4. 2003-2023. An Interior Design Story. Roots, Themes, and Evolutions of the First *Interior Design* Degree Program in Italy

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4.1. Preliminary Reflections for a Philology of *Interior Design* at Politecnico di Milano

The history and development of design as a discipline within the Italian academic landscape, starting from the establishment of the first Bachelor's Degree in *Industrial Design* at Politecnico di Milano, form the foundation of the extensive philological reconstruction undertaken by the *Design Philology* project. The narratives within this historical reconstruction are manifold and, above all, interconnected through a dense system of interdisciplinary relationships, intrinsic to the discipline of design and its presence within a polytechnic context.

Within the complex network of histories, themes, and key figures that have accompanied the evolution of design on multiple levels – from education to research, from its relationship with the professional world to international collaborations with other universities – *Interior Design* has played a central role from the very beginning in asserting the discipline's autonomy and its multifaceted expansion. With the establishment of the *Interior Design* Degree program in 2003 – alongside the

programs in *Product*, *Communication*, and *Fashion Design* – the independent disciplinary identity of interior design was defined for the first time in Italy. This marked a strategic moment in shaping the key characteristics of Italian design, placing the theme of livability in inhabited spaces at its core. The narrative proposed here seeks to retrace some key moments and themes that have shaped the evolution of an ever-changing and hyper-dynamic concept of *inhabiting*. This concept refers to a deep and complex relationship between users and space, extending beyond domesticity. The study draws from various documentary sources, including interviews, publications, doctoral theses, seminars, conferences, exhibitions, and educational experiences to achieve this.

To better structure the content derived from the collected documentation, this reconstruction is inspired by the narrative framework of *The Contemporary Interior Landscape*, edited by Giampiero Bosoni, Agnese Rebaglio, and Francesco Scullica. Published in 2012, the book represented a significant attempt to synthesize the complex landscape of the *Interior Design* Degree program by juxtaposing different methodologies, themes, approaches, and visions, all of which contribute to the educational path offered by the faculty's program.

Collected materials and stories have been organized around three main interpretative keys. The first focuses on the evolution and maturation of the interior design discipline within Politecnico di Milano, particularly its relationship with architecture. The second key highlights the comparison between theories and methods, which over the years has materialized through numerous spaces for exchange and debate, such as publications, conferences, exhibitions, and events. Finally, the third key emphasizes the recognition of Interior Design as an *adaptive* discipline, capable of integrating cross-disciplinary and transdisciplinary approaches – from architecture to psychology, from sociology to emerging technologies – creating synergies that effectively address the complex challenges of our time (Anzani, 2020; Anzani & Scullica, 2022).

4.2. Evolution and Development of Interior Design as a Discipline at Politecnico di Milano: Relationships, Key Figures, and Disciplinary Foundations

Interior design at Politecnico di Milano has had a complex genesis, shaped by significant figures, faculty members, researchers, and designers, as well as by the various university reforms and the establishment of academic programs.

Key roots in the field of interior design can be traced to exceptional personalities such as Gio Ponti – who was, in fact, the first professor of *Interior Architecture* in the 1930s – alongside Franco Albini, Carlo De Carli, Alberto Rosselli, Vittoriano Viganò, and, more recently, Achille Castiglioni, particularly known for his renowned exhibition designs. These pioneers played a decisive role in shaping the field of interior design, moving beyond a purely *decorative* or *stylistic* approach and instead connecting it to a broader and deeper design research process, fully aligned with Italian design culture.

Several key milestones contributed significantly to the birth and development of the *Interior Design* Degree program. The first significant step was the introduction of the *Industrial Design and Furnishing* specialization within the Faculty of Architecture at Politecnico di Milano during the 1983-1984 academic year. This initiative was unique within the university and became one of the foundational pillars upon which the entire design education system was later built.

From this experience emerged, first, the *Industrial Design* Degree program, launched in the 1993-1994 academic year, and subsequently, the Faculty of Design – initially called the Third Faculty of Architecture – established in 2000-2001, later becoming the current School of Design ↴. This academic path became a convergence point for different experiences and activities when Milan underwent a profound transformation – from an industrial city to a post-industrial one. In this context, design, fashion, and communication were taking on an increasingly central role, not only in economic terms but also as a driving force for social and cultural change.

4.2.1 Interior Design as a *Bridge* Discipline

Another crucial milestone was the establishment of the PhD program in *Interior Architecture and Furnishing*, later redefined with the term *Exhibition Design* (DRAIA). Initiated in the late 1980s, this doctoral program was initially positioned within the field of architecture. It was promoted and managed by the Department of Architectural Design at Politecnico di Milano, in collaboration with the Department of Urban Design at the University of Naples Federico II. However, thanks to the vision of Cesare Stevan – long-time coordinator of the PhD program and a prominent figure at Politecnico, also serving as dean of the Faculty of Architecture for many years – the program gradually opened up to dialogue with the Faculty of Design and the INDACO Department (Department of Design, Communication Arts, and Fashion) between the late 1990s and early 2000s 2↘.

2. Dipartimento INDACO. Event→

This integration process fostered a stronger connection between the world of design and architectural disciplines, broadening the PhD program's scope and enriching future professionals' education. In particular, even in its final phase, the program provided a significant platform for dialogue between two different interior design visions. The first, rooted in architecture, followed the methodological and instrumental approach typical of the discipline, conceiving interior spaces as part of a broader architectural composition.

The second vision, emerging through the influence of figures like Andrea Branzi and later Luciano Crespi and Silvia Piardi, emphasized the independence of interior design from architectural scale and logic. This perspective redefined interiors as an autonomous expression of a design culture and vision.

At the core of this second approach lies the recognition that, especially since the late 1960s, industrial design – and design in general – has played an increasingly influential role in shaping spaces, ultimately defining their very identity. One can consider the contributions of Riccardo Dalisi or Andrea Branzi himself, who explored the relationship between design and craftsmanship. This shift is evident in the *exhibition-like* approach to spatial design, where themes such as the temporality and reversibility of design solutions take center stage.

[…] il XXI secolo è segnato dal passaggio da una Civiltà Architettonica a una Civiltà Merceologica (o Oggettuale) dove il concetto di Città non corrisponde a un insieme di *scatole architettoniche*, ma a un flusso di prodotti, informazioni, servizi e scambi che attraversano lo sterminato territorio della *globalizzazione* sia del mercato reale che di quello mediatico. Quella nata dalla Terza Rivoluzione Industriale è una società che non opera più attraverso progetti *definitivi, forti* e *concentrati,* ma attraverso dispositivi *flessibili*, *deboli* e *diffusi*, che le permettono di adeguarsi al continuo mutare dei mercati, alle trasformazioni tecnologiche e agli assetti interni di una società *riformista*, cioè di una società che non possiede più un modello unico di riferimento, ma deve costantemente adeguarsi, per rispondere a equilibri politici e sociali locali, in continuo cambiamento. È dunque nel quadro di queste trasformazioni storiche che la questione degli *interni* oggi si pone; non come un'area di competenza di un piccolo settore professionale, ma come una attività che svolge un ruolo fondamentale nel funzionamento complessivo della città e della società, nell'epoca della globalizzazione. (Branzi, 2012, p. 9)

[Author's translation: […] the 21st century is marked by the transition from an *Architectural Civilization to a Commodity* (or *Object-Based*) *Civilization*, where the concept of the City no longer corresponds to a collection of *architectural* boxes but rather to a flow of products, information, services, and exchanges that traverse the vast landscape of globalization – both in the real market and in the media sphere. The society born out of the Third Industrial Revolution no longer operates through definitive, strong, and concentrated projects but through flexible, weak, and distributed mechanisms that allow it to adapt to the constant shifts of markets, technological transformations, and the internal structures of a reformist society – one that no longer possesses a single, stable reference model but must continually adjust to respond to ever-changing political and social balances. (Branzi, 2012, p. 9)]

Furthermore, interior design has established itself as a *bridge discipline* connecting fields often considered distant from traditional architecture, such as communication, cinema, fashion, consum-

er sociology, and economic-management sciences, among others. This interdisciplinary dialogue has helped redefine interior spaces not just as physical environments but as a crossroads of languages and competencies, reflecting a broader and more complex vision of design.

A key aspect to consider, as highlighted by Luisa Collina (2024), is the significant contribution of the field of *Technological Culture of Design* to the identity of interior design. This contribution has been evident in education and scientific-theoretical research, forming a particularly dynamic area of study at Politecnico di Milano. Luisa Collina (2024) emphasizes how this field of study «sits at the intersection between architecture and design, playing a crucial role in interior design». From this perspective, themes such as the industrialization of architecture, system- and component-based design approaches, an interest in seriality and repetition in design elements, and reflections on the temporality of certain spatial solutions have all represented a valuable intellectual legacy. This heritage was built through the work of key figures such as Adriana Baglioni, Fabrizio Schiaffonati, Alberto Seassaro 3↘, and Antonio Scoccimarro. More recently, this approach has been further developed by scholars and designers like Luciano Crespi, Cesira Macchia, Silvia Piardi, and Giuliano Simonelli, who have continued to explore and expand these themes (Collina, 2024). This legacy has solidified an approach to interior design that integrates technological and cultural dimensions, providing theoretical and methodological tools to address complex, interdisciplinary projects.

3. Alberto Seassaro. The demiurge.
Narrative→

4.2.2 The Bachelor's Degree in *Interior Design* and the Master's Degree in *Interior Design*

The establishment of the Faculty of Design in 2000 marked a decisive step in affirming *design* as a discipline structured into various fields, including interior and spatial design, alongside already well-established sectors such as product, communication, and fashion design.

This process led to the creation of the first degree program in Italy entirely dedicated to *Interior Design*. Starting from the 1999-2000 academic year, the Interior Design address (*orientamento*) – alongside *Product*, *Communication*, and *Fashion* – was introduced, initially with a three-year bachelor's degree and later with a master's degree, in line with the university system reform introduced by the Berlinguer law 4↘.

The introduction of these academic programs helped consolidate the importance of a design culture in Italy, which, since the 1990s, has played a crucial role in establishing a leading design and production identity – particularly in Milan – at both national and international levels. This leadership fueled a growing interest in the field, significantly increasing the number of aspiring university students in interior design. At the same time, the educational offering expanded with the launch of new courses dedicated to interior design, not only in universities but also in numerous private institutes and schools, primarily in Milan but also in other Italian cities.

This phenomenon further strengthened the role of interior design in the country's cultural and professional landscape.

The effort to maintain a constructive dialogue between the two main approaches to interior and spatial design – the one rooted in architectural tradition and the one more oriented toward design – found a significant ground for discussion in the PhD program in *Interior Architecture* at Politecnico di Milano. At the educational level, this effort initially led to creating a Degree program in *Interior Architecture* (Class 4) within the Faculty of Design. However, this experience was short-lived due to the difficulty of defining a common foundation for training new designers (Collina, 2024; Crespi, 2024; Piardi, 2024).

While the PhD program allowed for a prolonged theoretical and speculative discussion of these two perspectives, the undergraduate program struggled to reconcile architectural roots with the new demands of design and the challenges posed by contemporary contexts, characterized by evolving behaviors, spaces, and technologies.

However, with the closure of the PhD in *Interior Architecture* and *Exhibition Design* in 2016 (after its 27th cycle), research on interior design topics at the post-graduate level became integrated into two distinct doctoral programs at Politecnico di Milano: the PhD in *Design* within the Department of Design and the PhD in *Architectural Urban Interior Design* within the Department of Architecture and Urban Studies (DASTU).

The academic pathway dedicated to interior design has since continued within the School of Design, alongside *Product Design*, *Communication Design*, and *Fashion Design* programs. It has been structured at the undergraduate level (with the Bachelor's Degree in *Interior*

Design) and the Master's level (originally *Interior Design*, now *Interior and Spatial Design*). Currently, the *Interior Design* program is one of the most significant in terms of student and faculty numbers, both nationally and internationally, and is distinguished by the relevance of its activities and achievements.

This success has also been made possible by a new conception of the role of university faculty members, developed within the Faculty – now School – of Design. Unlike the traditional Italian academic model, which often favored highly esteemed individual figures with little inclination for collaboration, the School of Design has fostered a more diverse and dynamic community. Faculty members have shown intellectual proactiveness and cohesion, working toward shared goals.

This collaborative spirit has contributed to the consolidation and evolution of the educational offering and research in interior design.

Among the professors who have played a significant role in shaping the academic program over the years are Andrea Branzi, Alberto Seassaro, Arturo Dell'Acqua Bellavitis, Giampiero Bosoni, Luisa Collina, Luciano Crespi, Michele De Lucchi, Pierluigi Nicolin, Silvia Piardi, Giacomo Rizzi, Pierparide Vidari, and Paola Vidulli, along with Gabriella Zuco. These names represent only some of the most influential figures within a faculty characterized by a diverse scientific and methodological richness, which has made a decisive contribution to the development of interior design as a field of study and practice.

4.3. Theories and Methods in Comparison: Publications, Conferences, Exhibitions, Events

The comparison between approaches initially unfolds on a typological level. Unlike the architectural tradition, which primarily focuses on specific *classical* space typologies – such as residential, institutional, and cultural spaces – the School of Design has expanded its scope.

This broadening has been driven by attention to the transformations introduced by the post-industrial era, such as the phenomenon of repurposing spaces and the evolving ways people inhabit and expe-

rience environments. These changes have challenged the two dominant poles of industrial society – residential and workspaces (offices and factories) – by integrating new needs and uses related to contemporary society.

Alongside traditional spaces such as public buildings, schools, libraries, and theaters, new significant contexts have emerged, including entertainment and retail spaces. In many cases, the hybridization of all these typologies (residential, workspaces, museums, healthcare and wellness spaces, and entertainment venues) has led to an innovative rethinking of spatial relationships (Scullica & Elgani, 2019).

From the early years, these new approaches have drawn from interdisciplinary influences, as previously mentioned, and have been reflected in teaching and research, particularly within the INDACO department. Among the most significant topics explored during this period were hospitality and contract design, fields that, thanks to the contributions of faculty members such as Luciano Crespi, Luisa Collina, and Francesco Scullica, provided opportunities for concrete experimentation (Collina *et al*., 2002; Scullica, 2008). Notably, workshops commissioned by leading industry brands allowed for the integration of academic research with professional demands. At the same time, retail design developed as another key area, thanks to contributions from faculty members like Valeria Iannilli and Giulia Gerosa.

4.3.1 Events and Exhibitions, an Accelerator of Interactions

A key element has been the constant dialogue between educational activities and Milan's design events system. One of the first opportunities for this synergy was the participation of the School of Design in the *Dining Design* exhibition/event, promoted by COSMIT and held at the Fiera di Milano during the 2004 *Salone del Mobile*.

Designed and curated by Adam D. Tihany, the exhibition focused on dining as an experience, anticipating a sector that would later see significant development. The event featured designers such as Aldo Cibic, Makio Hasuike, and Luca Scacchetti, as well as significant industry companies and several prominent international design schools, in-

5. *Dining Design*. Event→

cluding the School of Design at Politecnico di Milano 5↘.

Another early event, which would be repeated in the following years, was the *NO.MADE* exhibition, held at the then BaseB 1↘

during the 2006 *Salone del Mobile*. The exhibition showcased projects developed by students of the *Final Synthesis* workshop of the Master's Degree in *Interior Design*, coordinated by Francesco Scullica, Silvia Girardi, and Francesca Murialdo. The exhibition was designed explicitly for the disused spaces of the venue, with the idea of a new *colonization* of what was essentially a possible *urban void* or *residual space*, envisioned as an ideal container for innovative spatial devices (temporary housing cells, gathering areas, modular and flexible elements, sustainable, low-cost) 6↘.

In the following years, numerous exhibitions and events linked educational research with the city's spaces (and the city itself as a subject of dialogue) and the world of design, production, and communication. The theme of temporary hospitality was first experimented with in the *La casa dei designers* project, which saw collaboration between Politecnico di Milano's Design System and Esterni during *Milan Design Week*, between 2006 and 2007.

The project involved setting up a reception area for international designers arriving in Milan, with the possibility of hosting meetings and events. In the 2006 edition, the De Carli room at the Bovisa Campus was transformed by Esterni into a temporary hostel, with spaces for sleeping, as well as for breakfast, meeting, and resting 7↘.

Ten years later, a similar initiative was proposed with the two editions of *A letto con il Design* (2016, 2017), a temporary hospitality project born from the collaboration of Studio Ghigos (Davide Crippa and Barbara di Prete, professors in the *Interior Design* Degree program), in collaboration with the School and Department of Design, POLI.design, MarkersHub, and Ideas Bit Factory.

The *pop-up* hostel (Crippa, 2017), set up in a former factory in the Bovisa area, hosted 40 international designers who stayed there while also exhibiting their creations. The space was conceived as an area dedicated to workshops, talks, and other events related to *Design Week*.

Another example of exhibitions as an experimental expression of design within the *Interior Design* program is the exhibitions curated by Michele De Lucchi, such as *L'Estetica della Miseria*, set up at Palazzo Litta during the 2015 *Design Week*. The exhibition featured 16 scenographic projects on the theme of *eroded* material, created by students

in their Master's course laboratory, led by De Lucchi and Andrea Branzi 8↘. In the following years, the exhibitions involving student models guided by De Lucchi were included in the *Design Variations* program curated by MoscaPartners during Milan's design weeks. The most recent of these was the *Reforming Future* exhibition, held in 2023 among the ruins of the Istituto Marchiondi Spagliardi by Vittoriano Viganò 9↘.

In parallel with events and exhibitions of broader significance, over the years there have been numerous exhibitions dedicated to the results of design workshops, which have always represented a fundamental moment of sharing and enrichment for the degree program and the school (considering that practice is widespread across all degree programs). These exhibitions are generally set up in the spaces of the Durando Campus, home of the School of Design, thanks to the support of the *Set – Design Lab* (*Laboratorio Allestimenti*), the instrumental workshop of the School that historically has the closest connection with the Interior Design program, also due to the figure of Paolo Padova, in whose memory the lab is now entitled 10↘.

A new role for interior and urban space designers has emerged, one called to intervene in a *city of events* where interior and exterior merge. This evolution requires an alternative approach to traditional design, «toward an aesthetics of the momentary» (Crippa & Di Prete, 2011). As Luciano Crespi (2024) notes, «questioning how a space for events should be means reflecting on its history, but also asking questions about the social and symbolic meaning of such spaces, their ability to evoke emotions and create connections, as Baudelaire defined them».

Crespi also observes that the open spaces in contemporary cities must be redeveloped and repurposed. With the loss of the specialization that characterized them in the past, these spaces now require increasing flexibility, able to accommodate a growing variety of functions: exhibitions, performances, markets, parties, and even political events. This evolution reflects a profound change in how urban spaces are conceived and lived in contemporary society.

4.3.2 Fields of Scientific Dialogue: Conferences and Publications

In addition to educational experiences, a significant role in defining interior design has been played by contributions from researchers and

professors at the School of Design and the Department of Design, presented at prominent conferences, many of which were organized by the field of interior architecture itself. Among these, the first (2005) and second (2007) 2↘ *National Interior Architecture Conferences*, organized at IUAV, stand out, focusing on the role of interiors in the design of existing structures. On these occasions, numerous faculty members and researchers from the faculty contributed, enriching the debate with innovative and interdisciplinary perspectives (Cornoldi, 2005, 2007).

In particular, at the second conference, the second session – as recalled by Luciano Crespi (2024) – was titled *Interior Design in the Recovery and Reuse of the Built Heritage* and opened with the introductory presentation by Andrea Branzi (at the time, the head of the *Interior Design* Degree program), *Spaces for Culture and the Culture of Spaces*. This was a significant recognition of Branzi's figure and the role of ICAR 13 professors (including Luca Guerrini and Francesco Scullica) in building the *Interior Design* Degree program. In the same session, Luciano Crespi and Agnese Rebaglio also presented *The Reuse of Urban Interiors. Temporary Setups for the City of Events*, bringing into the field of interiors, for one of the first times, the need to consider the revitalization of urban open spaces through a design approach that is staged, reversible, and temporary (Crespi, 2024).

At the same time, a significant body of editorial production developed in connection with the first ten years since the foundation of the *Interior Design* Degree program and its corresponding UDReD (*Research and Teaching Unit in Interior Design*) in the INDACO Department. Among the most important publications is the critical anthology *Design degli interni*, edited by Luca Guerrini (2006), one of the first attempts to systematize a theoretical and practical approach to space design.

Figure 1.
a. Cover of the volume *Design degli interni*, edited by Luca Guerrini, FrancoAngeli, 2006.
b. Table of contents of the volume *Design degli interni*, edited by Luca Guerrini, FrancoAngeli, 2006.
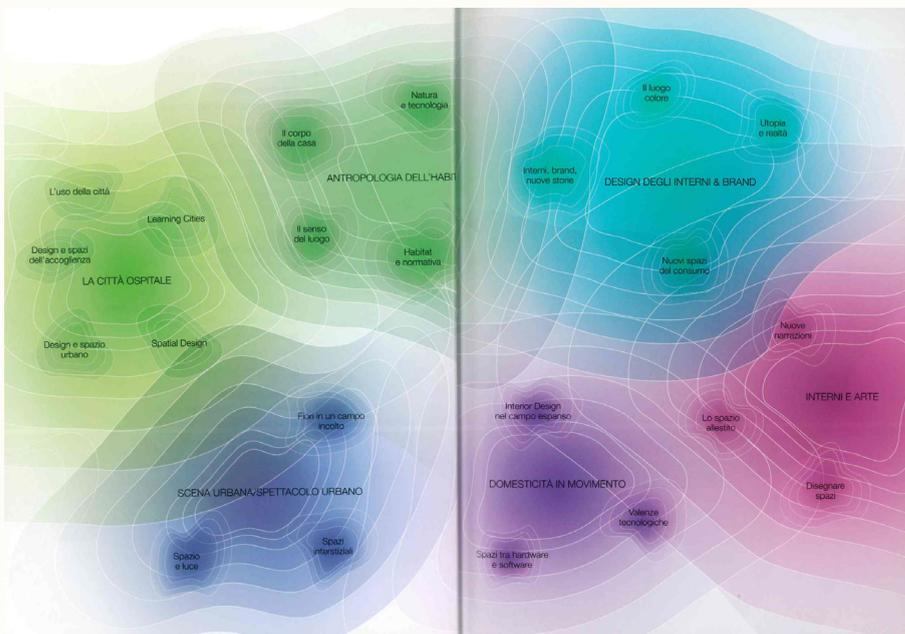
Figure 2.
a. Front and back cover of the volume *Contemporary Interior Landscape*,
edited by Giampiero Bosoni, Agnese Rebaglio, and Francesco Scullica,
Abitare, 2012.
b. Thematic map of the *Interior Design* programme, graphic design by
Francesco Dondina, 2012.

This was followed by numerous texts, essays, and articles written by prominent figures such as Giampiero Bosoni (1997, 2002, 2006, 2008), Andrea Branzi (2006, 2012, 2022), Luciano Crespi (2005, 2006, 2008, 2011, 2018), Silvia Piardi (2002, 2004), and Giovanna Piccinno (2008; Piccinno & Lega, 2012), who contributed to defining a rich and articulated editorial landscape.

The publication *The Contemporary Interior Landscape* was a significant milestone, edited by Giampiero Bosoni, Agnese Rebaglio, and Francesco Scullica (2012). This book represents a critical endpoint for an initial review of the concept of interior, reinterpreted in a contemporary way and in dialogue with a more dynamic and diverse design culture compared to traditional architectural paradigms. The publication proposed a meaningful synthesis of the complex panorama of the *Interior Design* Degree program, addressing several strategic areas that still intersect with the discipline today: from the repurposing of disused spaces to the design of living environments in all its forms – culture, work, collective activities, and events – from both temporary and museum setups to communication and urban landscape design. Through multiple testimonies from faculty members, the book compared methodologies, themes, approaches, and visions, which, although diverse, together characterize the study program.

Subsequently, the publication edited by Giovanna Piccinno, titled *Dualism Manifesto. Design Challenges for the XXI Century* (2023) com-

Figure 3.
Cover of the book *Dualism Manifesto. Design Challenges for the XXI Century* curated by Giovanna Piccinno, Maggioli, 2023.
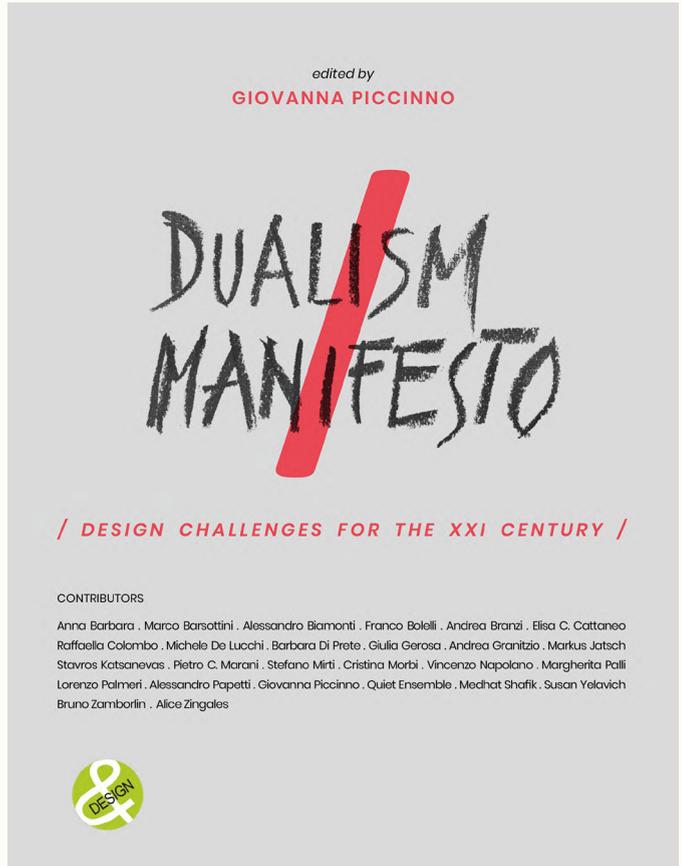
piles experimental teaching and learning outcomes from the period when Piccinno coordinated the Master's Degree program, which took the new name of *Interior and Spatial Design* from her initiative (2016-2021). The book highlights the interdisciplinary nature of spatial design, exploring its boundaries and possible futures through a series of dualistic oppositions such as space/time, local/global, nature/artifice, science/art, technological and humanistic knowledge. Contributions from some of the faculty members of the *Interior Design* Degree program (such as Piccinno herself, Alessandro Biamonti, Andrea Branzi, Anna Barbara, Pietro Marani, Barbara di Prete, Michele De Lucchi, Giulia Gerosa, and Alice Zingales) in dialogue with international figures from academia and professional fields demonstrate how the spatial designer's competencies expand and integrate across the multiscale steps of design, defining the strategic role of the *direction* of the design process with a humanistic, polytechnic, and interdisciplinary vision.

Finally, a significant body of scientific and editorial production has consolidated in recent years within the LEM (*Design of Environments, Landscape, and Mobility*) section of the Department of Design, leading to the publication of numerous collective volumes in the Design International series by FrancoAngeli. These volumes, edited by several members of the section and the *Interior Design* Degree program, offer an updated and diversified overview that well represents the multi-disciplinarity and complexity of contemporary interior/spatial design studies and applied projects within the LEM section and the *Interior Design* Degree program (Camocini & Fassi, 2017; Migliore, 2019; Scullica & Elgani, 2019; Lecce, 2020; Gramegna, 2021; Barbara & Gramegna, 2022; Camocini & Dominoni, 2022; Dominoni & Scullica, 2022; Barbara & Perliss, 2023; Bosoni & Cecchi, 2023; Gerosa & Manciaracina, 2023; Caratti & Galluzzo, 2024; Cordera & Trocchianesi, 2024; Elgani & Monchiero, 2024).

4.4 Defining Themes: *Plural* Approaches of an *Adaptive* Discipline

Reflecting on the defining themes of interior design, both for the Bachelor's and Master's Degree programs, a significant contribution to the theoretical and methodological foundation of the program has

been made by Silvia Piardi – appointed head of the pre-council of the newly established *Interior Design* program, shortly before Andrea Branzi was appointed as president. In several crucial presentations 3↘, Piardi outlined some of the key directions for the program (Piardi, 2024). Among these, the emphasis on the autonomy of spatial design stands out, independent from a direct dependence on either architecture or product design.

In particular, Piardi highlights the ability of interior design to evolve in relation to contemporary living culture, including strategies to make already built spaces habitable, with the support of new technologies on various scales, both *hard* and *soft*.

Particularly innovative was the introduction of the concept of *parasitic design* (Bosoni, 2008), understood as a design that attaches to an existing resource to enhance and transform it, making it functional and meaningful.

In these notes, Piardi also emphasized the practical dimension of Interior Design, which ranges from complex interventions on interiors to the design of furniture and urban furnishings, always maintaining a focus on the quality of living in all its facets: from the home to the workplace, from study spaces to travel.

On the educational front, a clear pathway had been outlined for both the undergraduate and graduate degrees. For the Bachelor's Degree, the presented guidelines emphasized the importance of knowledge related to the functional distribution of activities, control of micro-environmental and sensory factors, selection of materials and execution techniques for interior interventions and setups, and the economic management of the interventions themselves.

Also notable is the attention given to historical, cultural, semiological, anthropological, and psychological aspects, all fundamental for designing spaces that promote human interaction. For the Master's Degree, the focus shifted to developing advanced critical and design skills. Among these, understanding contemporary culture, the ability to produce and communicate images, and the capacity to develop complex projects that engage with the challenges and opportunities of contemporary life. Ultimately, the outlined path aims to train well-rounded professionals capable of addressing spatial design with vision, sensitivity, and interdisciplinary competence (Piardi, 2024).

These are the guiding themes through which the debate within our community has evolved over the years, shaping the program's identity (both undergraduate and graduate), as can be seen today.

In the theoretical debate, particularly in the cultural, thematic, and methodological evolution toward *innovative* approaches to spatial design, design has significantly benefited from the contribution of figures with diverse academic and professional backgrounds. This has allowed for the delineation and consolidation over time of distinct and specific areas of interest (Piardi, 2024).

The relationship with art has also been crucial, continuing to be a key element in differentiating the identity and approach of interior design from more *decorative* and *superficial* conceptions found in many international contexts, both in educational and professional settings.

A significant role has also been played by the exhibition and staging dimension, thanks to the contribution of prominent professors such as Giampiero Bosoni, Alessandro Colombo, Ico Migliore, Franco Origoni, Raffaella Trocchianesi, and Pierparide Vidari. In line with the growing demands for temporality, reversibility, and sustainability, the exhibition approach has become a distinctive aspect of interior design.

Similarly, concerning some of the *new Italian design* frameworks, all those *soft-sensory* components (light, color, decor, scent, microclimate) have emerged as increasingly decisive elements in the design of space with its experiential use (Barbara, 2011, 2012).

Finally, the connection with economic and managerial components has strengthened over time, as seen in the contract sector and space-product field. A significant example is represented by the processes of *brand extension*, which range from products to environments, services, and experiences, consolidating the link with strategic design and the product system.

Alongside these themes, there has been a growing awareness of the potential social impacts of spatial design with an approach that goes beyond mere redesign/reconfiguration of spaces.

Significant theoretical influences in this regard come from the works of Ezio Manzini (2015, 2021), founder of the DESIS network (Design for Social Innovation and Sustainability), which relate the themes of *social and economic sustainability* and the role of participation (co-design) with spatial/service design, to promote social

innovation processes. In this context, design confirms its role as a discipline capable of addressing crucial issues for social groups and individuals. This approach has gained significant traction in research activities and teaching, particularly among faculty members of the Design Department affiliated with the POLIMI DESIS Lab, such as Davide Fassi, Anna Meroni, and Laura Galluzzo (Interior Design CCS).

Research that has directly involved students in significant research projects at both the national and international levels, such as Human Cities/SMOTIES (Fassi *et al*., 2024) and CampUS (winner of the *Compasso D'Oro ADI* in 2018) (Fassi *et al*., 2016), whose legacy has contributed to the *Off Campus* experiences at the university, which today involve several professors from the Design Department and the *Interior Design* program 11↘ 12↘.

In recent years, within the Master's Degree in *Interior and Spatial Design*, the curriculum has further expanded to provide students with skills related to themes such as *flexible dwelling*, *minimal living*, and the concept of *living in motion*. These thematic areas, rooted in naval and nautical design, have become integral to the curriculum, contributing to an expanded interior design view.

11. *CampUS – 5x1000 POLISOCIAL AWARD 2014 CAMPUS*. Event→

12. *Off Campus NoLo*. Event→

These themes, and others that continue to form, grow, and flourish over time, thrive in a cultural environment, that of Milan and Politecnico, which fosters exchanges and connections, sometimes unexpected, between different fields. The contamination and collaboration between traditionally separate disciplines constitute the key to innovation (Piardi, 2024).

Alongside these themes, the program also explores particularly strategic and distinctive areas. One is the so-called *strategy of the unfinished*, introduced by Luciano Crespi (2020, 2023). This approach proposes a vision of design that concerns the reuse of both interior and exterior spaces, respecting the original characteristics of the environments and moving beyond traditional aesthetic logics. It is an *open* and constantly evolving mode, leaving room for future use possibilities. In this approach, the beauty of a context or place is reinterpreted in light of new sensibilities, but also in response to an epochal transformation we are undergoing, marked by global crises and challenges such as those related to health, humanitarian issues, geopolitics, eco-

nomics, or severe environmental emergencies due to climate change. These phenomena, including war conflicts, forced migrations, growing inequalities, and poverty, are crucial issues that interior design cannot ignore, responding with innovative and conscious solutions.

As emphasized by Arturo Dell'Acqua (2024), valuing interior design represents a «strategic lever to extend the life of architectural artifacts, given that each European citizen generates 1.8 tons of construction waste annually related to demolitions of the built environment».

Another fundamental aspect concerns the role of new technologies, mainly digital technologies, which profoundly change how we live and interact with spaces, reflecting new behaviors and social dynamics. However, despite these transformations, the typical dialogue of Italian design with artistic and craft dimensions remains central, continuing to constitute an essential cultural and expressive resource in interior design.

In the context of new technologies, artificial intelligence (AI) is an emerging challenge in interior design. This area is beginning to be integrated not only in certain design courses and other areas as an object of use and experimentation. The introduction of AI raises a series of crucial questions about the relationship between ideation and execution of the project, as well as the very identity of the design, not limited to interior design alone. The main questions concern how AI might affect creativity and the designer's role and how it could transform design, production, and enjoyment of spaces.

4.5 Conclusions

This long and articulated excursus has been developed with the aim of providing a narrative foundation for a path that, over more than twenty years, has succeeded in establishing the *Interior Design* Degree program (both Bachelor's and Master's) with its own authority and identity, distinguishing it from similar programs at architecture schools.

Its placement within the School of Design has stimulated a process of revising the very notion of *interior architecture*, *freeing* interior design from the constraints imposed by the idea that it was a discipline solely focused on furnishing spaces, often with lesser *relevance*

compared to architecture, and supporting its growing value as a new cultural and professional reality, destined to engage with entirely new phenomena present in contemporary society.

It is therefore possible to conclude that revisiting history remains a fundamental tool for facing the challenges posed by the mutability and complexity of future scenarios, as well as for evaluating with greater criticality the developments that have followed. In this regard, it may be desirable to find moments of greater disciplinary cohesion around the design of interiors through opportunities for discussion (conferences), research groups, and even updated events and communication tools.

In the near future, the *Interior Design* program will have to face significant technological, behavioral, environmental, and even sociological transformations characterizing an era of great change.

The system of spaces-furnishings-services-experiences will need to play an increasingly important role – not only in terms of staging – and explicitly define its role in shaping new life scenarios for individuals and society, promoting the social and ethical values that form the basis of the contemporary concept of design (in a broad sense), and which are now more than ever critical for designing the future.

Acknowledgements

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