cultural broadening of disciplinary inspection. The InteriorsForumWorld conference 2008 was summoned in order to stimulate a direct contribution to the investigation themes that occupied the PhD Programme. Following the Call, approximately 200 abstracts were gathered and winnowed by a double-blind review process that led to the redaction of a list of about 150 authors for as many potential papers. Upon delivery, the papers were in turn subjected to a further revision process, again on a double-blind basis, which allowed for the identification of the interventions to be featured at the convention (21 speakers) and included in the attached publication, as well as a selection of the other contributions for the CD that comes with the book. Such a decision is justified by the value of several of the delivered manuscripts: to prevent dispersion of the scientific works of a number of scholars, we choose to gather all the same the best of the contributions that were not selected for the presentation and edit them in a digital publication, which accompanies the printed material and represents somehow an ideal extension of it.

I. Exhibit

Some trends in exhibition design

Luca Basso Peressut, Politecnico di Milano (I)

Of all interior architecture disciplines, exhibition design is certainly the less constrainable in terms of exact thematic and operational boundaries. Complex and cross-cutting, multi- and infra-disciplinary, in recent years the theory and practice of *ex-position* widened its scope of action, from the limited sphere of museums and temporary exhibitions to encompass the whole ample phenomenology of high-access and permeable public spaces that characterise our current metropolitan way of life.

Interexchange and mobility areas (stations, airports, metros, terminals), innovative leisure spaces (mediatheques, performing art centres, multiplex theatres), major shopping centres (shopping malls, galleries, mega-multi-stores), urban areas where temporary events are staged (concerts, parties, sports events), represent the new intervention fields of exhibition design.

Exhibitions in contemporary reality affect multiple typologies and functionalities, and reverberate into a condition of communicative hyper-diffusion that involves and embraces the concept of *collective interior*, defined as a system of the city's closed and open spaces. These spaces qualify by the different activities and the various possible ways of usage of information, and often appear as architecturally interexchangeable (museums are excellent examples of the current trend in public architecture to the interiorisation of the urban environment, within a city that is made up of buildings that in turn individually surrogate the totality of the city itself). Here, appliances, furnishings and exhibits establish themselves for limited periods, accomplish their task of message mediators, redefine meanings, produce density and depth, spatiality and environmental quality, thus creating conditions for showing, staging, presenting, offering: affirming then, according to Mies' principles, the «intensification of our life» by exercising expositive communication.

Whether it is exhibitions, installations, sceneries, urban furnishings, these interventions sew up the tradition of architectural interior appliances to the current (and future) conditions of the contemporary city's shaping project, and to the dynamics that stage the persona as active subject of associative

life. Nowadays the expositive space is comparable to a total theatre, an active lieu where crossings, paths and sequences convert spectators-visitors into participating or even leading actors by exploring, in a more or less orderly fashion, the exhibited objects. Such a recital may tune in to the arrangement of the expositive pattern, or alternatively may try to capture speech fragments according to a fully contemporary a-methodological significance for accessing knowledge. Between *experience* and *interpretation* (N. Serota), that is to say, between emotion and rationality of the cognitive process, each exhibition is a discovery process in which the multiplicity of contents and subjects dealt unfolds via the execution of appropriate devices that take part in shaping the *architecture of exhibiting*, namely the construction of spaces, forms, and at the same time of textual structures, narrations or more subtle evocations of concepts and knowings. Carried out in museums or for other purposes, be that culture, entertainment, promotion or sale, exhibitions are recognisably «complex artifices», to be defined by a concurrence of techniques and modalities, depending on the group of objectives and communication strategies, which are connected both to the cultural offer and to the production and business market.

Unlike architectural design (in a strict definition), the activities of exhibition design involve many more *deliberative subjects*: from the client to the trustee/manager, to the furnishing creator, to the marketing, communication, graphic, multimedia, sound and lighting design experts, all of them aimed at coordinating the contents with the exhibition's physical arrangement (spaces, pathways, furnishings). All of these are dominated by the double directional figure including the trustee (exhibition deviser, museologist, museum director) and the planner (architect or designer), who play a strategic role in the formalisation of the whole.

Moreover, whereas in architecture the communicative content is implicit and subtended in the composition language, as an expression of the architect's wisdom and the *Zeitgeist* to which the work belongs (thus decipherable only by those who are able to capture its metaphoric and symbolic valences), in exhibitions this content is explicit, displayed indeed by the montage of the communicative sequence that is proper of each single *mise en scène*: it is therefore a discourse that is clearly enunciated on a subject, expungeable from the exhibition's title, from the museum section, from the theatre music score whose scenery it realises, from the action of cinematographic «visual deceptions» on the filming location, from the brand that is advertised in an exposition or a showroom, and so on. The circularity of experiences and solutions, and consequently the techniques and shapes for displaying participate in a contamination among different