

Alberto Seassaro. The demiurge

DESIGN PHILOLOGY. THE MASTERS SERIES

Edited by

Antonella Penati, Agnese Rebaglio and Paola Bertola

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Antonella Penati, Agnese Rebaglio and Paola Bertola

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***Morfemi* by Alberto Seassaro**



Photo by Fausto Brevi, 2010

“ Il progetto, se non
ci salva, ci consola.

[Design, if it does not save us, at least consoles us.]

ALBERTO SEASSARO

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Preface

One becomes an architect through education, learning, and the decisive role played by the transmission of experience from those who have already traveled certain paths. Likewise, there are figures who are born architects, meaning those who answer to both nuances contained in the term itself. *Archí*(ἀρχή) indicates command or primacy, such as *chief* or *first*; *Téktōn* (τέκτων) designates a *builder, craftsman, maker*, or someone engaged in action and operative practice.

What everyone recognizes in Alberto Seassaro, hidden among the eclectic and layered micro and macro-histories that mark his personal story, is the rare ability to construct a trajectory aimed at delineating the disciplinary autonomy of the field of design from the structurally foundational and historically structuring realm of architecture. This path reached its highest expression with the founding of the Faculty of Design and, subsequently, with the promotion and introduction, within the arduous magma of ministerial frameworks, of the Scientific Disciplinary Sector of Design: a development with far-reaching consequences for academic careers and for the future of entire generations of designers in the most contemporary senses that the term now evokes.

Over the course of his academic career Alberto Seassaro enacted the most meaningful gesture a professor can offer: placing at the service of the community his intelligence, undeniable foresight, and boundless talent and intuition.

If today the center of gravity of education and research in the world of Milanese design possesses a universal reach – understood not in a rhetorical or static sense but as dynamic, fluid, national, and international – we owe this in large part to him: an intellectual moving between consensus and dissent who, in *looking far ahead*, made of it a life philosophy and, on that basis, contributed to the growth, by reflection, of the Politecnico di Milano. His wide and diverse interests – devoted to design and experimentation, to practice and research, to building production, but also to art and craftsmanship, to future technologies, coupled with an attraction to history – animated his work throughout his life, directing him, some years later, toward new horizons, those of design, which at that time were likely already taking shape.

Starting from his interests in technology and building production, prefabrication, art, craftsmanship, and experimentation – passions that led him to realize works in industrialized construction and interior architecture and, between 1962 and 1969, to conduct theoretical and applied research in form, in the visual arts, in industrial design, and in architecture – his commitment progressively and decisively shifted toward industrial design.

In this scenario he held numerous institutional roles, including President of the five-year degree program in *Industrial Design* from 1994 to 2003; President of the POLI.design Consortium from 1999 to 2002; and Dean of the Faculty of Design from 2000 to 2010, the first Faculty of Design in Italy, both chronologically and in scale. It was precisely at the outset of this extraordinary growth – rare and exceptional within the Italian academic landscape – that our paths crossed, straddling the late 1980s and early 1990s. The setting for this encounter: the spaces of the Department, technological in spirit, then bearing the unforgettable name PPPE (an unpronounceable yet easily memorized acronym for *Programmazione, Progettazione e Produzione Edilizia* [Programming, Design, and Building Production]), later retitled Di.Tec (Industrial Design and Architectural Technology), also intended to give visibility and substance to the area of Design.

This was a world progressively assuming an ever more significant and strategic role within the University – one that figures such as Alberto helped to shape day by day. In those cramped yet extraordinarily rich spaces – teeming with people, papers, notes, documents, ideas, and visions – the first national degree course in Design was born, thanks to him. It was the first seed and fragment of what today constitutes the Politecnico di Milano's *Design System*, a place of excellence in teaching, research, and experimentation, an international model of reference.

Precisely in a period such as the present, which underscores the importance of contamination among bodies of knowledge and the evident heteronomous *status* that the worlds of architecture and design claim and display, the figure of Alberto Seassaro is all the more current and operationally modern. His thesis, focused on the project of form and concerned with the synaesthesia of the arts, signaled a step beyond the more customary disciplines of design and composition, telling much about his interest in interdisciplinarity and the interrelation of competences.

A student of Architecture already projected toward a sense of institution and eager to grasp its problems, Alberto was first and foremost interested in the relationships between teaching and research, between Faculty and Department – then Institute – between research for teaching and research for professional practice. These themes, deeply nourished by the impulses of the student movement, would later reappear, with greater vigor, in his roles as lecturer and, even more, as Dean.

Likewise, Seassaro as artist and professional reveals his chief quality: curiosity and a hunger for experimentation. His artistic training at Brera, his encounters with the Milanese avant-gardes, his focus on form and on the theme of light, his political engagement, also and precisely as an artist, all converged. On the professional front, his projects are distinguished by having addressed the articulated scales of design: from furnishings to interiors to architecture.

At the heart of this colorful, multidirectional, eccentric picture emerges the genesis of design as a discipline at Politecnico di Milano: an embryo that, evolving, would spread throughout Italy. Fundamental in this context was the role of Architectural Technology within the then Faculty of Architecture, nourished by environments devoted to innova-

tion and change. The entire technological area, the technical cultures, and the Department of Technology played a primary role in the birth of design. Alberto undoubtedly succeeded in stitching together his artistic experience with his professional one, shared with Giuseppe Ciribini, Marcello Grisotti, Raffaella Crespi, Giacomo Scarpini, and stimulated at the Department of Programmazione, Progettazione e Produzione Edilizia [Programming, Design, and Building Production] of the Politecnico di Milano by central figures such as Marco Zanuso, Raffaella Crespi, Achille Castiglioni, and later Tomás Maldonado, Ezio Manzini, and Francesco Trabucco, each bringing vibrant experience to the field.

Equally unforgettable and strategic, for the success of the large-scale program he had in mind, was the contribution of longstanding friends of the Department who, through dialogue and often tenacious, passionate debate, contributed directly and indirectly to the evolution and birth of *a new discipline*, the result of a fusion of knowledge and competences that each personality brought to bear. Antonio Scoccimarro, then Head of Department, Guido Nardi, Bianca and Maria Bottero, Fabrizio Schiaffonati, Valerio Di Battista, Claudio Molinari: all central figures in enabling the Department to open itself to this new undertaking and in positioning Alberto as the standard-bearer of that crusade.

Similarly, in other Italian Schools of Architecture, it would once again be the technological component to nourish the first experiences of design within the university, unfolding along the entire length of the country.

The stages Alberto Seassaro lived through in conceiving and creating the multiform cultural platforms that saw him as a protagonist in research and teaching culminated in his role as Dean of a Faculty – today a School – that still bears, incisively, the imprint he formulated and shaped. From these succinct traits Seassaro emerges as a *demi-urge* who makes experimentation his operative instrument: an activity straddling artistic, interior, and design projects, where the imagination of inhabitable space becomes a system through coherent control of the technological aspects of architecture.

His work in education and research interprets, through a specific approach, a civic and social role, valorizing his recognized capacity to embrace innovative contents of the art of design and translate

them into institutional form. For this reason, and not for this alone, as Pro-Rector Vicario – but even more as an architect who had the good fortune to know him – I feel compelled to thank Alberto Seassaro for what he managed to conceive and realize for the Politecnico di Milano and for its steady evolution and international standing in the field of design and the applied arts.

Therefore, on behalf of the Rectorate and its progressive and institutional spirit, I sense both the pleasure and the duty to extend to him, Professor Emeritus and devotee of the discipline, a tribute for the effort by which he anticipated themes, dynamics, and timings that are undeniably current today: the alchemy and fusion of disciplines as an antidote to the too-often exhibited self-referentiality of architecture and design, opening the doors to a global and universal concept of the applied arts in which Milanese design stands as a genuine world pioneer among innovation, tradition, and new horizons.

In this light, the features of Alberto Seassaro emerge as those of a heteronomous intellectual, bearer of an idea situated between architecture and design: a dream of then, now transformed into a domain of vivid resonance and contemporary relevance.

Emilio Faroldi

**Department of Architecture, Built Environment and Construction
Engineering, Politecnico di Milano**

Polyhedric and Polytechnic

Alessandro Deserti

Department of Design, Politecnico di Milano

My first encounter with Alberto Seassaro coincided with one of those moments when a group's energy and capabilities exceed the sum of its parts. I remember a smoky room, the kind that still existed in the 1990s, in which a small cluster of people occupied the little space left free by cupboards and tables on which stacks of documents were heaped, sheets with notes and corrections, and diagrams crowded with boxes, arrows, and connections. Earlier still, I recall an equally crammed basement where, when I was still a student, I worked with him on mounting an exhibition that later led to my thesis, for which Alberto Seassaro was supervisor and which allowed me to begin to know him in a way decidedly more intimate and profound than is usual in the relationship between teacher and graduating students.

Perhaps Italian design could have a mythology of the basement just as Silicon Valley has that of the garage, because I later remember another basement, in a condominium in Via D'Ovidio that the Politecnico di Milano had rented to cope with the shortage of space, which represented the very first, tiny expansion of the project we subsequently called *Design System* of Politecnico di Milano: the POLI.design

Consortium, the Faculty (now School) of Design, and the Department of Design. Having been there from the beginning, I am certain that the overall scheme was not preordained and that we operated within an emergent model, seizing every opportunity and exploiting all available resources rather than formulating a strategic plan that foresaw the construction of all the system's components. Yet what was then Alberto Seassaro's vision, an intuition to be cultivated, has today become a solid presence, grown to the point of becoming one of the three souls of Politecnico di Milano and internationally recognized.

This growth was grounded in Alberto Seassaro's contagious direction, in his ability to hold together people with diverse and complementary competences and temperaments, but also in the grind of procedures, of equilibria and boundaries to be renegotiated continuously. When I think back to those early years, endless working days come to mind, in which up to a certain point I took part while simultaneously pursuing professional practice and leading a double working life that absorbed many of my weekends and holiday periods. I recall, for example, the many times we climbed over the gates to enter Politecnico di Milano on the weekend, or a summer spent with Flaviano Celaschi drafting a major development plan for laboratory teaching and the supporting infrastructures that had to be delivered at the beginning of September, which perhaps trained me for the deadlines of European research projects that would arrive years later, always scheduled at the beginning of September. It is an experience that has taken on a *heroic* dimension in the memories of almost all the members of the group, which perhaps today would deserve a critical rereading in the light of a necessary balance between professional and private life.

It was not a linear path, free of errors, second thoughts, setbacks, and recoveries. When Alberto Seassaro decided to take on the challenge of building the educational pathways in design at Politecnico di Milano, resources were extremely scarce. Alberto Seassaro was able to recognize and bring together differences and complementarities, gathering colleagues, engaging diverse competences and dispositions, opening internal and external dialogues, finding the resources needed to enlarge the group, and working tenaciously on the construction and then the consolidation, also in formal terms, of the system's various components. Along this path, inspiring and uneven as all

great challenges are, Alberto Seassaro managed to hold together visions and constraints, imagination and rules, the urgency of innovation and the patience of the institution.

His *polyhedric* nature has always struck me. His interests, which the contributions in this volume portray in their variety and complexity and which ranged from architecture to lighting design; from the exploration of form poised between art, architecture, and design, to the technology of building components; through to the relationship between the construction industry and the building supply chains, functioned as hinges capable of opening dialogues and creating connections. This disposition toward transversality made the *Design System* intrinsically open and relational, sustaining its vitality over time and welding the founder's multifacetedness to the polytechnic character of the project.

His distinguishing trait, what, in my view, made him most interesting, was his fertile contradictions. Alberto Seassaro was, at the same time, an anarchist, a visionary, and a man of institutions. The anarchist who refuses frames that are too tight and opens passages; the visionary who recognizes opportunities and trajectories for imagining the new and reimagining what already exists; the institutional man who accepts the responsibility to give stable form to novelties, so that they may endure beyond individuals and cycles, without, however, relinquishing the drive toward the new. In this sense, Alberto Seassaro was multifaceted but also profoundly *polytechnic*: not only a leading figure of an institution, but the engine of a project that, perhaps for the first time, truly integrated the different components of knowledge that characterize Politecnico di Milano. From this perspective, the *Design System* is the result of an orchestration capable of holding together diverse elements according to a principle of dynamic coherence: education, research, technology transfer, relations with the productive and cultural fabric, internationalization.

The wager, by no means a foregone one, was that design could be cultivated as an academic discipline without losing its project-oriented vocation and its capacity to engage the world. I do not know whether we have succeeded: design is a young discipline and the challenge demands sustained commitment. Yet I believe that the best answer, thirty years on, is the one we can read in the numbers,

in the reputation, in the projects, and in the people who have grown within this community and who today are part of it.

This publication, curated with sensitivity by Antonella Penati, Agnese Rebaglio, and Paola Bertola, conveys the figure of Alberto Seassaro in all his richness and complexity through a plurality of voices and formats. From critical profiles to the *quasi-biography*, from interviews to cameos, from documents to thematic reconstructions, it offers a framework consistent with the person and with the project to which he contributed in a decisive way. It is neither a hagiographic account nor a celebration of what was accomplished, but rather a critical reappraisal of a trajectory, in which to reflect on the choices made, on the goals achieved, and also on the challenges encountered and the ways in which they were addressed, so as to look to future prospects with renewed energy and capacity for innovation.

The opening sections, devoted to the *heteronomous intellectual* and to the fertile relationship between architecture and design, frame his cultural posture and capture the core of the formation and evolution of his thought. The pages on *where it all began* take the reader back to the Politecnico di Milano of experimentation, with that blend of vision and pragmatism that made it possible to reach unforeseen results. The interview with Ugo La Pietra and the cameos, including the recollections by Giancarlo Consonni, Bianca Bottero, and Luigi Bistagnino, add emotional depth and lateral perspectives.

The section devoted to Alberto Seassaro's artistic and design experiments after his graduation and before the full unfolding of his academic career, featuring contributions by Antonella Penati, who highlights the artistic practice that shaped his training, and by Giovanni Baule, who identifies in his *visual notations* Seassaro's most distinctive mode of expression, together with essays such as *Doing Everything, Doing It Artfully* (C.vo) by Beppe Finessi and *Imagining the Living Space Between Experimentation and System* (C.vo) by Giampiero Bosoni, sheds clear light on the hallmark of his presence on boundaries and at intersections. It is a thread we then find again, in the folds of technological culture, in the premises to the birth of the *Design System*: the social role of education and research, the capacity to catalyze energies and ideas, as recalled by Fabrizio Schiaffonati and Luciano Crespi, and the vivid images of Cristina Tonelli's *penguin* and *bats*, which

render the human dimension and the tenacity required to manage an institutional construction site in the making.

Building the institution to open up to emerging content is perhaps the core of Alberto Seassaro's legacy. Building institutions is, in fact, a cultural project: it means translating innovative contents into shared and durable forms, giving learning and research processes structures capable of supporting complexity and future developments. In the contributions in this section – from reflections on teaching for design to the documents and testimonies of transformation, through to the in-depth examinations of visual notations, cultural heritage, and lighting design (*Each Student is in their own Way a Master*) – one recognizes a way of thinking that sees *bricolage* as the path to creating resilient systems. It is a theme that I later, somewhat by chance, encountered again in research on social innovation, where *bricolage*, as an approach tied to structural resource scarcity, has been widely investigated.

Looking today at the *Design System* – at its international reach, at the quality of its research, at the breadth of its educational offering, at its strong relation to social, economic, and cultural developments – I recognize Alberto Seassaro's capacity to look to the future and the *cathedral thinking* that invites one to imagine undertakings larger than the time span of those who initiate them, and that enables the production of exceptions, ensuring that systems remain alive, attuned to the new, capable of learning and evolving.

On behalf of the community that constitutes the *Design System*, I would like to thank all those who contributed to this volume. The editors' merit has been to give a choral shape to memory, without smoothing its edges and by restoring its contradictions as well, so that it may become a legacy rather than a repertory. To those who will read, I therefore wish that these pages prove not only a tribute to a fundamental figure, but also a call to action: to design while holding together the vision needed to imagine the future and the tenacity required to achieve concrete results. It is, ultimately, what Alberto Seassaro asked us to continue to do.

Almost a Biography

Antonella Penati, Agnese Rebaglio, Paola Bertola

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Design at Politecnico di Milano

The reality of Italian design and the history of its relationship with industry constitute at once both an exception and an exemplary case. Unlike most European countries engaged – during the postwar reconstruction – in fostering a *science of design* intended to meet the needs of an expanding industry, in Italy the first modernization of the country took place through a *culture of design*. This path followed the original and far from naïve direction of inventing new typologies that emerged already mature (Castelnuovo, 1989); of technological and linguistic transfer between different and even distant product sectors; of fertile flows moving from the war industry to the domestic furniture industry. A trajectory that never found its gravitational center in methodological certainty but rather in cultivated intuition, in a spontaneity not aligned with schools of thought, in authorial experimentation, in a strategic vision that transcends the object.

The industrial system itself, composed above all of small and medium-sized enterprises, represented at the same time both an exception

and an exemplary case. Devoid of the rigid organizational structures so characteristic of large American and European companies (Chandler, 1994), Italian small and very small firms implemented a flexible policy of free collaboration with the system of design, never integrated into the logics of the enterprise and therefore free in the almost-artistic expression of carrying out *cultural crusades* (A. Branzi, 2011a, p. 4) and of tracing unprecedented paths by experimenting with hypotheses destined to leave a mark and to become, in many cases, the *manifesto* of a way of practicing design.

Compared to the historic experiences of the Bauhaus and Ulm in Germany and the university and technical institutes developed worldwide – first in industrialized European countries and North America, then in emerging and more recently developed contexts – in Italy design, despite the worldwide success achieved since the 1960s by its designers and their products, for a long time could not rely on a system of university-level education and research. Until the early 1990s, in fact, university training drew upon individual courses within the Faculties of Architecture, while outside of them proliferated private institutions that compensated for this gap with targeted educational offerings.

As Andrea Branzi reminds us, «in the landscape of Italian design there have always been both designers trained in Architecture and self-taught figures such as Bruno Munari, Enzo Mari, Denis Santachiara, Joe Colombo» (Branzi, 2011b, p. 4), capable of using design «not to change the real world but that of ideas» (Branzi, 2011b, p. 5).

When, in the early 1990s, Politecnico di Milano decided to grant the teaching of Design its own path, autonomous from Architecture, it had to reckon with this important cultural legacy produced directly by manufacturing and instilled in the design of its products, without the mediation of a dedicated educational system.

Much of the history of the construction of this major system of education and research in design is owed to Alberto Seassaro. It is about him, and about this construction that engaged a community for almost two decades, that we now set out to write, placing at the center of this account the inseparable human and cultural intertwining between Alberto Seassaro and Politecnico di Milano.

Preamble

Arduous, certainly difficult, is the task of writing about Alberto Seassaro, because of the multifaceted nature of his design production, almost programmatically devoid of easily drawn boundaries; almost programmatically directed toward *producing exceptions*, as Beppe Finessi writes in his fine contribution on Design Philology digital platform; almost programmatically devoted to looking more at what still remained to be done than at what had already been achieved, to the point of discouraging any attempt at cataloging or ordering what had been realized. To archive one's own experiences as exemplary and worthy of being remembered does not belong to the somewhat dissipative disposition of someone who, when faced with the choice between gathering fragments of his own past and looking toward the future, always opted to move forward.

The ambition to collect achievements and professional successes, typical of those who punctiliously update their curriculum profile, was far from an attitude that was always first critical of oneself even before being critical of others.

A single great *exception* to the proliferation of *exceptions* that marked his intense life: that of his role as Dean of the Faculty of Design. A role that absorbed him during the mature phase of his career and into which he poured such energy that those who knew him at the time tended to conflate that role with his entire existence.

Personal determination, the ability to grasp shared ideas and contents, to give meaning to a unified project, to govern a process of legitimization – these created the conditions for the construction, at Politecnico di Milano, of a Faculty of Design of international stature. It was the early 1990s.

In this story, Alberto Seassaro entered almost by chance, drawn more by the insistence of colleagues than by personal conviction. Despite this initial reluctance, within this long and complex process of institutional construction, he would play the role of protagonist, absorbed into this endeavor in every effort of his design activity.

Both stage and secondary actor in this narrative was Politecnico di Milano, a University of design, until that time an institution for the training of engineers and architects.

As we write this book, it has been just over a year since the *Design Philology* platform has been online, reconstructing «the historical traces of the development and institutionalization of the teaching and research in design at Politecnico di Milano and, more broadly, at the academic level» (Bertola, Rebaglio, 2024, pp. 217-218).

The platform recounts

[...] the process of collective reconstruction of the identity traits and cultural roots of the Department [of Design, ed.] and more broadly of the Design System of Politecnico and of its reference community». The *Design Philology* project, celebrating the 30th anniversary of the establishment of the first degree course in *Industrial Design* – the starting point of the entire *Design System* of Politecnico di Milano – is structured «as a project of codification and reconstruction of the historical memory of the Design System, as a tool for clarifying its identity traits and on which to ground new strategic perspectives. (Bertola, Rebaglio, 2024, p. 216)

Beyond describing the main stages that led to the construction of the Design System at Politecnico di Milano, the project also includes a section dedicated to the celebration of the *Maestri*, namely, those figures who, with their thought, ideas, reflections, and cultural positions, nourished the process of constructing the values and principles that animated the School of Design from its birth throughout its evolution: Attilio Marcolli, Raffaella Crespi, Francesco Trabucco, Ezio Manzini, Andrea Branzi, and many others testify to the cultural pluralism that marks the entire institutional project.

The remembrance of the *Maestri* cannot but begin here, precisely with Alberto Seassaro, the *craftsman-man* (an appellation borrowed from Richard Sennett's celebrated definition), the designing intelligence of an entire system, of which he was not only the ideator and architect but also embroiderer-weaver, goldsmith-engraver, blacksmith-maintainer. Like Sennett's craftsman, Alberto Seassaro, in addition to his personal visionary capacity, invested in this project all his passion, dedication, and personal commitment (Sennett, 2009, p. 28).

Sennett also reminds us that «the Greek word we translate as craftsman is *demiourgos*, a composite term combining the idea of pub-

lic (*demios: belonging to the people*) and of production (*ergon: work*)» (Sennett, 2009, p. 29). A term that, we believe, would have appealed to Seassaro the *man of the people*, for the way he liked to present himself and for his ease in establishing relations at every level, and also to Seassaro the industrious man, capturing in that word his commitment, inventive talent, and constructive skills. Craftsmen, as Sennett reminds us, are those who know how to use both head and hand, idea and technique, to achieve an end; those who, in other words, possess the capacity to design and the ability to devise both conceptual and material instruments to give body to ideas. An activity that, for Sennett, drawing on Plato, is always characterized by the «aspiration to quality» (Sennett, 2009, p. 31), by acting under the impulse of improvement without settling for «modest results» (Sennett, 2009, p. 31). In this spirit of the craftsman-demiurge we find that of Alberto Seassaro, a Dean endowed with personal qualities, including the *craft* astuteness typical of the artisan, placed at the disposal of a community to give design a home. A challenge not simple to face, for in the case of design we are confronted not only with a discipline worthy of teaching and of autonomous paths of research, but also with an emerging phenomenon of Italian culture whose achievements are celebrated as the splendor of an imaginative synthesis that, even beyond our country, has become a model of invention. We shall return to some of these reflections in the paragraph *The Demiurge*.

Collective Biographies

It is incumbent, in this introductory section, to offer a brief note on the theme of *biographies* (a theme that, in this case as well, will be taken up later) as a specific narrative genre which, distinct from autobiographies, makes it epistemologically necessary to distinguish among the literary, journalistic, and historical forms, given the risk of lapsing into anecdote of limited cognitive import.

Biography, as a historiographical genre, poses first and foremost the problem of the authoritativeness of sources and the correctness of their use. This issue is all the more pertinent to a philological, document-based inquiry such as the one initiated with the *Design Philology* project.

Studies on the subject, however, teach us that

the boundary between what is history and what is not has a neutral zone of its own, where the distinction becomes difficult, where differences increasingly blur: where history approaches the narrative genre and literature acquires certain historiographical connotations, both in the verification of facts and, above all, in the capacity to interpret their deeper reasons. [...] And at times literature, thanks to fewer constraints of documentation and therefore to the greater freedom it enjoys, succeeds in clarifying certain aspects of the past and above all the motivations of human actions better than historiography. [...] (Pignatelli, 1999, pp. 299 and 301)

The aim here is not to claim that the biographical recollection we propose lacks documentary foundations. Quite the contrary. Rather, we intend to privilege the category of *understanding* over those of *interpretation*, of proof, and of documentary control (Rebeschini, 2006, p. 435), which are more proper to a historical approach than to the approach, more typical of the social sciences, that we shall privilege here.

Moreover, the editors are not professional historians and, above all, their genuine interest is to unravel, in the telling, the rich interweaving between the story of a single individual and the story of the socio-cultural structures in which he was immersed; that is, they are interested in tracing the signs of the contribution the individual left to the micro-social system into which he was inserted and, conversely, in order to understand «what the dialectic between the person and his context has been» (Pignatelli, 1999, p. 302).

Such an attitude toward biographical reconstruction is especially apt when it proves difficult, and perhaps even inopportune, to isolate the peculiarities of the contribution of a single figure, however prominent, with respect to a system of collective actions to which the descriptive field is broadened.

For that matter, this stance also makes sense when one refers to biography as a historiographical genre. Even in this case, in fact, «the use of the category of individual as the entity to which to anchor historiographical reconstruction» (Rebeschini, 2006, p. 231) becomes a critical element, and the lens of microhistories becomes the one capa-

ble of «observing individual components within an institutional space» (Rebeschini, 2006, p. 235).

It is increasingly common, moreover, that «biographical interest in the strict sense proves secondary because it is dissolved into the context in which the *how* and the *why* are deemed significant» the *how* and the *why* (Pozzi, 1999, p. 290) that led a prominent subject to become the problem-setter and problem-solver of central issues within his institutional *milieu*.

Even in the biographies of scientists, entrepreneurs, and innovators, individual action is interwoven with the system of interests and with the infrastructures that become part and support of their agency; thus the celebration of autonomous, individual ingenuity does not, by itself, suffice to explain histories of invention and progress – no more than talent alone suffices for artists (Spagnolo, 2010). In the case of Alberto Seassaro, moreover, it becomes difficult even to define a role that can be rendered historiographically: what, in terms of collective memory, does the story of a Dean of Faculty represent and what does it tell us? What sort of figure do we face? A figure of the institutions? An academic? An intellectual? A bureaucrat? A politician? A man of design and innovation? Perhaps even an artist, given the flashes of insight that accompanied his action? «A great player of solitaire who always manages to finish the game», as Andrea Branzi once defined him in the pages of *Interni* (Branzi, 2020, unpaginated). Perhaps all these meanings together. And, very likely, in Alberto Seassaro's case it is also limiting to reduce his work to that of a Dean of Faculty, since before *to preside* over an institution, he created it, transformed it, made it evolve – indeed, in certain respects, even invented it – when no one would have imagined development on the scale we know today: that of a major international system for education in design.

The few biographical data, deliberately reduced to the essential, that we list below outline an academic career not unlike that of many university figures who, in their mature years, come to occupy managerial roles within the university system:

- Alberto Seassaro was born in Milan in July 1939.
- He graduated in Architecture from Politecnico di Milano in April 1964.
- Associate Professor in Architectural Technology in 1980 and

Extraordinary Professor in 1990, at the Faculty of Architecture of Politecnico di Milano; holder of the chair in Technology and Economics of Production and, from 1995, Full Professor of Industrial Design.

- President of the Technological Track Council of the Degree Course in Architecture at Politecnico di Milano from 1981 to 1989.
- President of the first Degree Course in Industrial Design at Politecnico di Milano from 1995 to 2003.
- Founder and Dean of the Faculty of Design from 2000 to 2010.
- Founder and President of the POLI.design Consortium from 1999 to 2002.
- Founder of the In.D.A.Co Department (Industrial Design, Arts, and Communication), today the Department of Design.
- Founder and President of the National Conference of Deans of Design Faculties (CPD) from 1999 to 2010.
- Founder and President of the Italian Design Society (SI.design) and of its antecedent associative forms (AUDI) of faculty and researchers of the Scientific Disciplinary Sector of Industrial Design from 2005 to 2010.
- Emeritus Professor of Politecnico di Milano since 2013.

Data which, rescued from the aridity of the curriculum list, present Alberto Seassaro as the first President of the first Degree Course in *Industrial Design* at Politecnico di Milano, where he then founded and presided over the first Faculty of Design in Italy and the first design consortium, POLI.design, and brought into being the first Department of Design (the In.D.A.Co Department, Department of Industrial Design, Arts, and Communication). This work of building a research and education system starts from Politecnico di Milano but then spreads at the national level, where Seassaro labored to promote the development of design within Italian universities, fostering the establishment of Bachelor's and Master's Degree Courses at various university sites.

From this action on a national scale, he went on to found and coordinate the *Conferenza nazionale dei Presidi di Design* [National Conference of Deans of Design] and the *Società Italiana del Design* [Italian Design Society], promoting the diffusion of design culture even beyond the strictly academic system, enabling it both to contaminate

and to be contaminated by the wider world of project culture – already highly active in Milan in particular, thanks to the rich presence of associations and cultural institutions, sector journals, fairs, exhibitions, and events. A process of cross-fertilization that reached the vibrant ecosystem of project professions suspended between industry and craft; between the intellectual sphere and production; between art, science, and technique [1](#) [2](#) [3](#) [4](#) [5](#) [6](#) [7](#) [8](#).

Some Notes on Method

When, as curators of this text, we sat around the table to draft the outline of Alberto Seassaro's biography, we were well aware that the most evident trait of his profile coincided with his academic life and in particular with his vital role as promoter first and Dean later of what, according to many, represented – after the creation of the Faculty of Architecture in 1934 – the most innovative event in the history of Politecnico di Milano: the establishment of the Faculty of Design at the

9. Cesare Stevan,
Professore Emerito del
Politecnico di Milano.
[Document →](#)



Milanese university [9](#).

It was equally clear to us that linking this important institutional achievement to the figure of its founder carried the risk of falling into the celebratory-agiographic rhetoric typical of narratives that dwell on the biographical and personal qualities of a single protagonist, as is often the case in those entirely «internal» histories (Ferguson, 1974) that sacrifice, in the name of one individual, the collective dimension underlying the development of a major institution. While it is undeniable that Alberto Seassaro played the principal role in the establishment of the Italian Design System, in spreading from Politecnico di Milano to all Italian universities the teaching of design as an autonomous educational path, it is equally undeniable that attributing to one person alone the merits of what, for over a decade, was a widespread laboratory of didactic experimentation in this discipline risks relegating the history we are beginning to recount to a limited perspective.

This concern, combined with our deep adherence to the new «biographical statutes» and «social biographies» of the *nouvelle histoire* (Le Goff, 1980), led us to write a text in which the personal biography is always immersed in its context of development and, indeed, finds in

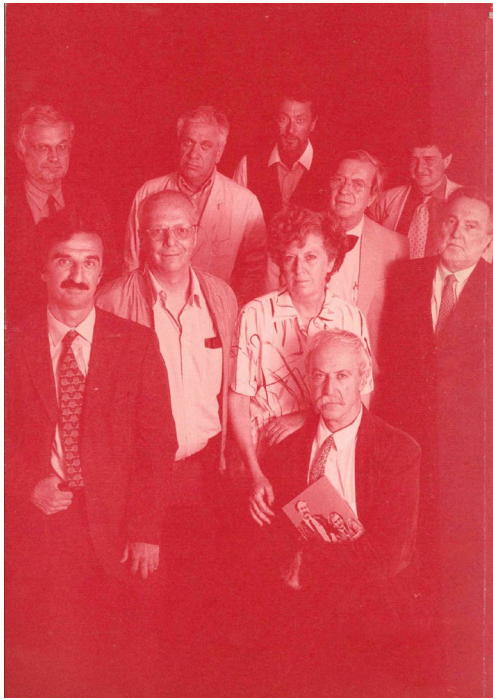


Figure 1.

On the back cover of the Student Guide for the academic year 1999-2000, the first Board of the Degree Course in *Industrial Design*. From top left: Ezio Manzini, Francesco Mauri, Arturo Dell'Acqua Bellavitis, Attilio Marcolli, Medardo Chiapponi. Front row, from left: Alberto Cigada, Giovanni Anceschi, Gabriella Belotti, Alberto Seassaro, Francesco Trabucco.



1. Politecnico di Milano, sede di Milano Bovisa, campus Durando.

[Document →](#)



6. Fotografia di Alberto Seassaro con il Rettore Giulio Ballio.
[Document→](#)



7. Fotografia di Alberto Seassaro, Cesare Stevan e Antonio Scoccimarro.
[Document→](#)



Figure 2.
 Meeting of the Italian Design Society (SID). From left:
 Medardo Chiapponi, Patrizia Ranzo, Massimo Ruffilli,
 Alberto Seassaro, Antonella Penati.



8. Fotografia con Alberto Seassaro, Benedetta Spadolini, Gillo Dorfles, Vico Magistretti, Vanni Pasca.

[Document →](#)

the context itself the cultural and political humus capable of shaping Alberto Seassaro's interests and passions, as well as his constant orientation toward the Institution as the end to which he aspired.

In this sense, the biographical premises themselves, here read in close connection with events, people, and facts, become an open space of narration, allowing us not to exhaust the account entirely within the figure of Alberto Seassaro.

Politecnico di Milano is both place and secondary actor, and following Seassaro's trajectory means at the same time following the rich history of the Milanese university where he graduated, built the greater part of his career, and held a significant role in determining its evolution toward its contemporary form.

As historians know, the starting point of a story is always important. The close bond between Alberto Seassaro and Politecnico di Milano establishes, in essence, the entry threshold to our narrative, which does not begin on March 16, 1995, the date on which Seassaro was officially elected President of the Degree Program in *Industrial Design*, but rather during his university studies.

Alberto Seassaro graduated on April 14, 1964, the very day when, by extraordinary coincidence, his second daughter was born, significantly named Ulla Laurea Seassaro.

The years of Alberto Seassaro as a student were turbulent years for the Faculty of Architecture. Years well recounted by Raffaele Pugliese, Francesca Serrazanetti, and Cristina Bergo in a book with the emblematic title *Sperimentazione o dell'architettura Politecnica. Origini e sviluppi della cultura moderna dell'architettura nella ricerca e nella didattica al Politecnico di Milano* [Experimentation or of Polytechnic Architecture. Origins and Developments of Modern Architectural Culture in Research and Teaching at Politecnico di Milano] (2013), which collects many documents and grey materials depicting the events that marked, in those years, the teaching of design and the true turning point represented by the creation of University Institutes, later to become Departments, establishing the need to build disciplinary knowledge nourished by research aimed at teaching. These intense student years constituted an invaluable reservoir of experience and left a deep mark on Seassaro's subsequent cultural trajectory, shaping his interest and aptitude for engaging in institutional transformation process-

es and in the relationship between cultural content and organizational forms. As an example, one might cite the inseparable link between research and teaching that Seassaro-Dean always placed at the forefront, to the point of considering design teaching as a distinctive form of investigation capable of nurturing and enriching the more canonical modes of academic research. The entire structure of his approach to the management of design education carried with it this idea, with deep roots reaching back to his own training.

An additional critical knot that has oriented the writing, especially in the part concerning the years of the long rise of design at Politecnico di Milano and in Italy the years of the Presidency of the Faculty of Design and of the – Presidency of the *Associazione Italiana del Design* [Italian Design Association] – is the still too recent character of the events, where the short temporal distance makes it difficult to lend the facts historical perspective. Being personally involved in the construction of this institutional history, and having worked side by side with Alberto Seassaro, can likewise be read as a critical element liable to influence the way of recounting and interpreting events that are intrinsically political in nature and for which it is right to seek an objective and impartial vantage point, distinguishing between facts and objective data, and between opinions and interpretations. Proximity of perspective also carries the further risk of unduly emphasizing, in a misleading way, both the positive and the negative aspects of a story that we do not wish, let us reiterate, to render through an epic lens.

Precisely to avoid simplifications or generalizations of contentious elements, as curators we have preferred, in the part of the biographical account closely connected with his role as Dean, more subject to differing points of view, to rely on a documentary repertory that presents the history plainly, leaving to the authors who have written the contributions in this section of the text the opportunity to grasp identifying traits of Alberto Seassaro's complex figure. These are authorial standpoints not called upon to explain, in political terms, what happened in those years of intense institutional work, but rather to characterize the narrative by discerning distinctive qualities more closely tied to the person than to the office he held.

A final note derives once more from the *nouvelle histoire*, which urges us to attend to the *retrobottega della storia* [backstage of the sto-

ry], to everything that happens behind the scenes. This vantage point makes it easier to identify, in the specific contextual circumstances, not only individual events but also the constraints, opportunities, and demands of different actors, as typically occurs within complex organizations, as well as the occasions offered by regulatory changes and institutional needs, which are significant in prompting strategic shifts and adaptations.

Stories that take as their privileged vantage point the concrete unfolding of everyday activities make it almost natural, among other things, to take distance from narrative frameworks made up of accounts of progressive successes and triumphs, from a way of telling events as a linear, obstacle-free process.

Multiple decisions taken daily at every level, interwoven with events in the institutional, social, and regulatory spheres, bring to the forefront the complexity of the context and the plurality and richness of the factors and actors that contributed to this important academic history.

In adherence to *Design Philology* project, the philological reconstruction, organized around texts and testimonies, lends itself well to supporting this narrative approach, which recounts, materializing them in documentary artifacts of various kinds, the different passages in the process of designing an immaterial object: the birth of an institutional organization devoted to teaching and research in a field that is new to the Italian educational landscape.

As anticipated in the preface, at the time this volume is being composed, *Design Philology* platform has already been online for more than a year. Within it, in fact, the history of the birth and development of the *Design System* is already present, with a great wealth of materials. This text takes shape, as far as possible, in a hypertextual form that refers, whenever deemed appropriate, to documentary in-depth materials available on the online platform, where the presence of Alberto Seassaro hovers strongly everywhere, even when his name is not explicitly cited in the various narrative passages.

Alberto Seassaro. The Demiurge

Demiurge is the attribute chosen to describe the role played by Alberto Seassaro in the years of the founding of the *Design System* at Politecnico di Milano and of the diffusion of design across the network of numerous Italian university campuses. For those who knew him, however, the nature proper to the demiurge more generally describes his way of positioning himself before projects both of elementary scale and of complex nature.

We have used the term *demiurge* in this contribution on Alberto Seassaro not to extol divine qualities but deliberately in contrast to the term *artefice* [maker], in an anti-rhetorical sense. Not the creator who gives life, brings forth, and thus generates, but the one who is able to take pre-existing elements of a given context, produced by others, and, by conferring order upon them, create value and impart meaning.

If Cesare Stevan – Dean of the Faculty of Architecture – and Tomás Maldonado – a leading figure in design education, with a long career at major international schools – were the two true makers who created the political and institutional conditions for the birth of this new educational reality at Politecnico di Milano, Alberto Seassaro was, by contrast, the skilled weaver of human, institutional, and conceptual relations who took this reality by the hand in its initial phase and brought it to completion, to the systemic state we know today. Possessed of a deep knowledge of institutional mechanisms, he immediately proved able to use the dynamics and logics of a complex organization such as Politecnico to introduce continual innovations.

The figure of the demiurge, as is well known, is central in Plato's *Ti-maeus*. The demiurge emerges precisely in contrast to the god of creation, the *artifex* [maker], and represents one who is able to transform the available material, shaping it and giving it form according to necessity (Reale, p. 28).

The documents of this history make it clear that even the *Design* – then *Disegno industriale* – full professors most inclined to found a course of study autonomous from Architecture, toward which there were initially no great expectations, all showed a certain reluctance to proceed with the launch of a specialized teaching path, believing that, in that particular historical moment, Architecture did not possess

the necessary competencies (Penati, Rebaglio, 2024). The disruptive strength of Alberto Seassaro's action lies precisely in *taking* what the system had at its disposal, in terms of human resources, knowledge, equipment, spaces, organizational habits, and, through minute work of adaptation, micro-transformations, and tactics, designing a strategic action of unimaginable scope, building consensus around a political project that, from being individual, immediately became collective.

Seassaro also possessed the patience of the demiurge: none of the synonyms that can be used to objectify the ability to *put things in order* with determination, almost stubbornly, step by step, were foreign to his way of working: «to put in order; to settle/adjust; to arrange; to distribute; to align; to catalogue; to classify; to fix/adjust; to regulate; to regulate (formally); to set right; to organize/sort out; to codify; to standardize; to coordinate; to prepare; to prearrange; to make arrangements; to give an order/orders; to command; to decree; to prescribe»; even to «impose» when necessary [15](#).



Note 1.
[Link →](#)

And finally, like every demiurge who «sets measure to things» (Reale, p. 18), according to ends that remain to most inscrutable until the results of the action have taken shape, Alberto Seassaro had the intelligence to steer a long process, not without obstacles, employing the art of persuasion. Skilled at weaving political relationships at various levels, he knew how to move among currents and countercurrents, seeking to bring innovation without altering internal equilibria, recomposing conflicts, governing divergent options among numerous actors and social and institutional stakeholders; meeting the expectations of interest groups; taking on the arduous task of modifying organizational and institutional arrangements and forms by weaving strategically oriented links, studying quid pro quos and counterbalances, especially in the years of *la grande bouffe*, when many were feasting while keeping their hands free of managerial and political responsibilities. As a shrewd strategist, every move was conceived to facilitate the insertion of *clusters of innovation* (of themes, of methods, of tools, of infrastructures) within a system entrenched in the historic domains of Engineering and Architecture, and rich in political appetites.

But beyond being a refined innovator who often knew how to move cautiously by following a policy of incremental innovation, when nec-

essary he also assumed the uncomfortable role of an agent provocateur who triggers innovation, at times with disconcerting intuition, at times with vehemence, exploiting the system's contradictions and not always finding an easy reception.

One quality, however, always accompanied him: the ability to navigate the meanders of the organization and to identify what, with Langdon Winner, we can define as «flexible character» of a long-standing politico-cultural system such as Politecnico di Milano, knowing how to leverage them to the advantage of the common cause and thus finding legitimation for continuous evolution (Winner, 1985, pp. 28-40).

Always poised between the drive to design and innovate and a sense of *measure* in assessing contextual conditions with their constraints and timings, the strength of Alberto Seassaro lay in his openness to dialectical engagement – constant and at times even rough, yet always open.

This way, over the span of a decade, the initial system of education in *Industrial design* transfers to the realm of research and then reverberates through socio-cultural and economic-professional systems, penetrating and infusing the Milanese design system with new lifeblood, before expanding first at the national level and then internationally.

It is a slow yet progressive motion, punctuated by moments of acceleration, that builds, around new scientific interests, new social relationships, professional ties, and economic investments, the reality of a socio-technical system – that of design – with its institutional artifacts, with new expectations, new widespread interests, and a material base that asserts itself by the force of its very evidence.

In the last years of his long tenure, a lively critical debate developed around the figure of Alberto Seassaro, between those who regarded him as the father of a far-reaching cultural project and those who criticized the hegemonic role of someone exercising unchecked decision-making power over many aspects of academic life. It was the most difficult phase, politically, in the life of the community.

Today, more than a decade after his departure from the system, the fruits that matured thanks to his work still endure in all their vitality, allowing us a reconciled view of his actions and helping to return, in shared form, an identity resolved as a figure who enjoyed indisputable authority and considerable prestige within the community.

History will never be able to tell us what the existence of this system would have been like, or what form it would have taken, without the work of a patient and tireless demiurge.

The steps to arrive at the *Facoltà del Design* [Faculty of Design] are complex [...]. Minister Ruberti [...] shared and supported the project, placing it within statutory legality. [...] Tomás Maldonado supported me throughout the process [...]. Angelo Cortesi, then president of ADI [Associazione per il Disegno Industriale], worked to establish a connection between education and professional outcomes. What followed is better known: my fraternal friendship with Alberto Seassaro and his talent fueled the growth and development of the initiative as no one else could have done. We held nothing back and thus laid solid roots for international recognition in a place of undeniable prestige. Today the *Facoltà del Design* stands in the Olympus it deserves. (Cesare Stevan, 11 April 2024) [23](#).



Note 2.
[Link →](#)

Structure of the Text

As stated in the introductory paragraphs, the text aims to highlight the close bond between Alberto Seassaro and Politecnico di Milano. It is, in fact, the cultural climate of the great Milanese university, and in particular of the Faculty of Architecture, that influenced his choices and his thinking from the 1960s onward, when Alberto Seassaro entered Politecnico as a student.

The book indeed opens with a chapter, edited by Antonella Penati, devoted to the years of study and thus to training in the culture of design, at the Faculty of Architecture of Politecnico di Milano, where Alberto Seassaro enrolled in 1959. While studying, he taught and worked as a renderer in leading architecture firms, immediately showing the profile of a person of irrepressible industriousness, both by inquisitive, experimental temperament and by economic necessity. Being deeply engaged in professional activity did not distract him from political commitment within the university, then the stage for the first student demands that would open, within a few years, an extraordinary season of reforms.

These were the years that shaped his thinking and his institutional action up to his most significant political episode, namely his election as Dean of the Faculty of Design at the same Politecnico that had seen him as a student.

After graduating, Alberto Seassaro began a frenetic design activity at every scale: from furnishing objects to the interiors of private homes and exhibition spaces, to participation in various competitions for the construction of buildings, alongside an artistic production that would see him present in several solo and group exhibitions.

This section of the volume hosts writings by Beppe Finessi, Giam-piero Bosoni, and Antonella Penati, who comment on the design and artistic activity of a newly graduated Seassaro, in the fullness of youth and with «the strength and happiness of all the body's cells working well», as Ettore Sottsass put it in his presentation contained in the catalogue of the exhibition *i Morfemi* held at Studio 2B in Bergamo [10](#). What emerges is the profile of an *engaged* artist, involved in anti-militarist claims and in favor of conscientious objection, and of a designer inclined to experimentation in the use of materials, in modular composition, and in a language that intertwines structural elements with exhibition elements. These traits are recognizable in the intense design work, with Ugo La Pietra (interviewed here by Agnese Rebaglio), at Montedison, where for several years Alberto Seassaro was responsible for coordinating the Study Center on heavy prefabrication processes with Silicalcite, in which, with youthful ingenuous faith, he placed the hope of a democratic building culture.

Included in this section is Giovanni Baule's contribution, which highlights the consistently design-oriented nature of Alberto Seassaro's thinking, expressed predominantly through a verbo-visual language.

Despite the fact that his professional activity was intense immediately after graduation, he never left the University. In 1964 and 1965 he held two Ministry Scholarships, which led him to deepen the research themes initiated with his thesis, aimed at constituting the first nucleus of the nascent Library of the *Istituto di Composizione* [Institute of Architectural Composition] of the Faculty of Architecture, with a section dedicated to studies and cultures of form. At the same time he began to assist various professors in teaching: first as *Assistente volontario* [voluntary assistant], later as *Collaboratore alla didattica*

10. *Seassaro. I morfemi.*
Presentati da Ettore
Sottsass Jr.
[Document →](#)



[teaching collaborator], and finally as *Assistente incaricato* [appointed assistant] in courses taught by Ludovico Belgiojoso, Cesare Blasi, and Giuseppe Ciribini, both at Politecnico di Milano and at Politecnico di Torino, and finally at the University of Abruzzo. Over this long experience, which led him to the associate professorship in 1980 and to the full professorship in 1990, he never failed to contribute culturally and politically to the process of transformative tension that marked the 1970s and 1980s in the Faculty of Architecture. Testimony to this are the design themes proposed to students in his teaching activity and his membership in research groups on housing and the forms of dwelling, where the closeness of his design interests to the problems of a rapidly changing social context is evident.

This is the phase in which Seassaro honed and matured his ability to involve, in teaching and research, groups, institutions, and movements active in the territory, in order to immerse design exercises and research in the concreteness of reality.

These passages are outlined in the section *In the folds of technological culture: premises for the birth of the Design System*, where Antonella Penati, Fabrizio Schiaffonati, Luciano Crespi, and Cristina Tonelli help to contextualize, within the furrow of a technological culture, the mature period of Alberto Seassaro that precedes that of builder of the Design System. A technological culture that unites the birth experiences of this disciplinary sector – young across the various universities of the Italian landscape.

These years can be considered as preparation for the subsequent roles he would hold at Politecnico di Milano where he became increasingly involved in building *parts* of the institutional system. On the research front, for example, we see him engaged in the creation of the CNR National Research Group *Produzione Edilizia*; on the teaching front, by contrast, in the design and coordination of the *Indirizzo di Tecnologia dell'architettura* [Architectural Technology track].

As anticipated in the preface, the concluding section of the text, *Building the institution to open up to emerging content*, adopts a different narrative style. The birth of the *Design System* and the story of its tenacious builder use, as primary sources, Seassaro's own writings, institutional documents, and communication materials, privileging a documentary narration. In particular, our choice has deliberate-

ly sought to bring to the forefront the back-room activity of a Dean, represented, for example, by more-than-daily epistolary exchanges interwoven with various institutional interlocutors, inside and outside the University, to obtain funding, to encourage actions of political support, to request cultural mediation, to expand the impact and diffusion of design, to promote associations, to verify technical data useful for launching classrooms, laboratories, and workspaces, etc.

Among these exchanges we have selected above all those that reveal not only the builder's tenacity, political foresight, and capacity to sensitize the Institution's leadership, but also Alberto Seassaro's personal traits, his way of being, ironic, provocative, but also affectionate, playful, sly. These documents are accompanied by tributes from colleagues (Paola Bertola, Luisa Collina, Flaviano Celaschi, Eleonora Lupo, Antonella Penati, Paolo Tinelli, Raffaella Trocchianesi), which add to the more institutional and formal narration Seassaro's manner of positioning himself with respect to problems; his way of working *as a team* while always personally tackling the preliminary investigative phase of the issue; his constant awareness of the political and structural features of the institution in which he moved, and of the themes and cultural interests dearest to him; his quips, which are also the quintessence of what, over time, has been termed the *seassarian spirit*.

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PART 1

The Training

1. Here Where It All Began. Politecnico di Milano in the Spirit of Experimentation

Antonella Penati

Department of Design, Politecnico di Milano

1.1 Politecnico di Milano in the Spirit of Experimentation

It is April 14, 1964. Two ambitious young students, with a thousand plans for the future, graduate at the Faculty of Architecture at Politecnico di Milano. On the title page of the thesis there is no trace of a supervisor. The protest movement underway, of which the two graduands are active participants, includes, among other demands, the student's total autonomy in choosing the contents, methods, and modes of presenting the thesis, which coincides with the discussion of several projects submitted during the course of study.

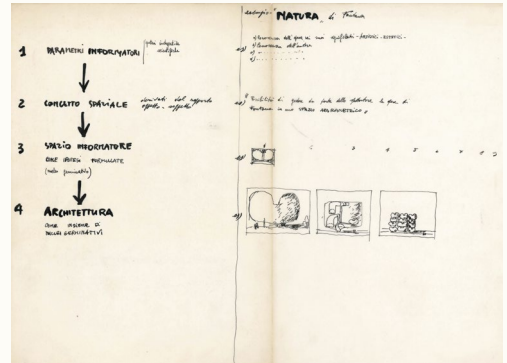
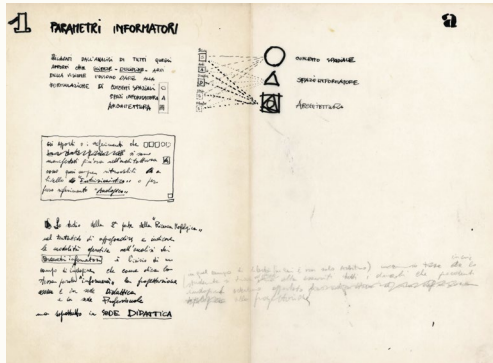
The subject of the dissertation departs from more conventional compositional themes, and the way it is presented is unusual. It is, in fact, an exhibition that stages and accompanies the discussion of *La ricerca morfologica. Proposta di lavoro per gli Istituti di ricerca scientifica della Facoltà di Architettura* [Morphological Research. A Working Proposal for the Scientific Research Institutes of the Faculty of Architecture].

The Degree Committee, chaired by Piero Portaluppi, proclaims the graduates with 100/100 *cum laude*, and for the thesis work the *Associazione Allievi del Politecnico* [Association of Alumni of Politecnico] awards them the gold medal [🏆](#). The two young graduands are named Ugo La Pietra and Alberto Seassaro.

The former would become a globetrotter of design thinking; the latter, a globetrotter of innovative thinking on university structures for education and research. To him we owe the founding of Italy's first and most important Faculty of Design,



1. Estratto della Tesi di Laurea di Ugo La Pietra e Alberto Seassaro, *La Ricerca Morfologica*. [Document →](#)



today among the largest design schools in the world; the creation of the first Italian Department of Design; the establishment of the first university consortium for post-graduate training in design; and the birth of the first Italian network for research and education in the field of design. Born in Milan in 1939, Alberto Seassaro enrolled in 1959 at the Faculty of Architecture at Politecnico di Milano, after qualifying to teach in upper-secondary schools in *Disegno Geometrico* [Geometrical Drawing] and in *Disegno e storia dell'arte* [Drawing and History of Art].

Already the father of his daughter Cristiana, he is a working student: thanks to the support of the Dean's secretary, moved by his condition as a young parent, he is allowed to submit classroom assignments in advance, completing them as quickly as possible so he can leave the university and rush to work. From 1959 to 1964, in fact, he teaches *Drawing and History of Art* at Istituto Leonardo da Vinci and at Istituto Cremona di Milano, and *Arti grafiche applicate* [Applied Graphic Arts] at Scuola Umanitaria where he is invited by Sergio Coradeschi, his instructor in Drawing and Survey at Politecnico di Milano, to whom he would remain bound over time by esteem, friendship, and gratitude.

Figure 1.
Among the projects followed as an assistant draftsman at the Morisi office were a villa built in Piedmont in 1961-62 (Arch. Roberto Morisi).



He also works as a draftsman in the office of the architect Roberto Morisi and, first as a renderer/visualizer, later as a freelance co-designer, in leading Milanese architecture studios (BBPR, Viganò, Zanuso, Frattini, Latis, etc.) and Italian ones (Luigi Moretti in Rome, Marcello D'Olio in Udine, Carlo Cocchia in Naples). It is to Roberto Morisi that Seassaro credits his formation in project culture and his apprenticeship in professional practice.

Alberto Seassaro enrolled in the Faculty of Architecture at the end of the 1950s, having earned the *Diploma Artistico* [Art School Diploma] by inclination and cultural passion and the *Diploma Scientifico* [Scientific School Diploma] to please his father.

His father, Carlo Seassaro, an electrical engineer, hoping to instill in his son his own passion for science and technology, prodded him with notions that, he hoped, would nourish a technical-scientific vocation and steer him toward studies in engineering. Already in primary school, on the way from home to school, he would quiz him on the definitions of impedance, resistance, and reactance. For each of these definitions he had devised rhyming jingles, to train young Alberto's memory. It would also happen that, in his spare time, he took him along to the Ginori manufacturing plants, where he was responsible for what we would today call quality control of ceramic electrotechnical insulators.

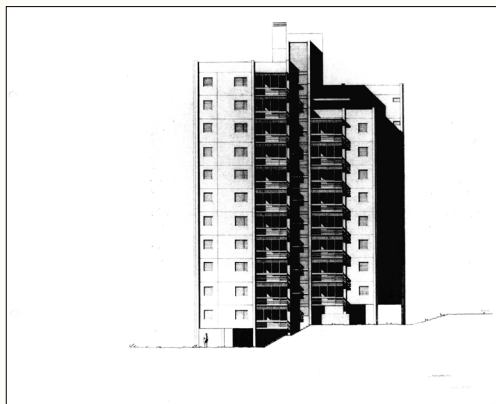
But Alberto Seassaro's eyes, and his curiosity, were drawn rather to the drawings by Gio Ponti and Giovanni Gariboldi that dominated the office corridors, and to the early-production pottery which, in the workshops, became scrap material among which he spent his afternoons. From his father, and from his travel stories (for work his father traveled frequently, and in those years intercontinental journeys were rare), he also inherited a love for distant lands, a curiosity toward *the foreigner*, toward customs and practices that spoke of a cultural diversity that always fascinated him. Also an inheritance from his father was an interest in geographical maps, objects of great fascination for Alberto, from which he would surely derive his well-known inclination toward visual

synthesis, toward reconstructing complex facts and events in visual form. His father also passed on an interest in collecting objects, starting with the souvenir objects that animated his travel tales upon returning home. Anyone who knew Alberto Seassaro and his domestic spaces knows his playful obsession with collections: objects that did not need the cachet of luxury but had to be authentic, popular, even modest, tied to their customary uses in everyday life. Not by chance his first interest turned to objects of cooking, those from which it is easiest to trace back to a people's food traditions and thus to its popular culture. Between science, technology, and art, then, his education and interests, enriched by a genuine passion for history, geography, ethnology, and anthropology, would find their natural culmination in studies in architecture.

His interest in technological aspects, in the control of form, and equally in people's ways of living is present in many projects undertaken as a student, in an ideal cultural partnership with Ugo La Pietra, several of which were presented by the faculty in publications on teaching (Cesare Blasi, 1962) 25: *Casa a torre in Viale Scarampo* [Tower House on Viale Scarampo], where he engages with Piero Bottoni's QT8 model neighborhood and the idea of a self-sufficient district; *Scuola elementare a Rozzano* [Primary School in Rozzano], where he surveys the typology of learning spaces; a historiographic investigation of rural settlements in the Lower Lombard Plain, where he conducts a philological analysis of the development of the ancient hamlets and farmsteads that characterize it, marked by the building typology of enclosed courtyards; and a group of dwellings for agricultural laborers, properties intended for residential use yet to be considered functional to agricultural activity. A thematic cross-section that shows complete adherence to the problems of a context defined by economic challenges and the housing needs of a society, and a country, in the midst of transformation 35 45 55 65. The obsession with form on the one hand, and the civil and social substance of designing on the other, gradually take shape over the course of his studies and inform the gaze with which he approaches the themes he tackles in his student work.

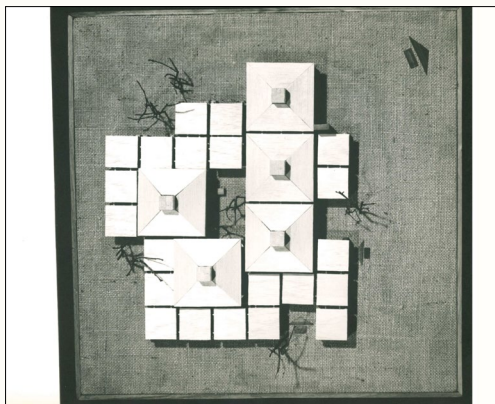


2. Cesare Blasi,
Un'esperienza didattica,
in *Comunità*, n. 100.
[Document →](#)



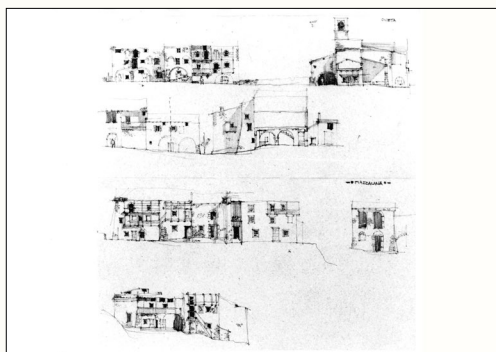
3. Alberto Seassaro, Progetto di una casa-torre in Viale Scarpino.

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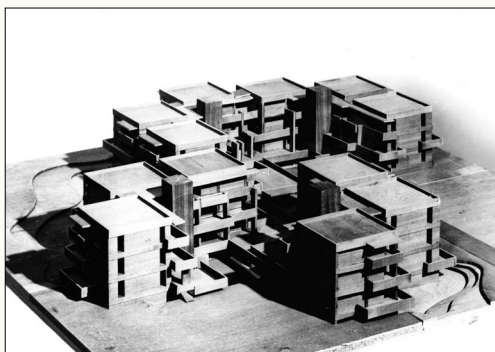
4. Alberto Seassaro, Scuola elementare a Rozzano.

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5. Alberto Seassaro, Architettura spontanea nella Val Brembana.

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6. Alberto Seassaro, Progetto di un gruppo di case per salariati agricoli.

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1.2 The Faculty of Architecture and Its Special History

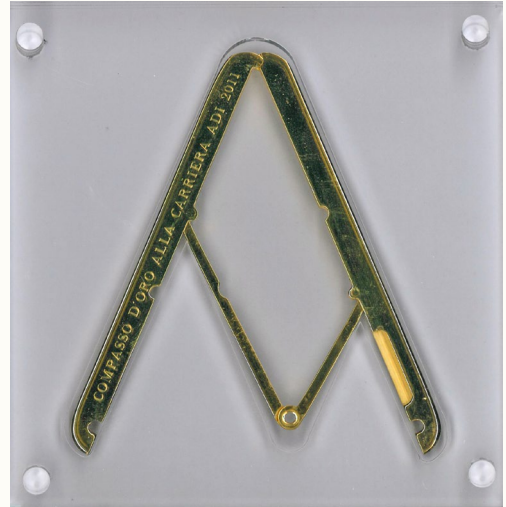
Politecnico di Milano and its Faculty of Architecture were the cradle where it all began; an elective locus of experimentation and project-making; the point of departure and cultural *milieu* from which Alberto Seassaro would never stray, beginning and ending his career right here, honored as *Professor Emeritus at Politecnico di Milano* and with the *Compasso d'oro alla carriera* [Compasso d'Oro for Lifetime Achievement] awarded to the University precisely for the birth and consolidation of the Design System [7](#) [8](#).

Tracing the stages of his education and his story within the university institution is also a way to read, in filigree, that «special history» (R. Pugliese, 2013, p. 9) of the Faculty of Architecture. That *special history* begins in 1963 with the first occupation – with Alberto Seassaro a student nearing graduation – continues with the years of didactic experimentation, the outcome of students' claiming spaces of autonomy – with Alberto Seassaro a volunteer assistant – and reaches the birth of Departments (the 1980s), an evolution of the pre-existing research Institutes, with Alberto Seassaro a young associate professor; to touch, at the start of the 1990s, its highest point with the articulation of the single Faculty of Architecture into several Faculties: Architettura I, Architettura II and Architettura III – or *Facoltà del Design* [Faculty of Design]. It is the birth and development of the latter of which Alberto Seassaro would be the principal protagonist.



7. ADI, Compasso d'oro alla carriera, Politecnico di Milano.

[Document →](#)



8. ADI, Motivazioni per il conferimento del Compasso d'oro alla carriera al Politecnico di Milano.

[Document →](#)



POLITECNICO
DI MILANO

Politecnico di Milano

Il design nelle università italiane ha avuto un significativo sviluppo negli ultimi vent'anni. A questo ha contribuito in modo particolare il Politecnico di Milano che ha saputo istituire sopra le proprie storiche radici (si pensi al legame tra l'ateneo e alcune figure straordinarie della storia del design quali Gio Ponti, Franco Albini, Achille Castiglioni e Marco Zanuso) il primo corso di laurea in Disegno industriale e successivamente, a partire dal 2002, la Facoltà del Design, oggi denominata Scuola del Design. Ciò è avvenuto per l'impegno di molti, tra cui ci piace ricordare Tomás Maldonado e Alberto Seassaro, primo preside della Facoltà del Design. Il design al Politecnico di Milano è oggi un sistema integrato di competenze che opera, tra formazione e ricerca, attraverso le proprie strutture quali il Dipartimento INDACO (Disegno Industriale, Arti, Comunicazione e Moda), a cui fanno riferimento il Dottorato di Ricerca di Design e il Sistema dei Laboratori, e il Consorzio POLI.design. Punto di incontro di culture diverse, in forte dialogo con il mondo professionale e imprenditoriale e con i principali centri internazionali di ricerca e formazione, il design al Politecnico ha svolto un ruolo fondamentale nella creazione a Milano di una comunità scientifica di riferimento.

Nothing that came afterward can be understood if one neglects to examine the context in which Alberto Seassaro was formed and the *imprinting* – in the extended sense the term *imprinting* has assumed beyond psychology and ethology (Lorentz, 1967) – cultural as well as political, capable of shaping his subsequent institutional action. It is as if Seassaro's remaining within Politecnico could be read as a long, continuous act of occupying an institutional space in which he saw reflected all the contradictions of society, yet to which he also ascribed all the potential proper to an incubating place and to an agent of transformation capable of penetrating cultural systems in depth and renewing them (Siliato, 2020) [93 103 113](#).

He is in the fourth year of his studies when, at the Faculty of Architecture, the season of major student demands begins, culminating in the occupations of 1963 and then 1967. Active participation in the renewal claims advanced by the students would profoundly mark the content of his research and teaching activities and his institutional commitment in the years that followed. These are years under the banner of experimentation; of drastic revision in the organization of teaching activities; of moving beyond disciplinary areas toward the idea of *didattica come ricerca* [teaching as research]; of reflection on possible methodological alternatives in design teaching to address emerging problems; of a new political awareness capable of placing at the center of education the social needs and requirements long kept too distant from an *elite university* more inclined to pass down static bodies of knowledge detached from transformations in the cultural and social context; of the «new role of architecture in the processes of transformation of the city and the territory» (Pugliese, 2013, pp. 9-10). Experimentation is the key word that would shape the dynamics of renewal at the Faculty of Architecture, in a moment not free of harsh clashes and contradictions.

[...] *Experimentation*: a word that, starting in 1964, spread through the student assemblies of the Faculty of Architecture in Milan and, from 1967, took shape as concrete proposals for reorganizing teaching; in 1968 the Faculty Council officially requested approval of a ministerial experimentation. (Vannini, 2009, p. 39)

**LA FACOLTA' DI ARCHITETTURA
E' OCCUPATA DAGLI STUDENTI DA GIOVEDI'**

Dopo una lunga agitazione rimasta senza riconoscimenti da parte delle autorità accademiche, abbiamo occupato la facoltà.

Ci stiamo battendo per essere resi responsabili della nostra formazione.

Lottiamo per un ordinamento universitario democratico, contro una struttura rigidamente autoritaria.

I nostri professori oggi non sono disposti a condividere con altri il potere direzionale della didattica e della ricerca. L'attuale struttura dà agli studenti solo doveri, nessun diritto.

Tutte le componenti del mondo universitario devono partecipare responsabilmente alla direzione degli istituti. Studenti, assistenti e professori al governo dell'università garantiscono la sua funzione di centro di elaborazione culturale autonoma e responsabile di fronte alle esigenze della società.

L'ordinamento democratico degli istituti universitari è il primo momento per la trasformazione della nostra università.

Gli studenti occupanti

L'ARRETRATO DELL'ARCHITETTURA



9. Manifesto degli studenti occupanti.
[Document →](#)



10. Manifesto di Anarchik, *Stato, Chiesa, Esercito, Polizia, Scuola*, Atelier Libre '70.
[Document →](#)



11. *Il futuro di Architettura comincia con le ricerche*. Estratto dell'intervista a Paolo Portoghesi.
[Document →](#)

[...] the *experimentalist* instance constitutes the defining trait of the complex vicissitudes of architecture at Politecnico di Milano. [...] as does the intertwining between polytechnical training and the humanistic roots of architecture; the centrality of the project as research and experimentation within a critical and reflective tradition; the difficult interpretation of a social and civic role for the university and its bodies of knowledge. (Pasqui, 2013, p. 6)

[...] 1960, June 10, minutes of the Faculty Council, regarding the downsizing of the study plan and the reorganization of teaching into four fundamental groupings: History; Scientific and Technological Subjects; Urban Planning; Architectural Composition. 'Such groupings will be organized into Institutes whose activity will be directed toward research and cultural production, whose scope will also extend outward as a direct service to society'. (Vanini, 2009, p. 39)

His active participation in the occupations and in moments of struggle and protest (occupier by night, worker by day), together with the climate of that context, deepened his interest in a form of project research autonomous from professional know-how and more closely tied to the needs of education; it pushed him toward the direct involvement of social groups that, in turn, advanced claims to housing as a right; it sharpened his attention to the city and its transformations, with the forceful emergence of the needs of the most vulnerable social *classi* [classes]. Ultimately, it led Alberto Seassaro to regard the project as a political act.

1.3 The Morphological Research

The thesis falls within this crucial moment in the life of the Faculty of Architecture. The demands advanced by the student movement exposed the crisis of architectural culture and of its teaching, too folded in on practice and on the professional interests of the faculty, and the need to open new relations among research, design, and design pedagogy. This cultural framework hastened and accompanied the

construction of the first contents of the Institutes, loci of theoretical reflection conceived as a point of linkage between research and teaching.

Beyond closer adherence to the new problems of housing and dwelling, of the city and its transformations, the students also demanded *lo svecchiamento* [renewal] of the faculty, the alignment of design topics with emerging social issues, and greater cultural openness toward disciplines not included in the curriculum yet closely tied to design cultures. On the basis of these requests, «external figures were invited to teach in the Faculty, such as Umberto Eco (*Teoria della forma* [Theory of Form]), Dino Formaggio (*Metodologia della visione* [Methodology of Vision]), and Franco Russoli (*Storia dell'arte* [History of Art])» (F. Serrazanetti, p. 19). Alberto Seassaro's interest naturally welcomed these teachings, so close to the art cultures he had cultivated during high school and to his interests in the visual cultures.

These cultural and political fermentations come to a synthesis with the thesis.

The contents of the thesis research bring together a passion for artistic cultures, the visual arts, and theories of form with a political commitment aimed at elaborating the institutional contents and scientific purposes of the nascent Institutes of the Faculty of Architecture, within which, as noted, the links between research and teaching were at that very moment taking shape. A few years later, in 1965, in the preface to a Ministry-funded research project, the very authors (Ugo La Pietra and Alberto Seassaro) would recount the research objectives of their thesis dissertation:

***Ricerca morfologica* [Morphological Research] is the development of a university project carried out during the 1962/1963 academic year in the course *Interni II* [Interiors II] and presented the following year for the Degree in the form of an exhibition entitled: *La ricerca morfologica. Proposta di lavoro per gli Istituti di ricerca scientifica della Facoltà di Architettura* [Morphological Research. A Working Proposal for the Scientific Research Institutes of the Faculty of Architecture]. The research can be taken as the first example, within the Faculty, of a cultural and political contribution aimed at setting out, in scientific terms, specific morphological**

issues within the university Institutes, as essential elements for founding a new architectural science. [...]

After an introduction to the problems of scientific research and their function within the Universities, specific themes are addressed, articulated under the following topics: Freedom of form; Artistic quality and aesthetic quality; The relationship among the arts (abstraction and figuration in architecture); The contribution to architectural research of professionals, utopians, and teaching, etc. The section that, *in nuce*, contains the *intentional* hypotheses [Editor's note: the two authors use the term *intentional* in their thesis to mean research aimed at design] is developed within the *method of models*. The parts most laden with potential expressions of intentionality concern reflections on the logic, methodology, and aims of scientific research; the first formulations of the *metodo dei modelli* [method of models], in which concepts and operational indications appear regarding its use and meaning; the concepts of *campo della forma* [field of form] as a *field of possibilities*; of *sintropia* [syntropy] and *finalismo* [teleology]; of *concetto spaziale informatore* [informing spatial concept]; of *modello spaziale elementare sperimentabile* [experimentable elementary spatial model]; of *gradi di libertà* [degrees of freedom]. Likewise, the formal investigative hypotheses developed with regard to *esempi espositivi* [exhibition examples], with their intention to pose themselves as alternatives to customary design, constitute an *investigative experience* on rigorously abstract bases and can be understood as the first expression of *modellazioni spaziali* [spatial modelings]. (Ugo La Pietra and Alberto Seassaro, *La ricerca morfologica*, 1966 – gray material without page numbering. Alberto Seassaro Private Archive)

The written component of the thesis brings into focus several concepts that remain – as the authors themselves note – at a germinal stage, within a text that is predominantly theoretical in character.

Concept of morphology as the spatial concretization of form-usage behaviors. [...]

Concept of models of understanding: models as both instrument

and method, enabling the integration – within a single moment – of the elaboration of theory and its verification on the real, in a mutually interacting form. [...]

Concept of models as *spatial tools*. [...]

Concept of *synesthesia among the arts*. [...]

Concept of the *field of form* as a *field of possibilities* and the connected concepts of *syntropy* and *teleology*; the idea of an *informing spatial concept* and of an *experimentable elementary spatial model*. [...]

Concept of the *existential nature of space* and the *spatial nature of existence* (re-elaborated from Merleau-Ponty). [...]

Concept of *modular space* and *weaves*, and the concept of *tissue-forming bodies*.

(From the Degree Thesis *Morphological Research*, Ugo La Pietra and Alberto Seassaro, 1964)

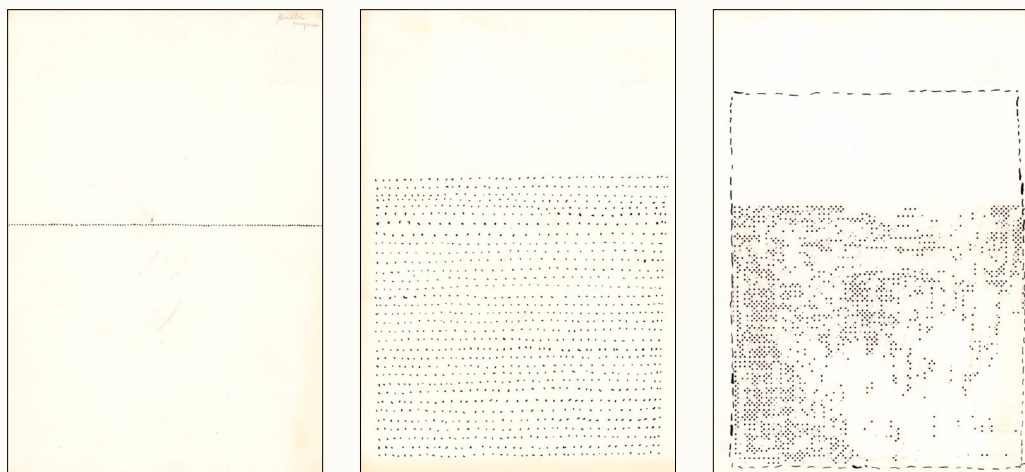
Central indeed, and well structured, is the definition of the concept of *form* and of its *operability* within a perspective of observation and within a perimeter of the field of validity – using the authors' terms – represented by the architectural project.

The concept of *morphology as the spatial concretization of form-usage behaviors*, in which the sense of *fruizione* [use/enjoyment] is extended to aspects of use, functions as a resolver both of the traditional dichotomization of architecture into typology-morphology, where the latter is in fact understood as synonymous with form, and of semiotics' compartmentalizations into syntax-semantics-pragmatics, by reducing them to their instrumental aspect. With this definition the *domain of research* is identified as *the interactions of mutual modification occurring between forms and behaviors*, highlighting that it is precisely forms that constitute the specific target of our operational intention, insofar as they are the instrument of our *technique* of intervention in the becoming of behaviors ¹². (Ugo La Pietra & Alberto Seassaro, 1964)

But beyond its cultural content, the thesis announces from its very earliest passages its intrinsic political vocation: it denounces shortcomings



in training precisely on the plane of *form as the primary content of the architectural project* and warns of the risk that formal contents be relegated to the background and surface in the design process merely as a consequence, an outcome, of functional questions.



Today's architecture student is the most dogmatic proponent of the supremacy of the *moment of content* over the *moment of form*. Thus, in his disciplinary formation, premises, preliminary investigations, deductive processes, programmatic statements constitute the *clou* of the situation, while the final experience of formal concretization is accepted as inevitable. These symptoms are variously interpreted: some diagnoses even maintain that this is not a *clinical condition* at all but rather a state of particular health. As a matter of fact, we report, identifying as a mere symptom of crisis, in addition to a scant commitment to probing the meanings of architectural forms, the lack of openness toward research aimed at understanding the perceptual, symbolic, psychological, informational, and communicative components of form. [...] Alongside the explicit overemphasis on *content*, another process has distorted architectural ends: namely, the *myth of methodology*. That is, the fetishization of an instrument which, from being a didactic support prepared for the purpose of acquiring the discipline of architecture, has become an end in itself, closing in a solipsistic loop of utterly barren self-verification. [...] The result of this is a powerlessness at the level of form that leads to elementary

assumptions of clichés, of type-forms, of standard forms, disguised as morality or probity of form. [...] At this point, probative of our thesis would be a demonstration of the extent to which these inadequacies have influenced Italian architectural production and, in particular, the extent to which the lack of adequate commitment on the part of the university faculty has influenced it. Here we especially wish to underscore that it is precisely within the university that the commitment to disciplinary clarification on problems of morphology must be brought. (La Pietra & Seassaro, 1964)

The teaching of design is deemed sterile if it is not nourished by research aimed at pedagogy and training. In this sense, the thesis is also an inquiry into the purposes and role of the University Institutes and the research carried out within them.

The instrument of the University Institutes is identified as the most pertinent one, by virtue of its close interrelations with teaching and therefore its direct impact on the living core of the cultural elaboration that should originate within it. To research, and in particular to pure research, within the University Institutes of the Faculty of Architecture must be entrusted the commitment to include within their programs this specific *moment* of inquiry. (La Pietra & Seassaro, 1964)

Ambitious on the theoretical plane yet, viewed at a distance, also ingenuous, for two students barely in their twenties. What certainly emerges is a passion for the cultures and theories of form, and a polemical force in claiming the need to act on teaching in order to effect a real renewal of its forms and contents.

The thesis, mounted as an exhibition, would be presented again in 1965 at the *Istituto di Composizione* [Institute of Composition] and in 1966 at the *Galleria Flaviania* in Locarno.

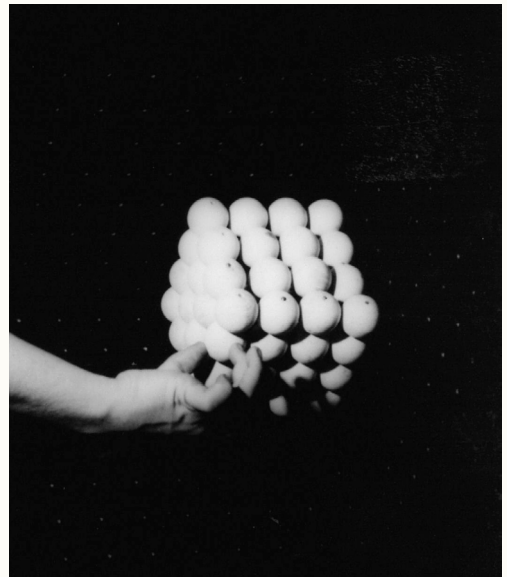
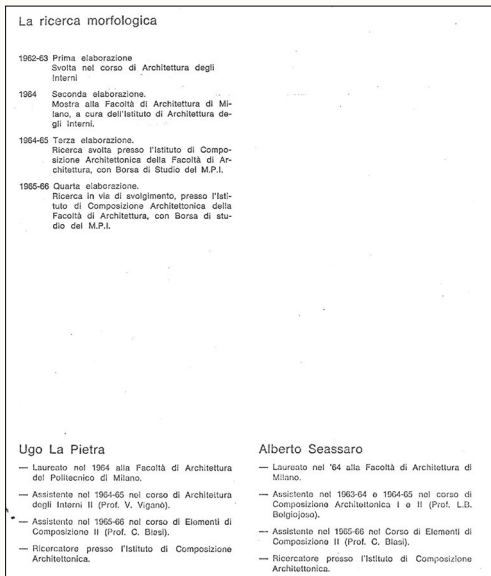
[...] Then came graduation: for many years no one had seen a *trenta e lode*; Seassaro and I were kissed by Dean Dodi, with compliments and appreciation for our thesis, which we presented spectacularly as an exhibition: photos, drawings, panels, models:

the *synesthesia among the arts*, with proposals for *doing research* within the Faculty of Architecture. [...] (Ugo La Pietra in Stefano Follesa, *Pane e progetto. Il mestiere del designer* [Bread and Design: The Designer's Craft], FrancoAngeli, Milan, 2009)

The Degree Thesis by La Pietra-Seassaro (1964-1965) marks the starting point for subsequent Ministry-funded Research projects (1965 and 1966) on the concept of *form* as a *research domain intentionally* oriented to the spatial dynamics proper to architectural studies. These two investigations, continuations and deepening of the thesis themes, were aimed at defining criteria for developing a bibliographic repertory on studies of *form* within project disciplines, to be housed in the Institutes of Composition. With these research projects Alberto Seassaro's university life begins.

The centrality of the morphological themes addressed in the thesis on the theoretical plane also constitutes the point of departure for his artistic and design activities.

Figure 2.
From Ugo La Pietra and Alberto Seassaro, *La ricerca morfologica* [Morphological Research], exhibition catalogue, Galleria Flaviania, 26 March 1966.



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2. *It Was a Good Journey, After All.* Interview with Ugo La Pietra

Agnese Rebaglio

Department of Design, Politecnico di Milano

Note 1.

[Link](#)→



A prominent role in Alberto Seassaro's formation and in his early years of work as a recent graduate is embodied by the architect, designer, artist, and draftsman – or, as he prefers to define himself, a *researcher in the visual arts* ¹, Ugo La Pietra. Almost the same age, their encounter at the Faculty of Architecture at Politecnico di Milano gave rise to a partnership that continued, solid as steel, throughout all their years of study and that ended abruptly and definitively after several years of shared professional activity. The two would then pursue their careers independently, yet each, within his own ambit – Ugo La Pietra in his design practice and Alberto Seassaro above all in the university – would develop that shared research root built during their youth. A root nourished by a fertile humus, constituted, as one gathers from La Pietra's words in the interview that follows, first and foremost by their mutual recognition of being outsiders to a certain social and educational system consolidated in the Faculty of Architecture of the 1960s, but also, certainly, by a common passion, vivid and concrete – almost an obsession – for a practice of design research that we would today define interdisciplinary. A sense of otherness with

respect to the context on the one hand, and artistic and design versatility on the other, led them, still students, to develop bold and visionary didactic projects, which culminated, in 1964, in the degree thesis that presented, in the form of an exhibition, their *morphological research* grounded in the *synesthesia of the arts* [1](#).



1. Ugo La Pietra e Alberto Seassaro, Catalogo della mostra *La Ricerca Morfologica*. [Document →](#)

The experiences shared in those years multiplied, intersecting a dense network of instructors, professionals, and fellow students (and later, studio colleagues), who in various capacities represented some of the protagonists in the history of the Faculty and of Milanese architecture in the last century, in an inseparable weave of stories. Pivotal were the encounters with Professors Vittoriano Viganò, Franco Albini, Cesare Blasi, Benedetto Resio, Carlo De Carli, but also with colleagues Renzo Piano, Milly Cappellaro, Cesare Stevan, Bico Belgiojoso, Carlo Guenzi, Filippo Tartaglia, Gianmaria Beretta, Giuliano Banfi, to name only a few; with some of them they undertook their first professional experiences. The relationship between Alberto Seassaro and Ugo La Pietra was nourished by the social networks and the altogether distinctive cultural climate that enveloped Politecnico di Milano and the city of Milan, a climate that pressed young students to reflect on the civic role and responsibilities of design. Within this world, and for many years, their bond – on both the personal and professional planes – was, to cite La Pietra's words, so *symbiotic* and visceral that it ultimately gave way to a *struggle for mutual acceptance*, producing a clear break, never mended. In short, a complex weave of stories and lives that reveals deeply human dynamics, in which the generative principles of youthful passions and shared interests evolve, over the years, into trajectories and parallel threads.

In the interview that follows, recorded in Ugo La Pietra's studio in April 2025, a testimony to those principles, that climate, that journey.

Let's start at the beginning: how did the two of you meet?

We met at university. In 1957 it was easy to get to know one another because there were very few students. At that time practically only the children of architects or entrepreneurs enrolled, and only rarely people without family ties to the discipline. So those like me or Alberto, who had no family tradition behind us, stood out right away. Our little partnership thus arose in quite a natural way.

Alberto had a marked artistic sensibility because he came from the art high school. He was a year younger than I was because that kind of school had allowed him to enroll early. I, for my part, was already a painter: even before enrolling in *Architecture* I had mounted small exhibitions. Among all our classmates, the two of us were closest to the *art world*, and it was precisely this that bound us together from the outset.

And then there was our constant competition with the other students, even if it wasn't sought. We were not *children of the establishment*, like others who could already count on a family background in architecture. We came from another story, and perhaps for that very reason, whenever we were given an assignment, we tried to push further. If thirty drawings were requested, we brought thirty-five. We always did more, and in ever greater complexity. We were living through almost a creative explosion, and our degree thesis, too, was conceived in that spirit.

We lived through many shared experiences as students, even though we never developed a project together, because at that time students worked only on individual projects. Nevertheless, my works often ended up resembling his, and vice versa. I recall an episode at Politecnico di Milano: one day we had to present the scale model of an assigned project. I kept mine hidden under a cloth, so as not to let Alberto see it. When he showed his, it was practically identical to mine... only a bit uglier! I had worked out that project in solitude, convinced it was particularly original, and yet he had conceived a project very similar to mine. In short, there was truly a great attunement between us, which lasted throughout all the years of study and culminated in the shared development of the degree thesis.

In fact, even before the thesis, we had collaborated on a beautiful project, also of historical value, together with Renzo Piano and Milly Cappellaro, who at the time was my girlfriend. For many days we surveyed and drew almost all the *cascine della bassa lombarda* (farmsteads of the lower Lombard plain), with splendid drawings, taken from life. Today I no longer have a single one, because Blasi, who in the meantime had become our professor and then our supervisor, gathered them all up. I never saw them again, except for a single drawing I still keep. Every time I look at it, I think: *wow, we were so talented!* We drew an enormous amount back then, and I went on to do so throughout my life. In Italy, unfortunately, even today *drawing* does not receive

the recognition it deserves, especially in the field of design: it has always been considered a gift to be given to the collector, nothing more. And yet drawing is a discipline in its own right, but it has no market, no collectors, not even a museum. I am a good draftsman



2. Fotografia di Alberto Seassaro, Renzo Piano, Ugo La Pietra, Milly Cappellaro.
[Document →](#)

– Alberto used to say I was the best – but apart from me and two or three others, no one knows it [23](#).

Your degree thesis was truly out of the ordinary for its artistic import, so anomalous for the Faculty of Architecture at the time, where theses were all devoted to a more canonical compositional project. How did you come up with that idea?

It is hard for me to say precisely how our degree thesis came into being, because after so many years the reasoning of that time blurs. I do know, however, that at a certain point we arrived at the



conviction that the integration of the arts – or *l'intégration des arts* – had by then been outgrown. The idea of an architecture that merely housed art, setting aside spaces for bas-relief or sculpture, no longer sufficed for us: we felt it was no longer enough to integrate; the arts had to be fused, so as to reconsider their relationship in earnest.

It was from this that the idea of *synesthesia* among the arts was born, the central theme of our thesis. I believe that, at bottom, we aspired to be *synesthetic instruments* ourselves. I myself, at a very young age, lived through a complex period, oscillating among various disciplines: I played in an orchestra (I played from 1955 into the 1990s), I painted, I was studying Architecture. In short, we never felt bound to a single field of study or expression.

For this reason, the hypothesis of crossing boundaries, traversing different disciplinary ambits, and bringing different creative languages into relation seemed to us – first intuitively, then with increasing awareness – to have a profound meaning for *design*.

Moreover, we felt keenly the need to claim, within the university, a space for research, with laboratories in which to experiment, in which to develop experiences, even irrespective of the specific discipline, with the aim of carrying forward true collective research, project experiments, and thus generating new knowledge. This approach to research, in Italy, was not contemplated within the Faculties of Architecture, but from the outset we felt its necessity acutely. I, we, have always felt ourselves to be *researchers*. And probably that thesis of ours, so atypical, arose precisely from there: from the intuition that genuine research had to be founded on the principle of synesthesia between the arts and the disciplines.

And indeed, there was a moment, in the early 1970s, when the disciplines truly began to lose their boundaries. In that period, everything seemed as though it might belong both to the world of *art* and to that of architecture. That vision of ours, almost utopian at the time of the thesis, seemed to take shape. The energy crisis of 1970-1972, and the consequent social and cultural change, had in fact pushed toward a rapprochement among the creative disciplines. Today, by contrast, these disciplines have returned to being separate worlds: the architect thinks of monuments, the designer of consumer objects, the artist works for the art system. We had tried to call precisely these boundaries into question and I, personally, continued along this path throughout my life. I kept faith with that initial intuition, and I still carry it forward today.

How did your trajectory at the university unfold?

After graduating, I became appointed assistant to Vittoriano Viganò, also going to work in his studio, and after a couple of years Alberto and I became assistants to Cesare Blasi, both in Milan and in Pescara.

But in the late 1960s Blasi was a figure who was not valued within the landscape at Politecnico di Milano, for political reasons. And yet among his assistants were the best of our generation: Stevan, Belgiojoso, Banfi, Seassaro, Tartaglia, and me. We were a fine group, truly.

Of that period in Pescara I have a strange *blank*. I had a girlfriend and I photographed her often, but I must admit I retain neither images nor memory of the moments spent there with Alberto, even though I know for certain he was there! I do remember clearly, however, setting out from Milan in my Volkswagen – even the very same car Alberto had! – and driving the whole of the *Adriatica* coastal road, town after town, because there was not yet an highway, with the traffic police whistling at you if you exceeded 50 km per hour. And yet I would set off with enthusiasm, because in Pescara one breathed an atmosphere completely different from that of Milan where, in 1969, the climate was deadly and there were shootings in the streets. Down there, by contrast, it was another world. The students were courteous, parents would come to meet the professors, in the evening they would invite you out, they treated you well. It was almost a vacation for me.

After a couple of years, however, things changed and the group around Blasi dispersed: Belgiojoso, Banfi, Stevan, Tartaglia, Guenzi, Sassaro – all drifted away. I was the only one who remained, because I'm sentimental and I had not understood the situation. Alberto, thanks to a friendship between his father and Ciribini – the great technologist – became his assistant, and we lost sight of each other. I, on the other hand, had drawn closer to Vittoriano Viganò: I had collaborated with him on several projects and he held me in high esteem. A project of mine from the second year, developed under his supervision, was particularly appreciated and even sold to the Centre Pompidou.

It was he who made me an assistant straightaway, even though normally one first needed at least ten years as a collaborator. Yet after the experience with Blasi, I did not embark on an academic career: after three or four years, realizing that things were not working, one day I simply left, without telling anyone, walking away from the Faculty.

That was a decisive moment, a kind of cathartic passage. Everyone, in our generation, took their own path, seeking their own mentor, and, at that moment, our paths diverged.

And outside the university, how did you work together?

Up to that point, throughout the 1960s, we shared a professional studio. Thanks to Alberto's father's connections, we had secured a major consultancy contract for a new Russian-origin building prefabrication

system: *prefabbricazione semi-pesante con silicalcite* [semi-heavy prefabrication with silicalcite]. We worked on this for years, producing prototypes, houses, claddings. I remember taking home 350,000 lire a month, the same salary as my father, who was a manager in a large firm. By comparison, when I worked for Viganò with a contract no one else had, my average salary was 150,000 lire a month.

Those figures allowed us to do a great many things, even if the work on silicalcite did not excite us. We designed an endless number of things, but it was certainly not our dream. Thanks to my ties with the art world, I also managed to obtain several commissions for our studio. We designed the *// Cenobio Gallery*, then *Spaggiari's house-gallery*, and even a colossal project for a small residential building, again for Spaggiari, who was a very well-to-do dealer. We designed the building and made a beautiful model that was never paid for. We went to court and even won, but we could not collect anything because the owner was officially indigent. In short, we were swindled and had to cover the costs ourselves. That was how things went then.

Already in the 1960s we tried to move beyond our two-person partnership, which at times was stifling, by bringing together a group of architects to create a broader collective studio. It included Stevan, Belgiojoso, Beretta, Algarotti, Seassaro, and me. Before that it had been just the two of us. Belgiojoso was talented; Beretta was good at keeping the books. We started with a studio in Viale Romagna, then moved to Via Solferino, and finally to Viale Petrarca. But there I lasted very little, perhaps a year or a bit more. And, as is my habit, one day I left without telling anyone. That is how it ended.

That is my story with Alberto. Afterwards, nothing more happened between us. The only episode worth noting is that I opened a studio at Corso Garibaldi 50 and, purely by coincidence – really, it wasn't intentional! – he took an apartment right there. But it meant nothing, because we no longer saw each other or kept company. A few times we ran into each other by chance; I would ask him what he was doing, but without going further.

What was your professional collaboration, in the studio, like?

I should preface this by saying that we always collaborated with many people; we were almost never alone working on projects and, beyond

the colleagues in the studio, we also had a network of external collaborators. I remember, for example, a very skilled craftsman on the outskirts where we would have our models made. But there were many others as well.

All the same, though we worked together, we were very different. The real difference between us was that I spent the whole day working like mad, I would *gorge* myself on drawing for hours, whereas he set to work only at night – good heavens! At nine in the evening he would arrive at *Viale Romagna*, where we had the studio, and before coming upstairs he would stop to chat with the prostitutes for a good hour.

Then he would finally come up, when I was already exhausted and on the point of going home grumbling, also because, in addition to work, I was a painter as well, I organized exhibitions, and in the evening I played.

So yes, we worked together, but under very different conditions, both in professional approach and in lifestyle. And so in 1971 I had the courage to say enough.

I left Politecnico di Milano, where I could not find fulfillment; I left the architecture studio, where I worked with partners I could not stand; and I also separated from my wife, a dreadful woman who had trapped me like a witch. In 1971 I was reborn.

What were the most significant divergences between you and Alberto Seassaro, from your point of view?

Ours was a partnership that lasted a long time, and we truly shared many moments of life, intimate and everyday. I keep, for example, marvelous memories of the long tables at my mother's house, where Alberto was at home. My mother was a splendid woman, affectionate, warm, welcoming in her home, and probably very different from Alberto's, about which he in fact spoke bitterly. Mine grew fond of the friends I brought home and welcomed them like children. And this way of being, for Alberto, mattered; perhaps he felt a domestic warmth he did not find at his own home. I remember that we shared dinners, parties, tables with *pasta al sugo* and a glass of wine that was never missing.

We were truly symbiotic. And yet Alberto was exactly the kind of person I have always found hard to tolerate. Let me give an example: we often went to Bar Jamaica, an iconic place for artists. Before I had the courage to go in, though, I spent years looking at it from outside,

not daring to enter, because those artists intimidated me. When I finally decided to speak with the owner, Signora Lina, she welcomed me sweetly because I was a shy, slight boy. Alberto, by contrast, was the opposite: he walked in with ease and at once greeted her loudly, *Cara mamma Lina, come stai?* He called her *mamma* straight off. It cracked me up! This was the deep difference between us that put me on the back foot.

And then, on reaching eighty, I discovered something shocking that I had not known before: I am dyslexic. And that, suddenly, explains so many things. Only after many years did I understand a difference in Alberto that I could not abide: for me studying had always been a torment, whereas for him it came very simply and naturally. When we were students, to study a book (physics, chemistry, or any subject), I had to spend three months copying it out in full into notebooks, word for word. I had, in fact, a marked visual memory and I was very good at drawing: when they examined me, I would close my eyes and *see* and *read* my notebook in my mind.

He, by contrast, studied everything in ten days. He did it somewhat swaggeringly, perhaps without delving into everything, but it was enough for him. And this drove me mad. At the time I did not understand why everything was so hard for me while everything was so easy for him. Today I know: I was dyslexic, but no one had ever told me. In

short, as expansive, brilliant, and entertaining as he was, drawing attention to himself, I, by contrast, was withdrawn, a bit

sullen, because I had spent my whole childhood and adolescence feeling like the last, the ugliest, the one who did not understand.

Living alongside someone so different from me, 24 hours a day, was an enormous challenge. We were alike in concepts, but opposite in ways of being. This inevitably generated, in the end, a *struggle for mutual*

3. Videointervista con
Ugo La Pietra.
[Document →](#)



acceptance, a short circuit. It was a relationship that marked me and that, in a certain sense, is still an open question because, at night, I still dream, regularly, of Alberto Seassaro. It was a good journey, after all [34](#).

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3. Alberto Seassaro, a Memory

Giancarlo Consonni

Emeritus Politecnico di Milano

I attended the first year at the Faculty of Architecture of Politecnico di Milano in 1962-1963. The initial two years were modeled after those of Engineering (a decision dating back to 1934, when Architecture was established as an autonomous faculty). Architecture was reduced to just a few subjects: *Constructive Elements I and II* (Carlo Villa, with the manual by Enrico A. Griffini), *Elements of Architecture and Survey of Monuments* (Claudio Buttafava in the first year, Umberto Sabbioni in the second, later replaced mid-course by Piero Bottoni), *History of Art and History and Styles of Architecture* (Alessandro Degani in the first year, Carlo Perogalli in the second), *Stylistic and Constructive Characters of Monuments* (Luigi Crema, the only one who gave lectures of any real interest). The rest – the predominant part of the teaching – consisted of the so-called *scientific*. If you managed to overcome the *catenaccio* – the barrier of the first two years – you arrived at the third year starved for architecture. Upon this scarcity, the first occupation of the Faculty in the winter of 1963 had its entirely legitimate reasons. But the occupiers were too absorbed in their demands to involve the new students. Freshmen were left only to observe the fire burning in a

barrel at the entrance of the newly inaugurated building in Via Bonardi and to labor, with T-square and triangle, on the drafting tables in the old headquarters in Piazza Leonardo da Vinci. At my side, bent over the drawings, were Demetrio Stratos and Thalia Istikopoulou.

A light in the darkness came, in the second year, with the arrival of Piero Bottoni, who revolutionized the course in *Elements of Architecture and Survey of Monuments*. At the invitation of a group of fifth-year students, who had been among the protagonists of the 1963 occupation, the designer of QT8 transformed the exercise into a research project on the settlement and socio-economic characteristics of some villages in the *bassa milanese* (a context that at the time, especially in agriculture, was still in conditions of poverty). For many students it was a plunge into reality, with field investigations and surveys conducted in groups (another novelty). It was, at least for myself, a formative experience.

Another light, again for this writer, came from some panels displayed in the library. They were the works that Ugo La Pietra and Alberto Seassaro had just presented for their thesis defense. An unusual project, so innovative in theme and in graphic presentation that the examining committee, chaired by Piero Portaluppi, decreed that those works deserved to be exhibited so that all students could see them. I have preserved over time the memory of the communicative force, effective and captivating, of those panels.

Seen again more than sixty years later, the two innovations, that of Bottoni and that of La Pietra-Seassaro, take on the character of anticipations of certain paths that the Faculty of Architecture in Milan would embark upon not only in the tumultuous decade that followed, but in the history thereafter.

While Ugo La Pietra went his own way, Alberto Seassaro was among the not few *assistants* who, in the heart of the 1960s, sided with the student movement in demanding a radical renewal of studies in Architecture.

The substantial harmony that arose between student demands and the orientations of much of the faculty, beginning with Dean De Carli and the Faculty Council, was not welcomed by the university leadership, who invoked and obtained from the central government repressive interventions that remain an exception – a *vulnus* – in the history of republican Italy. The first to take a heavy hand was Minister of Edu-

cation Giovanni Battista Scaglia (Leone II government), who on August 9, 1968 revoked the appointment of Carlo De Carli as Dean. More than three years later it was Minister of Education Riccardo Misasi (Andreotti I government) who, on November 23, 1971, suspended eight members of the Faculty Council (Franco Albini, Lodovico Belgiojoso, Piero Bottoni, Guido Canella, Carlo De Carli, Paolo Portoghesi, Aldo Rossi, and Vittoriano Viganò). Finally, between May, October, and November of 1972, the new Minister of Education Oscar Luigi Scalfaro (Andreotti II government) completed the work with the dismissal of 23 appointed professors: Emilio Battisti, Sandra Bonfiglioli, Dario Borradori, Bianca Bottero, Maurice Cerasi, Raffaella Crespi, Sergio Crotti, Mario De Micheli, Adriano Di Leo, Giorgio Ferraresi, Leonardo Fiori, Giorgio Gaetani, Corrado Levi, Lodovico Meneghetti, Antonio Monestiroli, Guido Nardi, Augusto Rossari, Giovanni Salvestrini, Giacomo Scarpini, Fabrizio Schiaffonati, Alberto Seassaro, Cesare Stevan, Gio Vercelloni.

A strong and tenacious commitment to research was the response of students and professors to the commissioner's control of the Faculty (entrusted to Corrado Beguinot). A form of resistance which, combined with the mobilization of eminent figures of Italian culture, led in 1974 to the rehabilitation of the members of the Faculty Council. A phase of renewed energy then began in the Milanese Faculty, along with tensions and heated confrontations.

The conditions of the broader context were also changing. Within a few years, the entire Politecnico di Milano, like the rest of Italian universities, was entering a fertile season, dense with hope, under the banner of self-government. At the Politecnico, the establishment of Departments in 1981 and several steps toward reducing, at least formally, the imbalance of decision-making power between engineers and architects bore abundant fruit, thanks also to three farsighted rectors: Emilio Massa, Adriano De Maio, and Guido Ballio. The construction of the *Politecnico network* (De Maio) – with the regional campuses of Como (later suppressed), and of Lecco, Cremona, Mantua, and Piacenza – and the establishment in 1995 of the Faculties of Civil Architecture and of Design in Bovisio were among the best results of this season. I had the good fortune to follow these developments closely in various governing bodies: the Integrated Academic Senate, which drew up the Statute of Autonomy; the University Commission, which

played a strategic role in stimulating and monitoring the creation of departments; and finally, the Academic Senate in full operation. It was an exhilarating phase, even more so if compared with what came after 2009 with the Gelmini counter-reform.

And Alberto Seassaro? The heated and persistent turmoil that for years preceded the creation of the Faculty of Civil Architecture saw him withdrawn, halfway between detached and amused, with that vaguely ironic smile under his moustache. In appearance, he was lined up on the front opposite mine; yet this did not prevent us from exchanging jokes about the inconsistency of the holders of academic power.

But, willingly or not, hesitant or simply waiting, his turn came. With the establishment of the Faculty of Design, the very promoters realized that, for the project to succeed, a figure was needed, a cultivated and prudent weaver. Few others in Milan possessed the competences and the network of relations that he could boast. Under his guidance, the Politecnico and the city thus saw a remarkable enterprise take shape.

Later he and I stood shoulder to shoulder in the Academic Senate in the years when the counter-reform emerged. There, with others – I particularly recall Renzo Rosso and Antonella Penati – we resisted with all our strength the decline toward which the Italian university was heading, warning of its dangers. In vain. The Gelmini tsunami swept away our resistance along with others. The consequences are plain for all to see and have turned Italian universities into entities incapable of self-government and, above all, into sad places.

Of Alberto Seassaro I retain the memory of a person who knew how to combine a joyful disposition with lightness and nonchalance. With those marvelous ties (crocheted by his wife) serving as his calling card.

PART 2

Between Artistic and Design Experimentation

4. Undisciplined!

Antonella Penati

Department of Design, Politecnico di Milano

4.1 Between Art, Science, Architecture and Design

For Alberto Seassaro, the years following his degree are marked by design fervor. The experimental attitude incubated during his training unfolds into multiple research pathways: in the university, where, just after graduating, he begins to collaborate with Ludovico Belgiojoso, with Cesare Blasi, and then with Giuseppe Ciribini; in the world of artistic practices, where he expresses himself by pursuing certain intuitions outlined in theoretical form during his university studies; and in the design sphere, where he moves from the scale of the object to that of interiors, to which is added the important experience at Montecatini that would translate into genuine design experimentations on housing modules composed of prefabricated systems and components.

These expressive planes of the project by no means distant constitute the testing ground of a *laboratory* in which the idea is concretely put into practice that the creative process works transversally across

the disciplines of form not through integration, juxtaposition, or opposition, nor through mere similarity or analogy, but through dialectical synthesis, through transfers and contaminations of languages, experiences, procedures, modes of thought, materials, and *aesthetic and ethical orientations*, in the search for that *sinestesia delle arti* [synesthesia of the arts] theorized with Ugo La Pietra in their degree thesis (La Pietra, Seassaro, 1964) in antithesis to the *intégration des arts* [integration of arts]. As Ugo La Pietra recalls in *La sinestesia delle arti*, their thesis research brought visual cultures together by identifying in the *segno* [sign] the lowest common denominator and in the *metodo dei modelli* [method of models] the operational tool useful for overcoming the separations codified by the various artistic-cultural systems (La Pietra, 2001, p. 15).

A morphological model [...], in addition to being a tool for experimentation aimed at the scientific knowledge of behaviorist interactions with form, acquires a precise semiotic essence as a receptor of processes of formal intentionalization and thus as a vehicle of poetics. This intentionality can, in fact, lead a model to exceed its own ontological sphere and, by attributing to it properties of the 'real sphere', allow it to assume within itself an architectural design attitude. The first experimental objective of the research – the construction of a spatial model instrumentable for morphological operability – was approached through the introduction of a 'spatial system' characterized by a 'spatio-temporal module' [...] capable of receiving 'elements of position and situation' and the primary perceptual experiences of orientation, directionality, distance, size, density. This part of the research led to the construction of modules operable as 'spatial utensils', endowed with an elementary homeostaticity that makes them capable of inducing 'effects' and of receiving the operator's feedback. The acquisition of the architectural object can thus be carried out through modeling operations, in the constant verification of the relationship between formativity and objectification of elementary morphological events. As a further phase in an instrumental exploration of the entire research cycle, the verification of the 'elementary spatial system' that was realized was carried out by loading

the model with behaviorist and functional implications, that is, by operating projective precipitations upon it that render it a vehicle of formal intentionality. (From Ugo La Pietra and Alberto Seassaro, *La ricerca morfologica*, Exhibition Catalogue, Galleria Flaviana, 26 March 1966)

On close examination of Alberto Seassaro's way of operating across these different spheres of design, one encounters a *continuum* that begins with certain theoretical reflections appearing in his writings and finds its first formalizations in the series of *Morfemi*, which then influence, both in language and in approach to the world of forms and surfaces, his objects conceived as modules extendable to infinity, as well as domestic interiors and installations for art galleries, up to the housing *modules* treated as *oggetti componibili* [combinable objects] or as *varianti* [variants] of the same object.

The theme of the *sign*, the minimal meaning-bearing element, and of the *model*, an instrument of *active and dynamic operability* – that is, interactive – derive for Alberto Seassaro from his readings and his interests in theories of form, semiotic cultures, and cybernetics. The latter discipline fascinated him after his university collaboration with Giuseppe Ciribini and following his attendance with Silvio Ceccato at the Verucchio seminars. It is the youthful phase of infatuations with approaches and disciplines that are fascinating precisely because they lie outside the canonical path of architectural studies; it is the time of granite positions, *without ifs or buts*, typical of a soul characterized by insatiable curiosity.

But it is also the moment of intellectual forays into the new universe of signs brought by the artistic avant-gardes and by the theme of contamination among different languages: music, painting, graphic design, comics, cinema. And again, it is the moment when the *solidity* of disciplinary boundaries gives way, and the art world, too, lets many walls fall, first among them the one that stood to enforce a sharp distinction between major and minor arts; between the visual and the sonic; between arts of pure aesthetics and functional arts. Among these is design, which for many has served as the blurred conduit between art and architecture. His library bears witness to the closeness among these different worlds, from which Alberto Seassaro drew

freely, and of which he was a great collector. For Seassaro, to appropriate a world – be it musical, artistic, cultural, or object-related – means embracing it until he knows it in its entirety, a totalizing whole, almost manic. And if, on the musical plane, his jazz soul leads him to *put together* entire vinyl collections (from Billie Holiday, Charlie Parker, Ella Fitzgerald, Louis Armstrong, Duke Ellington, Miles Davis, Ray Charles, David Murray, Thelonious Monk to George Gershwin), on the cinematic plane it is all of Fellini, all of Bergman, all of Kubrick, all of Hitchcock; all of Welles, all of Kurosawa, all of Antonioni, all of Visconti, all of Wenders, all of Tarantino, all of Truffaut, all of Allen, all of Monty Python, and so on – where *all truly means all*, obsessively. On the plane of visual culture, and in particular on that of linguistic invention and the contamination of different languages, his library then testifies, with numerous art-history books organized by authors, styles and currents, Schools, Museums and Art Galleries, etc., to a selective curiosity for comics culture: from Andrea Pazienza to Filippo Scòzzari, Tanino Liberatore, Tullio Pericoli, Moebius, Jean-Marc Reiser, not excluding the entire collection of Donald Duck (but NOT Mickey Mouse), and then *The Simpsons* (the whole family and all its characters still cover the bathroom walls of the Seassaro home), Mafalda up to Zerocalcare (but NOT Manga).

For Seassaro, collecting never coincides with possessing; rather, it means placing a thousand variants of the same motif side by side and grasping, precisely in the variance, even the smallest, the deep meaning and the interest in nuances and differences.

A whole chapter should be devoted, in collecting terms, to his interest in aesthetic disciplines, the art world, and the cultures of light. In other respects, his collection of *elephants* is also well known, with a preference for Indian ones over African, testimonies to his travels and to those of friends and family. No importance is given to the preciousness of the object but to its story and its placement within the material history of a people's culture, its symbolic aspects, its material characteristics, and its workmanship, which tell much about local know-how.

4.2 Brera as a Cultural *Milieu*

The enthusiasms and myths of his youth, his love for artistic cultures, and his political ideals were fed by the attitude of a voracious gleaner, an attitude that never left him, driving him to gather information, notions, and knowledge from diverse, even least conventional, sources and to go looking *here and there* for anything that satisfied his interests: not only books but also magazines, newspapers, atlases, brochures, photographs, reports and accounts, and then radio, cinema, and places of encounter. *Places of encounter*. Indeed, it is impossible to fully understand that *peculiar way* of living, being in the world, thinking, observing, communicating, and translating into design that marked Alberto Seassaro, if one omits to name, among the principal sources of his knowledge, being among people, learning *scambiando due parole* [exchanging a few words], the Fellini-esque *perder tempo* [wasting time] spent observing how the world turns, collecting points of view from the most disparate people, even the most humble – the ones you meet at the tobacconist's, on the stairs of the apartment building, at the bar, or along the streets of his beloved Brera neighborhood.

He breathed art in Brera as a student, and the artistic matrix made Brera a kind of *idealtipo* [ideal type] for the fertile humus that characterized it. Brera represented not only a place but also a season, a crossroads of milieus, situations, figures, and a concentrate of opportunities, of artistic and intellectual expressions. He chose Brera as the ideal place and neighborhood of his life, where he indeed *lived first* at Garibaldi 50 and then at 44, also, and perhaps above all, for its popular atmosphere: *Nora, Barbara, Coletta* made those streets and their inhabitants familiar. The Brera of the 2000s no longer corresponded to him, a *posto di fighetti* [posh hangout] and of *tourists who come and go*, where no one knows anyone anymore.

Brera is the milieu Alberto frequents at the start of his career: in Brera he gathers friends, initiates cultural exchanges, seeks stimuli. Brera, with its antennas always tuned to pick up the signals of the contemporary, is the place of encounters: artists, actors, photographers, painters, writers. Brera is guilty of having inverted Alberto Seassaro's biorhythm: by day, until late in the evening, wandering in search of stimuli and opportunities for exchange, seeking in (little) rest the mo-

ments of synthesis; at night, toward morning, the moments of feverish work. It would be so for the rest of his life.

Ugo La Pietra, who shared a professional studio with Alberto Seassaro in the first years after graduation, recounts the long, nerve-racking days spent waiting for him to arrive at the office. But Alberto would come late in the evening – very late – after stopping to talk with all the prostitutes of Brera (see Ugo La Pietra, in this volume). In Brera he began to spend time with Demetrio Stratos, bewitched by his voice and his vocal experiments. He had met him at the Faculty of Architecture and, although a few years younger, had started to see him and to attend his musical group, Area. In Brera he met Gian Maria Volonté (who later became his tenant at Garibaldi 50); Dario Fo, who gifted him the sketches for his stage sets; Giorgio Gaber (with whom he was often confused because of their thinness and aquiline noses); Uliano Lucas; and then, at the legendary Jamaica bar, the exponents of the Milanese avant-gardes, a term used here to encompass various currents and artistic practices in 1960s Milan characterized by a strong spirit of experimentation and innovation: Arturo Vermi, Emilio Isgrò, Piero Manzoni, Lucio Fontana, and also Fausto Melotti.

Brera was not only a place of easy encounters but a living environment of artistic ferment, immersed in a bustle of signs left by established artists and street artists alike, concrete testimony to their presence in the near-daily production of installations, images, drawings, sculptures, and creative artifacts. Everything that Seassaro, on the threshold of 30, found in Brera he would later seek in his countless journeys through distant lands and cultures.

Personal curiosity nourished by the art world tells only part of Alberto Seassaro's story. To grasp his *animus* fully, his youth must be situated within the culture, political struggles, social movements, and hopes of a generation. His political commitment marks his design choices and, more generally, his life choices. It began while he was still a student, with active participation in the ferment at the Faculty of Architecture; it then entered the university classrooms, first as a young assistant and later as a lecturer, through themes that testify to his sensitivity toward the housing problems of the most vulnerable social classes above all. He also made various interventions of a political nature within the Faculty Council and in the research seminars of

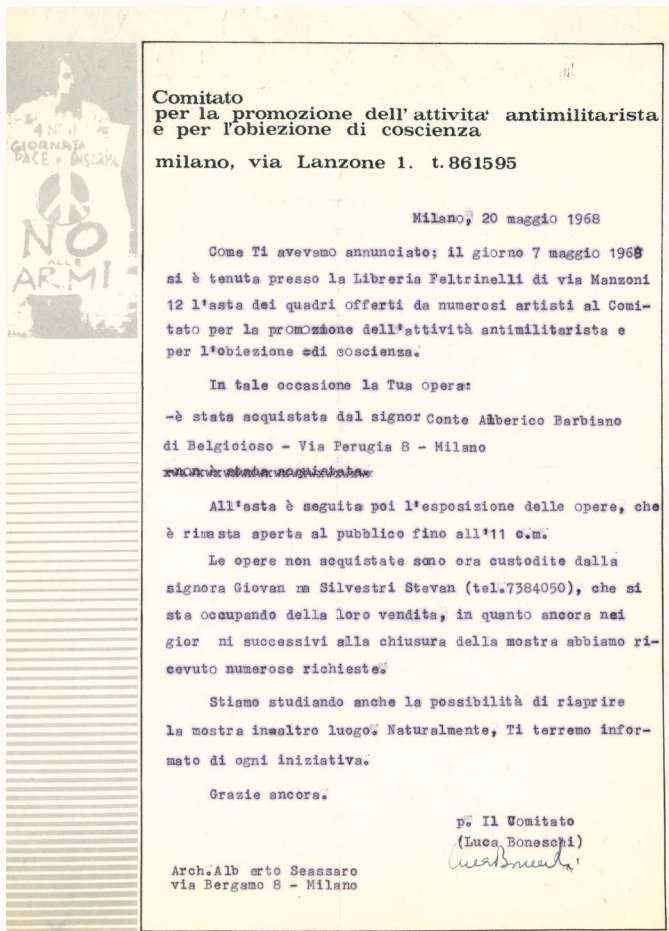
1. Lettera del Comitato
per la promozione
dell'attività antimilitarista
e per l'obiezione di
coscienza, indirizzata ad
Alberto Seassaro.
Document→



Cultura tecnologica [Technological Culture] and in the *Gruppo Nazionale di Ricerca CNR* [CNR National Research Group],

where the political dimension of technology is always predominant. His vibrant militancy – which ended as soon as he sensed the first warnings that would lead to the dark moments of armed struggle, from which he

forcefully distanced himself – also expressed itself outside the academic sphere, with participation in the movements of '68 and the 1970s. As an artist he took part in several fundraising events for the Anti-militarist Committee by auctioning some of his works; still as an artist, he withdrew his works from the XXXIV Venice Biennale of Contemporary Art in 1968, where he had been invited by Argan to the *Rassegna giovani* [Young Artists Review], joining the dissenting demonstrations of numerous artists; as a professional coordinating a design unit in a major industry such as Montecatini, he took to the streets with workers in labor protests against *the ex-*



ploitation by the bosses. The act cost him his job 19 29.

He was a keen observer and, also by supervising many theses, analyzed the life of cultural and political circles, social centers, and all those places that appeared confined and minor yet bore a counter-culture capable of fueling change and prefiguring new and different futures. He gave voice to housing-occupation movements, bringing the concrete experience of civic associations, neighborhood committees, and organizations active in the territory into university re-

search at a time when housing was one of the principal social emergencies. Within the university sphere, he fostered places and modes that made practices of self-reflection possible in order to bring to the surface the problems of youth; he took an active part in feminist movements, thanks also to his closeness in life and political militancy to Ida Farè [3](#) [4](#).

4.3 Youth Projects

This is the cultural, artistic, and political landscape that forms the backdrop to many of his early projects, which began as early as 1964 when, together with Ugo La Pietra, he opened the *P/S Project Studio*. In those years, project experiences matured in the fields of interior architecture, exhibition design, and product design, leading to built works and artifacts published in sector journals including *Domus*, *Abitare*, *Interni*, and *Edilizia Moderna*, in addition to important work in the field of construction industrialization for Montecatini Edison.

Many projects were nourished by the shared path that had seen them work together on their degree thesis on the terrain of form, a crossroads of art, architecture, and design.

These are strongly experimental projects that find their cultural and methodological premises precisely in their thesis work. Thus, for example, the project *Tuberie* [Pipes], submitted to the competition *Monumento alla Resistenza per la Città di Brescia* [Monument to the Resistance for the City of Brescia], in which Nanda Vigo took part. Seassaro had met her in front of a bar counter at the port of Genoa. In his passion for wandering, ports were privileged places of encounter.

The project draws inspiration from one of the famous *liriche oggettuali* [object-poems] by the Futurist poet Farfa (Vittorio Osvaldo Tommasini): *Tuberie*. A commodity poem that enumerates «real and imaginary pipes, symbolic and industrial, transfigured and oneiric; pipes that tangle with one another in a continual leap from one sensory sphere to another, from one context to another. Metaphorical, erotic, and hydraulic pipes, pipes 'for every use'» (Francesca Bergadano, 2018).

As La Pietra and Seassaro themselves recount, the *Monumento alla Resistenza per la città di Brescia* was to represent «an urban route

INVITO PERSONALE

inaugurazione della mostra,
dibattito "antimilitarismo
politico delle sinistre".
con Felice Accame, Luca
Boneschi, Giorgio Maiorino,
Marco Pannella.

ORE 22.15 :

asta; presenzieranno la
sign.ra Pia Rame ed il
prof. Gillo Dorries.

hanno aderito offrendo loro quadri, tra gli altri, i pittori :

[illegible]

CPAAeOB via Lanzzone, 1 MILANO tel. 861595



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in which the narrative element used is the conducting cylindrical tube. The relational character of the tube is expressed as a symbolic fact by Farfa's poem *Tuberie*. The monument is conduit, and the route of the conduit itself, and the transmission of historical events. The route: from narrow passage to fracture and thus to a sum of landscapes and routes, is the metamorphic representation of a historical path that goes from fascist obscurantism to the Resistance and ends with the reconstruction of the country» (La Pietra, 2001, p. 34)

pipes of water of air of gas / of drain of discharge of exhaust / of
stoneware of terracotta of concrete / of glass of rubber of ebonite
/ pipes of all merchandise / pipes of the water closet of feeling /
pipes of the stove and of boredom / tunnel pipes hungry for railway
/ pipes of torment and of joy / pipes of all metals / pipes of the
yellow gloves / hydrant pipes of the firemen / launching cubes
of fresh water / to calm the heat of the flames / pipes of fountain
pens / pouring thought / black as the mood / red as love / pipes of
blood pressure / digestive pipes / for the slow waltzes of digestion
/ pipes of guts / for the tarantella / of visceral grimaces / tangled
pipes of breasts / genital and virginal pipes / pipes of workshop
chimneys / of steamships of locomotives / with seed of smoke /
demonstrating the nullity / of voluptuousness / pipes of garden
benches / scented with jasmines / pipes for every use / pipes for
every abuse / dairy pipes bent / by the grasping hand / whose
expelled water / lengthens the fingers / pipes of reeds of gutters of
mouthpieces / Bergmann pipes / Togni pipes Mannesmann pipes
/ pipes of all machines / pipes of all motors / pipes of the stems of
flowers / pipes of rifles and of cannons / for the rapid change of
generations / pipes bones holes of chickens / that were well-fed
and sated / pipes of chilled noses / pipes of softened hearts / pipes
of telescopes / that on beautiful nights / fill with stars / pipes of or-
gans and of winches / of musical instruments / beating with breath
/ on the eardrums / very old motifs / pipes stopped and unstopped
/ named and unnamed pipes / pipes of every species and every
type / pipes of every thickness and size / pipes upright and with
sharp elbow / pipes in the everlasting operation / of masturbation
/ of their own content / intake pipes / descent pipes / ascent pipes

**/ all in universal heat / every pipe an umbilical cord / that binds
that welds to life / rushing and silent pipes / I am your singer / I am
a snake charmer. (Farfa, *Tuberie*, 1993. Farfa, *Noi miliardario della
fantasia*. Milano: Edizioni La Prora)**

Other projects, while not abandoning the stamp of experimentalism, already display a more complete design and professional maturity (even if both Alberto Seassaro and Ugo La Pietra complain that they never managed to get paid by their clients). Among these are projects for art galleries, again with Ugo La Pietra, and modular furnishing systems and living spaces, where Seassaro instead favors individual endeavor. In the project, the forms, the materials used, and the processing techniques are pressed into their expressive potential both in the artisanal sphere and in industrial production.

Among the projects with Ugo La Pietra, in 1968, the *Galleria privata Walter Spaggiari* [Walter Spaggiari Private Gallery] in Milan, published in *Domus* (n. 465, 1968) where the experimental attitude is directed toward rethinking the traditional typology of the art gallery as a space not only for viewing works of art, but also for housing a storage area for works and a space for dwelling [52](#) [62](#).

A complex typology that found in the succession of textures the structural motifs of the various environments. It is one of the first examples of an opening of the *galleria d'arte* [art gallery] typology [...] capable of breaking the traditional system through 'addition and integration'. (La Pietra, 2001, p. 42)

The perforated metal sheet, the weave of tubular elements in the ceiling, the panels, and the modular parallelepipeds are signs of a peculiar language that we also find in the other gallery project, 'Il Cenobio', in Milan, designed in 1967. (*Domus*, n. 451, 1967)

Conceiving environments as a single, large, unified object is a hallmark we find in the projects of La Pietra and Seassaro, and it recurs even when Alberto Seassaro works on his own, as in domestic interiors. His projects are few and similar to one another in their exhibition-installation and material language. It is a highly recognizable language that

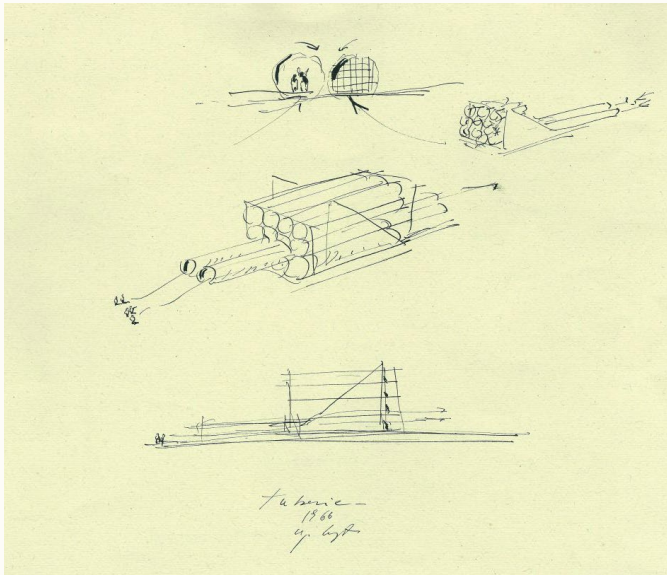
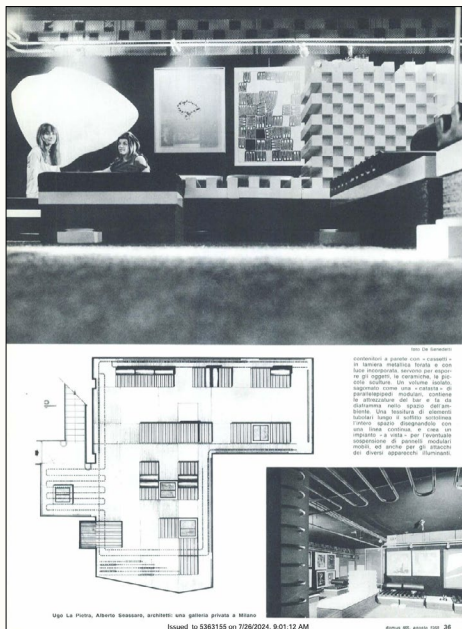


Figure 1.
Tuberie project by Ugo La Pietra, Alberto Seassaro, Nanda Vigo (1966).



5. Ugo La Pietra e Alberto Seassaro, Galleria privata Walter Spaggiari, in *Domus*, n. 465.
[Document →](#)



6. Ugo La Pietra, Alberto Seassaro, *Il Cenobio*, in *Domus*, n. 451.
[Document →](#)

we find in the project for *Casa Rizzi* in Camogli [7](#), in the family house in Camogli, and in the dwelling on Via Franchetti in Milan for his sister Paola [8](#). The interiors are conceived as equipped spaces in which reticular components integrate the walls, becoming one with them, and it is no longer possible to distinguish the structural elements from those that enrich them to facilitate use and organize space.

The exhibitory apparatus, characterized by protrusions on the walls and ceiling, in fact cancels the difference between container and content, generating a continuum where the furniture disappears and is everywhere, without the eye perceiving a clear break between elements that function as container, as lighting apparatus, as multipurpose structure, etc.

In the exhibition-based design of domestic space, the forms and juxtapositions of materials recall his more artistic works, in which he experiments with new expressive languages, where white, shaped in many surface treatments, prevails.

This way of conceiving the design of spaces presupposes that every single element, every single object, every constructive and exhibition detail be designed ad hoc: tables, tops and shelves, storage units, shelves and bookcases.

In the photo, note the table designed for the apartment on via Franchetti, conceived for artisanal fabrication but later reappearing in a simplified version for industrial production in the *Add* project for Acerbis [9](#). If in these projects the interiors are governed as if they were a large object conceived in all its details, then all the more so with the project of the *Monoblocco per arredo integrale* [Monoblocco for integral furnishing], presented at the international exhibition held in New York in 1972, *Italy. The New Domestic Landscape*, we are faced with a veritable object-space in which different environments and different functions are composed, almost assembled.

Hovering here is the philosophy of *macchine per abitare* [machines for living] (Fagone and Favata, 2011) that, in those same years, animated Joe Colombo's design experiments: the use of new materials such as methacrylate; the idea of a system composed of modular elements brought to the scale of total furnishing; the construction of an environment completely detached from the architecture that contains it, a



7. Alberto Seassaro,
Casa Rizzi a Camogli, in
Interiors '70.
[Document →](#)



8. Alberto Seassaro,
Spazio abitativo a Milano,
in *Interiors '70*.
[Document →](#)



9. Alberto Seassaro,
*Addition, Tavolo
attrezzato componibile*,
Acerbis.
[Document →](#)

Figure 2.
Table designed by Alberto Seassaro
for the house in Via Franchetti.



10. *L'intero mobile
corre su rotaie,*
Alberto Seassaro, in
Domus, n. 489.
[Document](#)→



kind of *house within the house*; the concept of a *mobile* space in the literal sense, that is, a space that can be moved according to changing needs. Alberto Seassaro's *Monoblocco*, produced by Acerbis as an experimental model, anticipates many of the problems of living in minimal spaces and, at the same time, reflects processes of rationalizing housing systems (see *L'intero mobile corre su rotaie*, Alberto Seassaro, in *Domus* n. 489) [10](#).

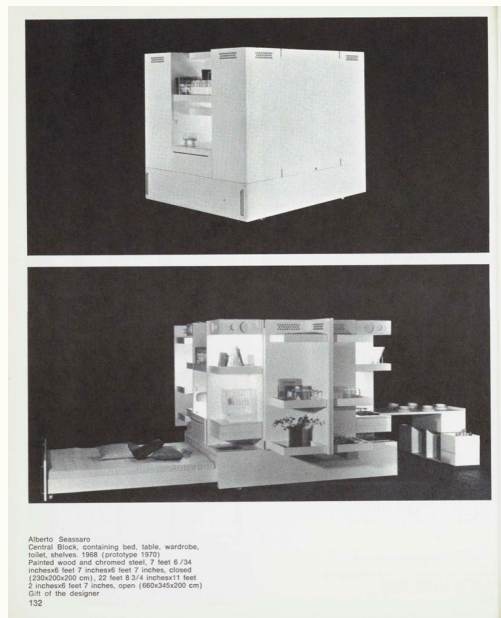
In the project, the social issues of inhabiting are reworked not by seeking a

rhetorical, ironic, or unconventional response, but by pursuing a solution that serves use, playing with the themes of modularity and flexibility [11](#). (Catalogue of the exhibition Italy: *The New Domestic Landscape*, MoMA, 1972)

The principles of flexibility and modularity; interior proposals that look not so much to tradition as to social evolution, new lifestyles, and new needs that open up to new ways of living; experiments with new materials, new technologies, and new languages, these are found not only in interior design but also in the design of housing units created through prefabrication and mass production.

This area of design would engage him for several years at the Research Division of Montecatini Edison and would be developed in collaboration with Ugo La Pietra.

Modular design and industrial technologies for the prefabrication of building components certainly constitute a fundamental, perhaps the most significant, part of Alberto Seassaro's professional design research. Within the prefabricated module and in the design of integrative equipment rests the hope for a democratic architecture for a



generation of architects who, due to their close proximity to modes of industrial production, approach the design methods most typical of design. The competences Alberto Seassaro developed in this field through his professional research would become a subject of study in university life as well and would constitute the point of approach first to the technological area and then to that of design.

The theme of industrialization in the construction sector and the production of industrial components and manufactured elements for residential use, for buildings of public interest, or for industrial facilities brings him close to figures such as Giuseppe Ciribini, Marco Zanuso, and Giacomo Scarpini, and to enterprises such as Edison S.p.A. and Finsider S.p.A., for which he worked as a consultant. For the Sviluppo Silicalcite S.p.A. of Montecatini Edison, together with Ugo La Pietra, he developed the *Programma di ricerca per la sperimentazione e lo sviluppo di un Sistema di prefabbricazione in Silicalcite per case unifamiliari e tipologie affini* [Research program for the experimentation and development of a silicalcite prefabrication system for single-family houses and related types] (1966), which kept him engaged for several years.

The research program envisaged the testing of the Silicalcite product and of the production process, aimed at refining a *Catalogue*



11. Estratto del Catalogo della Mostra *Italy: The New Domestic Landscape*, MOMA. [Document →](#)

of *standard housings*, of component typologies, and of typologies for assembling series-produced prefabricated elements.

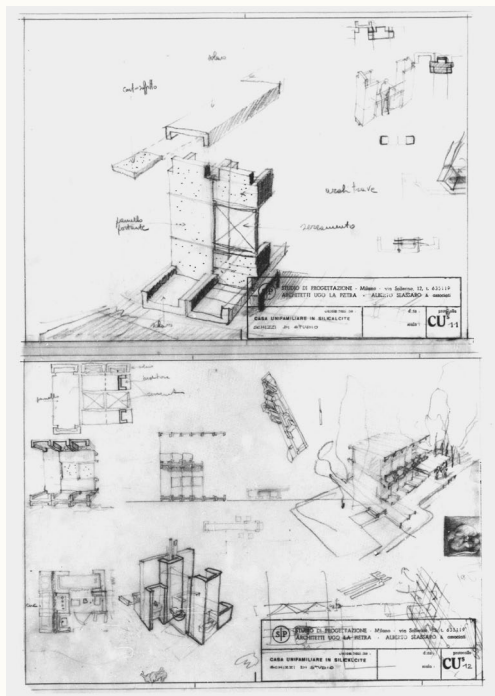
The catalogue can also be read as a compendium of new materials and of the new vocabulary that accompanied the evolution of the construction industry.

In 1971 he joined the Montedil Research Center of the Montecatini Edison Group as the person responsible for the development, coordination, and integration of building products, and for supervising the implementation of works across the various building complexes carried out by the Montedison Technical Office and by external designers. What emerges in these studies is an enthusiasm for the use of modular elements in architecture for the aspects of functional flexibility made possible by assembling simple components into complex systems, and for their propensity to create, through juxtapositions, surface textures.

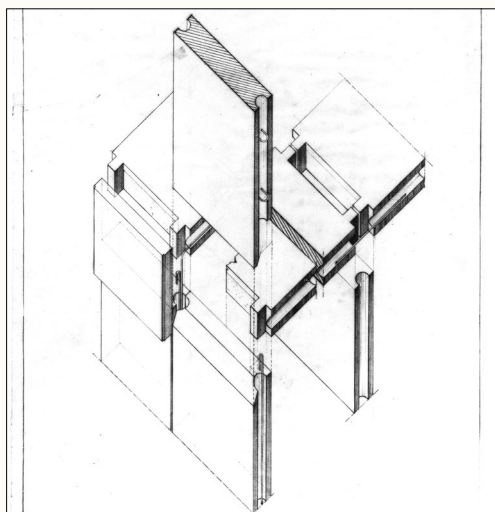
The possibility of obtaining different outcomes starting from basic components that can be aggregated in different ways – what in more recent times has become the myth of personalization – is here charged with ethical values oriented toward the idea of *casa-fai-da-te* [DIY house], of democratizing the quality of inhabiting. In this generation of architects there is also an underlying political wager: to insinuate themselves – as design technicians – into the meshes of industry, orienting its strategies. In Seassaro's later writings one reads the disillusionment of this hope [12](#) [13](#) [14](#) [15](#).

The culmination of his brief yet intense professional activity is the project carried out for ENEA with the architect Gianni Scudo. It is an *Edificio per uffici e laboratori di tecnologie energetiche appropriate* [Office and Laboratory Building for Appropriate Energy Technologies] in Ispra (completed in 1987), of which we provide below two short excerpts of commentary [16](#) [17](#) [18](#).

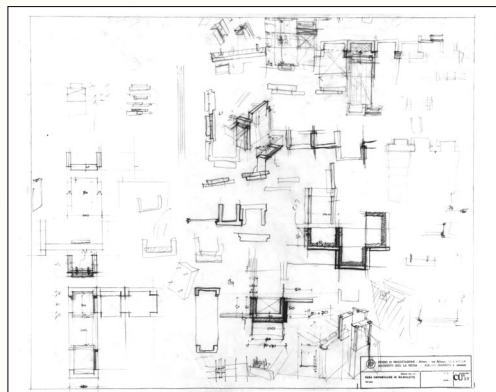
Of very recent construction is the new building in Ispra that houses several laboratories of the Department of Alternative Sources and Energy Saving; the project is particularly interesting in the way elements of passive solar technology have been perfectly integrated into the architecture: in particular, for this building a 'solar chimney wall' was conceived, industrially producible, for which



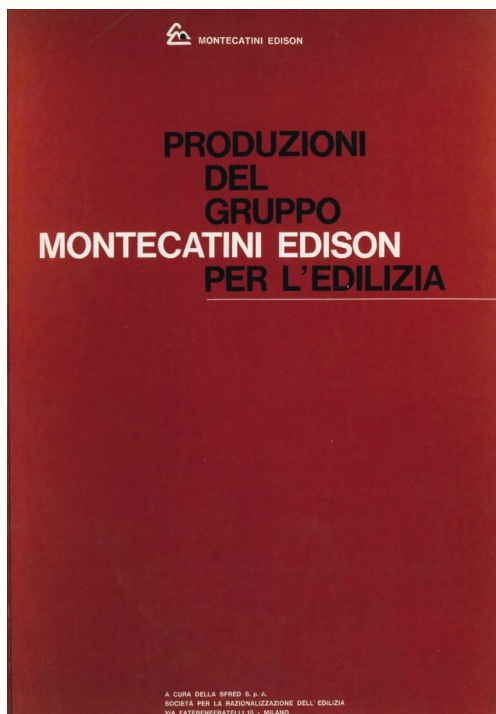
12. Ugo La Pietra e Alberto Seassaro, schizzi di progetto per Casa unifamiliare in Silicalcite.
[Document →](#)



14. Ugo La Pietra e Alberto Seassaro, schizzi di progetto (assonometria strutturale) per Casa unifamiliare in Silicalcite.
[Document →](#)



13. Ugo La Pietra e Alberto Seassaro, schizzi di progetto per Casa unifamiliare in Silicalcite.
[Document →](#)



15. Produzioni del Gruppo Montecatini Edison per l'Edilizia.
[Document →](#)



16. Gianni Scudo e Alberto Seassaro, Fotografia dell'Edificio per uffici e laboratori di tecnologie energetiche appropriate, a Ispra. Dettaglio finestre.
[Document →](#)



17. Gianni Scudo e Alberto Seassaro, Fotografia dell'Edificio per uffici e laboratori di tecnologie energetiche appropriate, a Ispra. Policromie strutturali.
[Document →](#)



18. Gianni Scudo e Alberto Seassaro, Fotografia dell'Edificio per uffici e laboratori di tecnologie energetiche appropriate, a Ispra. Facciata esterna.
[Document →](#)

ENEA obtained a patent requested by national industries operating in the building-envelope sector. (Umberto Colombo, *Architettura ed energia. Sette edifici per l'ENEA*, 1987, p. 9)

[...] The engineering laboratory in Ispra is in fact a sequence of experimental structures, each with its own specific prototype value, skilfully assembled into a deliberately discontinuous whole; the firm that managed the executive design [...] went through many variants, recording in advance the impact of the technological research located here, concerning various forms of heat production from solar sources; envelope and systems are no longer distinguishable, indeed, in one part of the building the systems directly form the building shell, with unusual geometric effects marked by festive polychromy. (Leonardo Benevolo, *Architettura ed energia. Sette edifici per l'ENEA*, 1987, p. 13)

4.4 Morfemi

In parallel with his studies and professional and university activities, starting in the early 1960s he conducted research and artistic-aesthetological experimentation on the *relationship between Arts and Sciences*, moving within the cultural context of FAST, the *Federazione delle Associazioni Scientifiche e Tecniche* [Federation of Scientific and Technical Associations] in Milan, with Silvio Ceccato, and of the *Colloqui di Verucchio* [Verucchio Colloquia] on *Experimental Aesthetics* led by Giulio Carlo Argan.

Alberto Seassaro's experiences as architect, interior designer, and designer are inseparable from his artistic experiences. And those same artistic practices are not easily classifiable within the world of artistic experimentation if they are separated from his studies and his interests in architecture.

It is, after all, within his course of study at the Faculty of Architecture that research leads him to methodological-design elaborations on the processes of form-constitution, crossing the disciplinary fences of individual design domains and culminating, with the degree thesis carried out with Ugo La Pietra, in the concept of *synesthesia among the arts*.

The modality of operating by design, conducting at the same time theoretical research and experimentation on form within the unified domain of the visual arts – finds its most authentic moment in *Morfemi* [Morphemes], *Progressioni morfologiche* [Morphological Progressions], and *Morfo-ambienti luminosi* [Lighting Morph-Environments], experimental-aesthetic artifacts and installations that Alberto Seassaro created and exhibited in group and solo shows, with presentations and critical essays by Gillo Dorfles, Lucio Amelio, Ettore Sottsass Jr., Tommaso Trini, Germano Celant, Francesco Vincitorio, Emilio Garroni, Silvio Ceccato, Umbro Apollonio, and Enzo Frateili. Among these: winner of the 1st Piero Manzoni Prize (Soncino, 1962); solo show at Galleria Blu (Milan, 1963); solo show at Galleria Flaviana (Locarno, 1966); solo show at Studio 2B (Bergamo, 1965); solo show at Modern Art Agency (Naples, 1966); solo show at Galleria Arte Oggi (Pescara, 1967); solo show at Galleria Visualità (Milan, 1968) [19](#); and at national and international art surveys, including: *Nuove tecniche d'immagine* [New Image Techniques] (San Martino, 1967); *Al di là della pittura* [Beyond Painting] (San Benedetto del Tronto, 1968); *Nuove tendenze* [New Tendencies] (Ferrara, 1969); the 1969 *Biennale di Venezia* [Venice Biennale] curated by Giacomo Manzù (Venice, 1969); *Documenta – A Quinquennial Contemporary Art Exhibition* (Kassel, 1970) [20](#) [21](#) [22](#).

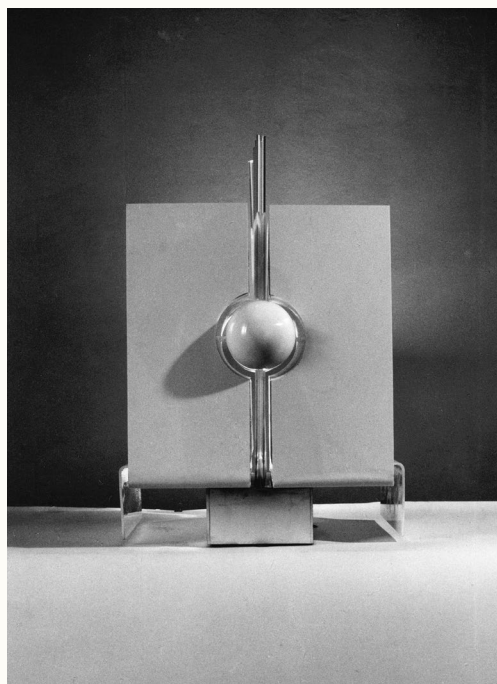
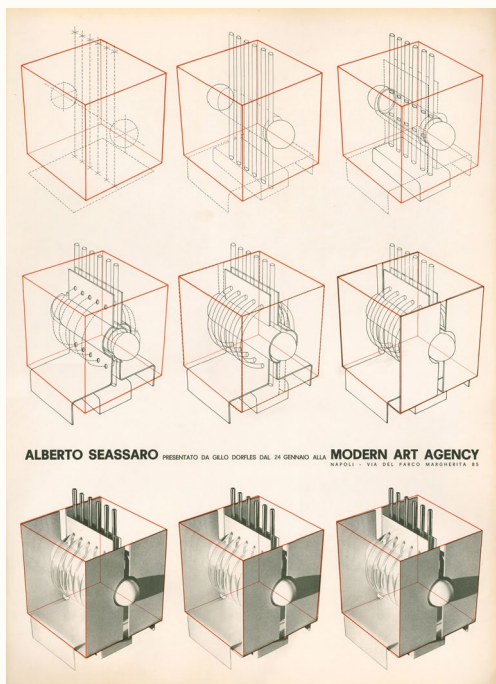
19. Cartolina della
mostra *Micro 33*, Galleria
Visualità.
[Document →](#)



What are the *Morfemi*? Objects? Sculptures? Small architectures? Experimental models? Perceptual study models? Process prototypes? «Moments of passage or pause in a research process», as Ettore Sottsass once called them?

It seems natural to say that *Morfemi* can indeed be considered research exercises on basic modular elements that, within the project, transform through addition, subtraction, translation, permutation, and slippage of surfaces. A kind of basic design of morphological research.

[...] it seems to me that these white-and-red 'things' by Seassaro are the results – or perhaps only the visible and tangible moments of pause and passage – of a work of 'research' (as one says today), and therefore these things can be placed only in the category of 'research' and in none of the traditional categories with which things are classified in order to be rid of them. It is not right to say



20. Manifesto della mostra *Alberto Seassaro*.
Presentato da Gillo Dorfles alla Modern Art
Agency.
[Document →](#)



21. Alberto Seassaro, *Morfema*.
[Document →](#)



22. Alberto Seassaro, *Ritratto con Morfemi*.
[Document →](#)

that they are sculptures, and it is not right to say that they are architectures, nor happenings, nor gift-objects, nor souvenirs: they are what remains clinging along the banks of research [23](#). (Ettore Sottsass, 1968, *Made In. Bollettino della Modern Art Agency*, January-February 1969a)

[...] *i Morfemi* are spatial models that 'fix', by concretizing them into tangible forms, the outcomes of a basic research activity on the theory and methodology of architectural design, usable in processes of understanding the logics of formal constitution and in activities of transformative experimentation [24](#). (Alberto Seassaro, 1968, *Made In. Bollettino della Modern Art Agency*, January-February 1969a)

23. Seassaro. *I Morfemi*.
Presentati da Ettore
Sottsass Jr.
[Document →](#)

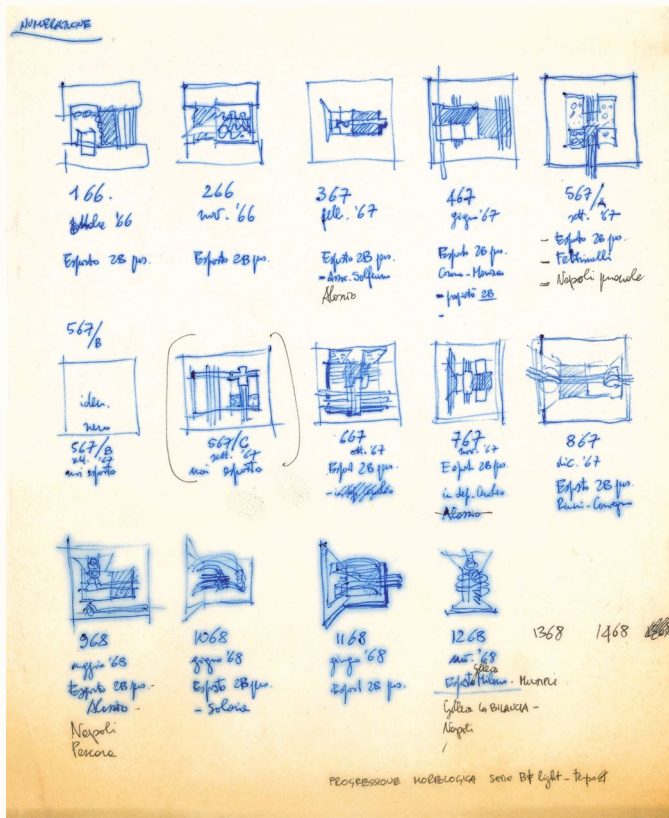


24. *Made In. Bollettino
della Modern Art Agency*,
gennaio-febbraio 1969.
[Document →](#)

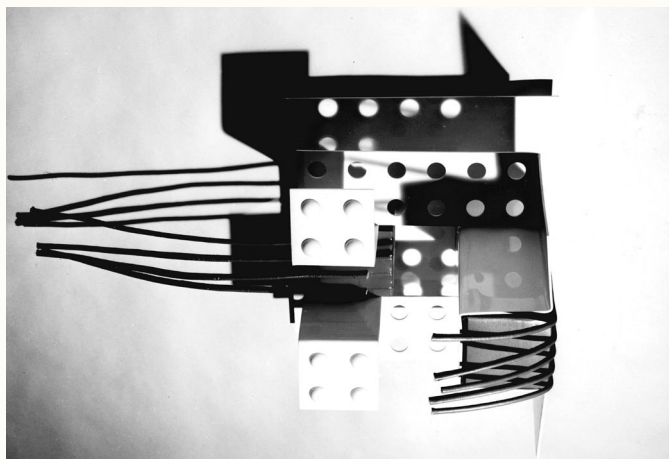


In the *Morfemi* one already discerns Alberto Seassaro's interest in light, its nature and the transformations it can bring to the perception of form. In the *Morfemi* light becomes the completion of the object, an element of morphological transformation that occurs through the object's infinite projections in space, continuously changing as the incidence of the light source changes. It is no coincidence that each morpheme was photographed by the author in multiple sequences precisely to convey, beyond its material concreteness, the opening to a transient virtual three-dimensionality. In the morpheme, light, working through arithmetic subtractions and additions, compositions and decompositions, solids and voids, positives and negatives, depths and emergences, can generate complex algebraic variations.

The *Morfemi* stand as the starting point of a path of inquiry into the cultures of light that is later fulfilled in the creation of artistic and environmental artifacts. At the same time, they constitute a testing ground for theories whose development we find in various publications from those years (Seassaro, 1966; Seassaro, 1968; Seassaro, 1969b; Seassaro, 1969c) [25](#) [26](#).



25. Alberto Seassaro, schema di numerazione dei *Morfemi*.
[Document →](#)



26. Alberto Seassaro, *Morfema* n. 567.
[Document →](#)

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5. On Alberto Seassaro's Notational Sheets. The Texture of a Verbal-visual Writing

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5.1 The Perseverance of Annotation

There is a fine yet tenacious *thread* ¹³ that links Alberto Seassaro's notational sheets to one another.

Different in origin and substance, these sheets of notes, research,

Note 1.

On the theme of the thread and the corresponding archaeology of a metaphor, see Catucci, 2024, p. 41: «The guiding thread makes it possible to bind together events that at first sight have no direct relations, so distant can they be not only with respect to the heart of an argument but also in time and space. [...] Dealing with the heterogeneous may indeed give rise to the need to make a selection, to discard something in order to enhance something else, to extract from the whole only certain aspects, choosing them on the basis of a compositional strategy» (Catucci, 2024, p. 41).

and systematization, share above all a distinctive trait that marks them eloquently: they present themselves as signs proper to the culture of design, the symptom of a designing mind, of a meticulous perseverance in jotting down and fixing through graphic marks referable to the expressive style of the design drawing as well as to the written note of a stenographic and mental kind; a form proper to self-communication, through juxtapositions and mixtures of writing, figural, schematic, and verbal codes.

It should also be considered, in parallel, the substantial documentary mass of which they form a part, corresponding to an enormous production of written material and to the incessant accumulation of paper artifacts that characterized a

daily working method: an oriented, contingent, yet purposeful accumulation, to be distinguished radically from the deliberate collecting of those who preserve traces for future remembrance 2x. By contrast, in this case it is an archive of the present for a near-term, at times immediate, destination: tools for communicating in short order, for clarifying oneself and making things clear, a contingent strategy for fixing and, if need be, subsequently transmitting in a transitive configuration.

No direct addressee is, in fact, discernible in these papers; rather, they are presumed to constitute a preliminary elaboration, the initial phase of a further mediation, a *first note* 3x to be given voice, as needed, at a later stage for subsequent presentation. In this sense, they appear as provisional artifacts, not intended for publication, but as devices for a reflective act, a valuable anticipation, at the level of discursive intentions, of a course of study or a possible communicative project; a writing of intent, of projection, very rarely of offcuts or *marginalia*. Where fragmentariness is an index of an incessant exploration of connections 4x and does not contradict the drive toward systematization.

Note 2.

Unlike the very nature of the archiving trace: by contrast, on the meaning of the archival intent and its consequent implications, see Derrida, 2005.

Note 3.

On the first note as a writing of anticipation, an auxiliary writing, of preparation, of preliminary analysis for other communicative forms, and lacking a compulsory form but freely drafted like all provisional annotations, see Baule, 2020.

Note 4.

On the figure of the explorer of connections and the principle of incompleteness, see Veca, 2011, p. 85 ff.

5.2 A Brilliant Verbo-visual Rhetoric

As confirmation of the unitary artefactual nature of these documents and of the idea of scriptive movement that underlies them, we can place them largely within those graphic-expressive systems that originally precede alphabetic writing (Cardona, 2009): a handwriting as a mingling of scriptive and visual codes, a writing that positions itself fully in the field of verbo-visual expression; and even in those cases where the mark seems to run along an apparently prescriptive plane, similar to technical-constructive drawing, it surpasses that rigidity while retaining its performative potential.

As Giovanni Anceschi, who has made this theme one of his principal objects of study, states:

What is notational is usually seen as a restitutive mode of a rigid kind, whereas *technical reproduction* is seen as continuous,

analogical, [...]. Nothing could be more apparent: the very schematization of annotation ends up being what enables the performer, indeed, what *generates* interpretation in the performer. [...] Notation is elastic, because in principle it is discontinuous, and in any case imprecise. Notation functions as a producer of interpretive variety [...] Whereas in the scientific domain it does not contain prescriptive aspects, [...] notation in technical and creative activities seems to have both functions. (Anceschi, 1992, p. 132)

The didactic exercise boards that, by virtue of their constructive instructions, most closely resemble the prescriptive go in this direction; apparently addressed to a direct addressee (the person who must carry out the exercise), they likely represent a preliminary elaboration. Exercises such as *Accendi una luce* [Switch on a light] (fig. 1) evoke a discursive-narrative suggestion and present themselves as scores for a series of possible performances. Taken as a whole, however, the articulation of the notes for the Course on *Lighting* represents a deployment of the entire span of the notational spectrum: from the sheets on the historical representation of light (fig. 2) to those on the etymology and the metaphor of light (fig. 3) there is a progression that moves from the purely verbal to verbal schematization and then to the introduction of the visual; from the symbolic-verbal, with representations of *seeing* (fig. 4), to the studies on concavity (fig. 5), where three-dimensional forms evolve in a generative play. In this case the design imperative clearly operates, and the *mise en figure* displays its full heuristic value: here, «representation is a support for invention, for the *trouvaille*. In this sphere, in short, images serve to discover and to invent» (Anceschi, 1992, p. 11). On the same theme, the synthesis board *Trigonon light – le parole della luce e la genesi della metafora* [Trigonon light – the words of light and the genesis of the metaphor] [19](#) records the writing of a *complex figural text* (Anceschi, 1992, p. 41) within a *mise-en-scène* that reconnects to triadic iconography.

The notes sheet relating to the course *Tecnologia dell'architettura* [Architectural Technology] (fig. 6) likewise includes, under the form of mixed schematizations, figures and caricatural traces that converge in a *manipolazione proiettiva* [projective manipulation] (Anceschi, 1992, p. 41): a synoptic view that comprises the perspective representation

of the building with a transparency effect and an endoscopic view, the schematic-verbal annotation of structural elements, and, not least, the symbolic figure of the *saver*.

The illustrative-caricatural code adopted in this latter case recurs across most of the illustrative inserts present in the notes and traverses different themes; the sketchy, comic-style manner of these pictograms underscores a personal, confidential point of view. Up to the deliberate transgression of the sketches labeled *Supplemento al Supplemento al dizionario italiano di Munari* [Supplement to the Supplement to the Italian Dictionary by Munari] 5 (fig. 7), a provocative overstepping of the bounds of the proper, albeit avowed, decorum of the Munari collection.

5.3 The Filter of Irony

The idea that, in order to safeguard an indisputable firmness of principles, as well as a convinced disciplinary dedication, it is also necessary to make room for playfulness, irony, the lesson of relativity, and open thinking is confirmed, for example, by the covers of the course booklets spanning the academic years of the 1970s decade (figs. 8, 9, 10). The graphic montage of illustrations, drawn by hand or taken from other sources, and inserted within the context of university research bears witness to a demystifying approach woven with ironic reversals (Jankélévitch, 1997, p. 61 ff.).

In the case of the booklets for study groups (figs. 8, 9), where disciplinary boundaries are swept away by free connections, the visual charge becomes more pronounced, happily irreverent and transgressive, assimilated from those countercultural languages that embrace montages of grainy photocopies, the provisional nature of handwritings, and the typewritten informality of the *mimeograph format* 6 2 3 4.

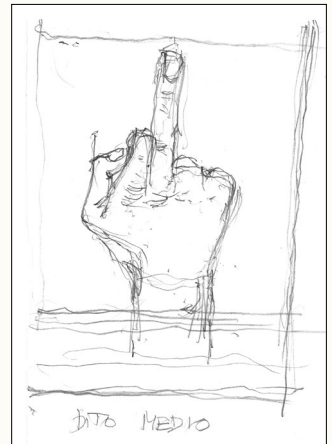
The wry gaze that frames the angularity of things, the mechanics of the system of powers faced with the tactics of play, the continual shifting of point of view: a step beyond the principle of otherness lies

Note 5.

«In this book the author examines the various ways of expressing oneself without speaking, not only with the hands. [...] We considered it appropriate to collect as many as possible, omitting obscene and vulgar gestures, in order to provide the most accurate documentation possible for the use of foreigners. [...] or as a supplement to the Italian dictionary» (Munari, 1999).

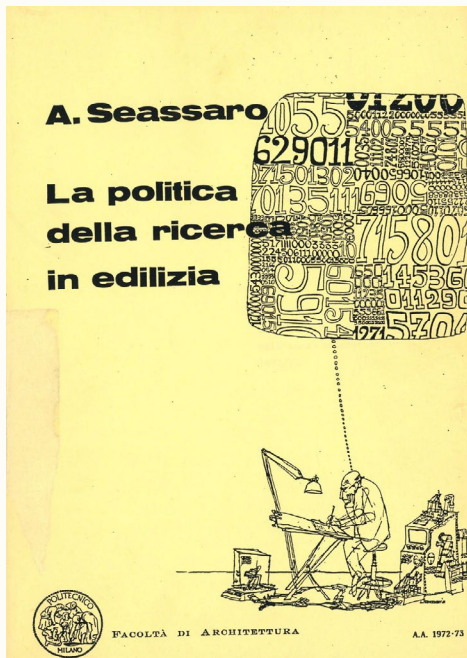
Figure 7.

Supplemento al Supplemento al dizionario italiano di Munari [Supplement to the Supplement to the Italian Dictionary by Munari].



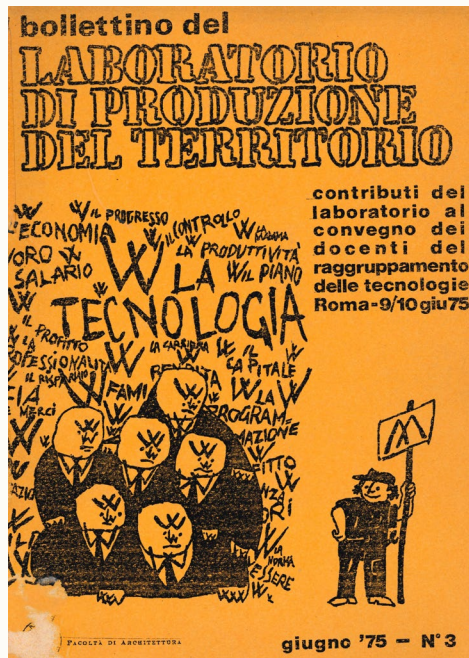
Note 6.

On the mimeograph format and the epic of the mimeograph, see Baule, 2008, p. 15.



2. Alberto Seassaro, *La politica della ricerca in edilizia*, Facoltà di Architettura, A.A. 1972-73.

[Document →](#)



3. *Bollettino del Laboratorio di Produzione del Territorio*, giugno 1975, n. 3, Facoltà di Architettura, Politecnico di Milano.

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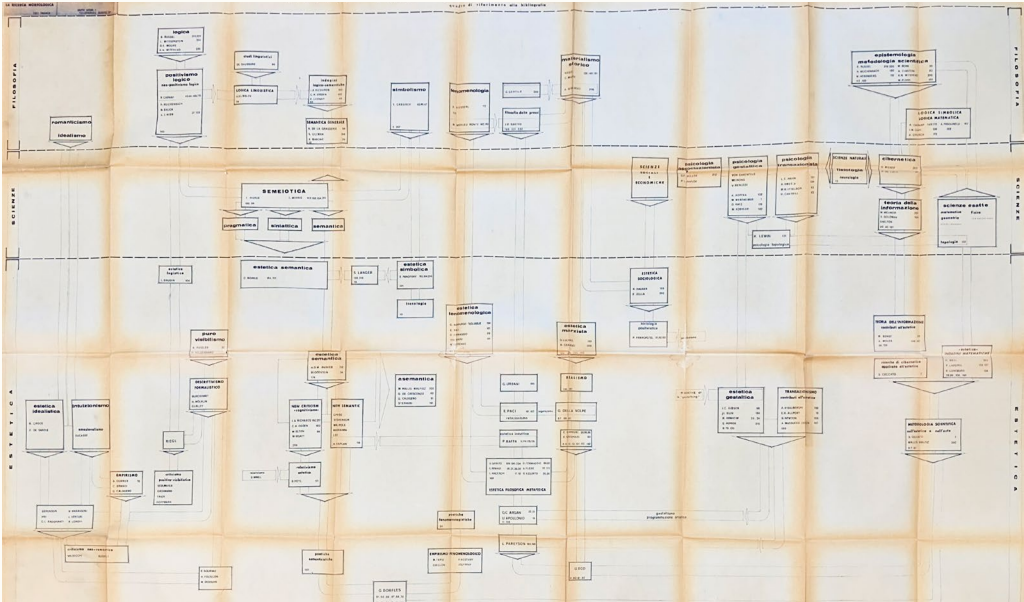
4. *Bollettino del Laboratorio di Produzione del Territorio*, settembre 1975, n. 4, Facoltà di Architettura, Politecnico di Milano.

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the exercise of a constant, radical critical relation with institutionalized knowledge; it is a matter of playing along, a game acknowledged as such, without granting respite to those who turn it, for their own ends, into an instrument of domination. Counterpoint to the filter of irony, born of a libertarian breath, is the meticulousness of the handwriting with which the analytical-descriptive, or prescriptive, notes are transcribed. *La grande tavola La ricerca morfologica – parte prima. L'approccio deduttivo* [Morphological research – part one. The deductive approach] (Seassaro, La Pietra, 1965) (fig. 10) is a bold textual map for the systematization of knowledge in the field of reference. We are in the realm of an encyclopedic project, where the system of contents is laid out within the ordering space of a tabular configuration, a device «addressed in the first instance to someone who, more than a spectator, is a user» (Anceschi, 1992, p. 101) [5](#). Tabular-diagrammatic in kind, in turn, are the ordering schemes of the Progetto di iter didattico per l'Indirizzo tecnologico ad Architettura [Didactic itinerary Project for the Technological Track in Architecture] [6](#), an organizational model intended for an institutional destination; with a peculiarity: the flow diagram (Bertin, 1967) identifies, with schematic skill, the planning of the pathways of the educational itinerary, unfolding them over the grid of the didactic structure and the temporal score.



5. Ugo La Pietra e Alberto Seassaro, *La Ricerca Morfologica. Quadro della bibliografia di riferimento sulle culture della forma.* Document →



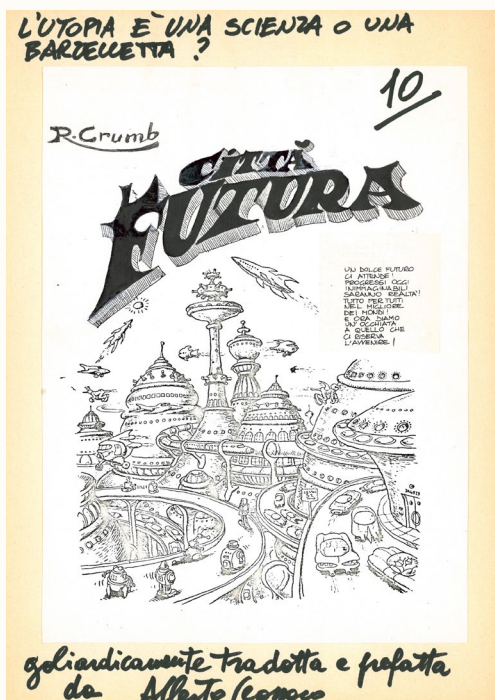


Figure 8.
L'utopia è una scienza o una barzelletta? Città futura
[Is utopia a science or a joke? Future city], booklet for
study groups, cover.



Figure 9.
Densità e affollamento [Density and crowding], booklet
for study groups, cover.

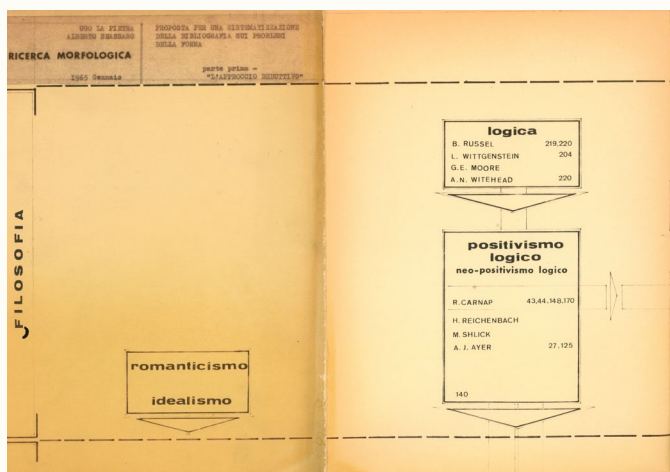


Figure 10.
La ricerca morfologica [Morphological research], board, January 1965.

PROGETTO DI ITER DIDATTICO PER L'INDIRIZZO TECNOLOGICO



5.4 Leave Nothing to Chance

Of a different tenor, both graphic and thematic, yet the result of the same meticulousness, are the handwritten prescriptive notes, evidently for private use, which fall within the scope of instructions for use, as in the case of *Preliminari all'uso della caldaia* [Preliminaries for using the boiler] (fig. 11). Here the detail of the operational sequence describes a process and illustrates the corresponding technical apparatus, accompanying the performance of the necessary functions.

In the same domain one can include the collection of more than a hundred note-cards gathered under the title *Tradurre digitale/analogico. Decriptare il linguaggio tecnico* [Translating digital/analog. Decrypting technical language] 72. These are annotations derived

Drafted on sheets of different sizes and colors, datable to 2011-2012.

Note 7.

from basic lessons on computer use and from self-learning trial exercises. Here too textual and visual notes alternate, recorded step by step, very much like a user manual written in-house, sometimes with topic labels: *Non riesco a spegnere* [I can't shut down], *Pagina della posta in arrivo* [Inbox page], *Scanner* [Scanner], [...] (fig. 12, 13).

Finally, a *storyboard* sequence, a draft intended for use in court, reconstructs the stages of a road accident (fig. 14), with an accentuated figural component and a narrative montage where, again, the comic-strip inflection does not undermine the credibility of the represented object but demonstratively schematizes the phases that constitute the event. Different registers and different centers of reflection, a vast arsenal of references across distinct techniques of representation

and forms of systematization, together lead to a graphic form that implies a reiterated visual translation (Baule, Caratti, 2016). It is the intent to fix, in hybrid forms, annotations that cannot be reduced to the verbal. These are strategic devices whose performative value responds to a visionary, design-oriented spirit, to a utopian determination sustained by a subtle tenacity and directed toward creative indiscipline 83.

Note 8.

And, as Edgar Morin clarifies: «Anarchy is not non-organization, but an organization that takes shape from the associations/interactions among beings who act without any need for a command or control issuing from a higher level» (Morin, 2015, p. 26).

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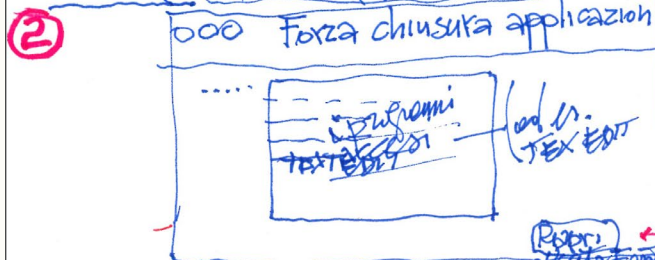
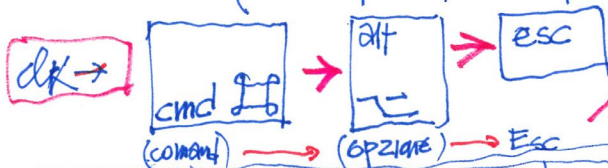
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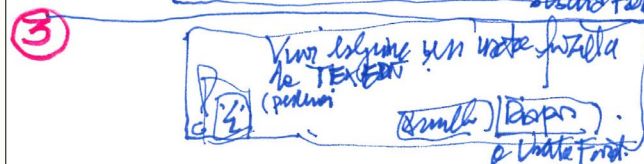


Figure 12.

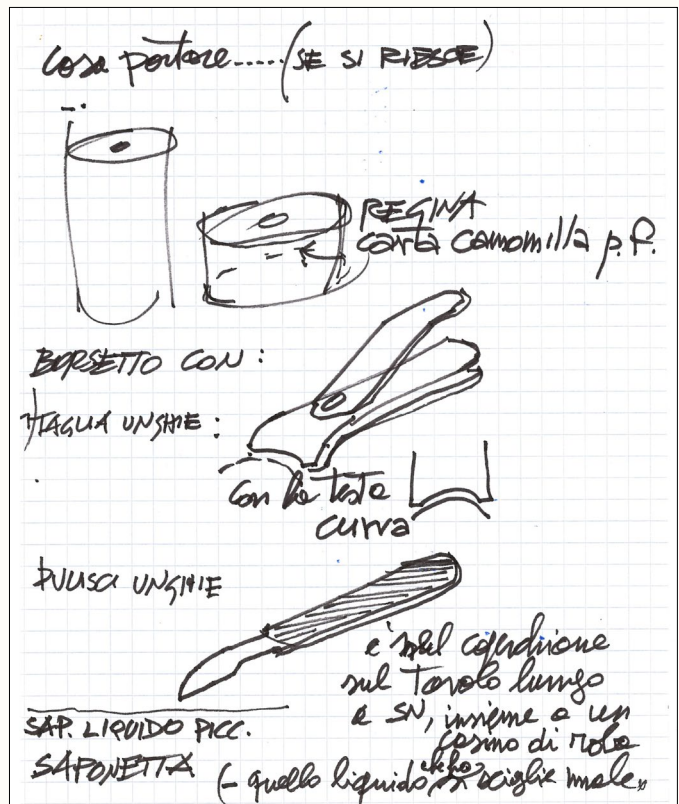
Non riesco a spegnere [I can't shut down], learning card for computer use.

5.5 The Visible Voice of Writing

Seassaro's writing-drawing is, certainly, a way of *reasoning on paper*, a form of lucid and constant reflexivity in search of mnemonic schemes. Yet, thanks to its calligraphic flow, it is also the expression of an intrinsic synaesthetic valence. This visual writing, in fact, suggests sonic traces, at times they are arrows: from deep within the grain of verbo-visual writings (Barthes, 1986, p. 6) the *grain of the voice* surfaces. This demonstrates that, even more than simple writing, which at times borders on *grado zero* [Writing Degree Zero] (Barthes, 1982), autographic verbo-visual writing can best restore a material and bodily dimension. These word-figure marks are vocal gestures, moreover indelible within polytechnic spaces.

If Saul Steinberg – among the very first Architecture students at Politecnico di Milano – himself an illustrator of voices (Barthes, 1998) – had by chance met Alberto Seassaro, he would surely have known how to draw, with the speech bubbles of his characters, the movement of the voice: the scathing dialectic, the unbroken discursive weave, the labyrinthine progression, the dialoguing and persuasive monologue, the hieroglyphic synthesis, the low-vibrated timbre. Among these papers there are written figures (fig. 15) which, even when the voice was forcibly silenced, knew how to speak on their own; and, like all the other annotations, they continue to speak. This is the key that explains the voice of the marks in Seassaro's verbo-visual writing.

Figure 15.
Cosa portare... (se si riesce) [What to bring... (if possible)].



They speak, they speak to us, these papers, and they ask to be heard; inseparably bound together, they return both the trace of a writing and the grain of a voice.

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6. Do Everything, Do It Artfully

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6.1 Designing Works, Sculpting Spaces, Suggesting Trajectories

If there is an evidently exceptional trait that unites the most significant creatives on the Italian scene over the last hundred years, it is that they were often transdisciplinary authors, active along trajectories that are hard to map, following lines of action that were always displacing and surprising. Outliers able to move among multiple professional domains, shifting with ease from architecture to design, from exhibition-making to stage design, from graphics to fashion, from painting to sculpture to photography, pushing into editorial and outreach work, into curating, criticism, and teaching.

Figures for this very reason hard to classify, proudly eccentric and consistently off-key: such as Giacomo Balla and Fortunato Depero, Gio Ponti and Marcello Nizzoli, Carlo Mollino and Bruno Munari, Ettore Sottsass and Angelo Mangiarotti, A. G. Fronzoni and Giancarlo Iliprandi, Leonardo Mosso and Roberto Sambonet, Enzo Mari and Alessandro

Mendini, Nanda Vigo and Getulio Alviani, and many more besides. And like Alberto Seassaro, an architect and artist whom, at our latitudes and among the pages of this book, we remember above all for the seminal, foundational, and immense work carried out to establish the School of Design at Politecnico di Milano.

For after an effervescent start between the visual arts and architecture, sustained by an explosive energy that fueled an indomitable action, Alberto Seassaro would increasingly turn his gaze (scientifically open, sensitively curious) toward the world of university education.

Having also lived, with totalizing involvement, through the season of the 1968 protests, and perhaps realizing that the political *commitment* breathed in assemblies and occupied classrooms could no longer go arm in arm with the world of galleries, nor with house projects for a bourgeois clientele, he would first abandon the art world and, over time, also that of architecture and interior architecture (domains in which he had achieved some striking, highly original firsts, always coherent with one another despite the differing disciplinary specificities of the visual arts and furnishing) to focus exclusively on teaching. In that world he immersed himself entirely, to the point of coming to dream, design, and then build a new School, the Faculty of Design precisely, which for twenty-five years now has been a cornerstone, internationally, of university education: an absolute project, one that none of the great protagonists who moved between university teaching and the world of Italian design (from Zanuso to the Castiglioni brothers, to recall a few giants who brought their indisputable charisma and talent into the classrooms at Politecnico di Milano) had previously managed to achieve, but which Seassaro succeeded in making concrete through a veritable *mission* that, day after day, found room and hearing, support and collaboration.

Probably because Alberto Seassaro experienced the foundation of the School of Design as *the* project par excellence to which he would devote himself, evidently, for him, a *life project*, following the path (before him) of other transversal authors, professionals of creativity who, at a certain point in their careers and personal histories, felt the need to commit themselves above all to teaching, to education and training: like A. G. Fronzoni, a master of communication who, while setting records in graphics, never ceased to teach also through his original


formula of a *workshop-school*, where he raised more than one generation of *progettatori* [designers]; or earlier still Bruno Munari, who at a certain point in his path (as artist, graphic designer, illustrator, and designer) stepped away from the design of *things* to arrive at the design of *people*; or Tomás Maldonado himself, already an artist and designer but above all a protagonist of design culture, through the theorization of that *projectual hope* (Maldonado, 1970) which he proposed in his teaching at the Faculty of Architecture in Milan, in his Chair of *Progettazione Ambientale* [Environmental Design], where he filtered the legacy of his years as lecturer and later rector at the *Hochschule für Gestaltung* in Ulm.

An evolution that enabled Seassaro to imagine, outline, and promote an educational path capable of avoiding «rigid models and instead fostering the growth of designers able to adapt to the great diversity of the contemporary world» (Branzi, 2020). He did so by mixing disciplines, as he had already done in his years of training and at the start of his professional activity, and then throughout his life, uniting architecture and science with the visual arts, and weaving and sustaining everything with a consolidated humanistic knowledge: for

there are some architects who act as builders, others as urbanists, others as technologists, as compositional designers, theorists (few), historians; those who do everything and the opposite of everything, or, as Malaparte said, are *good-for-nothings capable of everything*. There are designers, interior decorators, exhibition designers, window dressers, and then those who devote themselves to teaching. (Branzi, 2020)

Evidently, founding a *school* was for Seassaro the most important professional adventure, the one to which he devoted the season of his maturity. And among the fundamental things to recall, further, and from this perspective, there is also the foundation of INDACO, a name (beautiful! the name of a color, between blue and violet) cast as an acronym for a new institute, the *Dipartimento di Industrial Design, Arti e Comunicazione* [Department of Industrial Design, Arts and Communication], to underscore yet again, and through a precise denomination, an opening to different yet complementary worlds, necessary to one

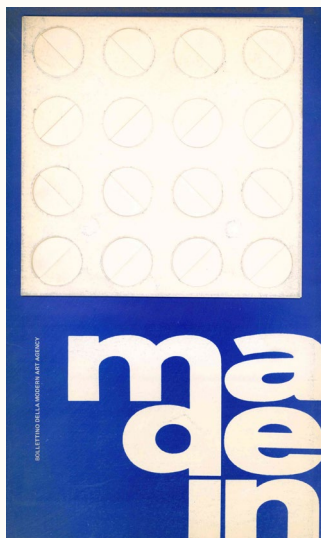
another: yes, a transdisciplinary department by denomination! But beyond the project of the Faculty of Design, it is worth recalling that Alberto Seassaro, trained as an architect, initially undertook – as a very young man – a path that led him to work as a true artist (a 1968 biography read: «Since 1963 he has researched and worked jointly in the fields of the Visual Arts and Architecture»).

And today, on the occasion of this important publication, the research he had begun to present when he was barely over twenty, in the early 1960s, and then distilled and elaborated with scientific imagination for a little over a lustrum, up to 1968-1969, an epochal moment when everything was being called into question (with young people around the world taking to the streets to say *NO*), resurfaces; a two-year stretch during which his activity as a *pure* artist reached evidently original results, obtaining significant recognitions: an honorable mention at the *Prima Rassegna Internazionale d'Arte Contemporanea d'Avanguardia – Premio Piero Manzoni* [First International Review of Avant-Garde Contemporary Art – Piero Manzoni Prize]; participation in one of the legendary meetings of the *Centro Pio Manzù* (the *17° Convegno Internazionale Artisti Critici Studiosi d'Arte* [17th International Conference of Artists Critics Scholars of Art], where he stood alongside, among others, Enrico Castellani and Gianni Colombo); a work donated to the *Comitato per la promozione dell'attività antimilitarista e per l'obiezione di coscienza* [Committee for the promotion of anti-militarist activity and conscientious objection] and acquired by Count Alberico Barbiano di Belgiojoso ; and a critical presentation by Gillo Dorfles in *Made In*, the bulletin of the Modern Art Agency in the orbit of the great gallerist Lucio Amelio.

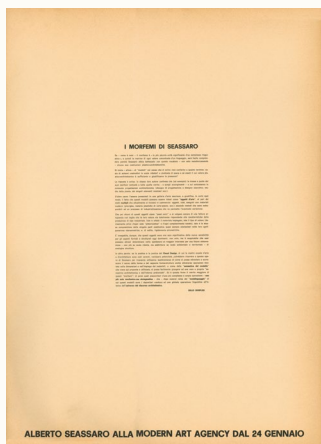
Above all, he came to elaborate and propose his most erudite and in some respects enigmatic works: the *Morfemi* [Morphemes], works that occupy an eccentric position within the *system of the arts* and that demonstrate the extreme originality of his *poli-tecnico* [poly-technical] thinking, presenting themselves somewhere between works of art and meta-projects, *morphological spatial models, born of an urban-design research begun in 1966*, modules and elements of ideal constructions that seem to draw lifeblood from certain architectural reflections by Enrico Prampolini and from certain abstract drawings by Bruno Munari of the mid-1930s (such as the paintings in the series

1. Invito alla mostra
del Comitato per la
promozione dell'attività
antimilitarista e
l'obiezione di coscienza,
Libreria Feltrinelli Milano.
[Document →](#)

2. *Made In*. Bollettino
della Modern Art Agency,
gennaio-febbraio 1969.
[Document →](#)



3. Manifesto della mostra
Alberto Seassaro.
Presentato da Gillo
Dorfles alla Modern Art
Agency.
[Document →](#)



Anche la cornice [Even the Frame]), and that, in filigree, retain traces of one of his important mentors, Ettore Sottsass (those sketches for rugs for Redan in the early 1950s, later exploding three-dimensionally ten years on in the tower cabinet for *Casa Tchou*, siblings of those that invaded the atrium of the XII Triennale di Milano in 1960) [2](#) [3](#).

Morfemi as works in the form of sculptures that nonetheless seem like models of architectures. It is Seassaro himself who, writing a highly learned presentation in a scientific tone, speaks of «the relationship between the structural model and the model-object, the one as an instrument for knowing the structure of real phenomena, the other expressing itself and its relationship with reality» (Seassaro, 1968). He underscores and clarifies that he intends

to allow the viewer to carry out the greatest possible number of *interpretations*, leaving free to perceive the semantic area of the *model as object* and to undergo its pragmatic effects, enabling an original, conscious or unconscious, construction of the decoding code. It is like assigning to the model a semantic code in which all valences are free and saturable with any value: that is, a code *open* to all meanings. (Seassaro, 1968)

And here, with the choice of the term *aperto* [open] (highlighted by quotation marks), it is inevitable and perhaps dutiful to connect these *Morfemi* to the climate (and perhaps also the concepts) of *Opera aperta* [Open Work] (Eco, 1962), which a few years earlier Umberto Eco had theorized in his celebrated essay, a text that would accompany (and legitimize) much of the artistic research of those years [4](#). The great Gillo Dorfles, always attentive to new experimentations and ever generous in supporting the work of young artists, introduced Seassaro's research starting precisely from the chosen title:

If – as is known – the morpheme is *the smallest significant unit of a linguistic complex*, and thus the matrix of every

conceptual value in a language, it will be easy to understand why Seassaro baptized – not only metaphorically – some of his plastic-architectural constructions with this term. (Dorfles, 1969)

Thus, from the very first words, he declared how these models were simultaneously sculptural and architectural. Yet he did not avoid questioning the essence of those very objects, presented as «models, in the sense usually given to this term; that is, of constructive schemes at reduced scale? Or rather as works in their own right whose plastic-architectural value suffices to justify their presence?» (Dorfles, 1969).

To respond, to understand, and to propose the most logical and honest reading of these works, Dorfles does not digress; on the contrary, he goes in depth, analyzing and further unpicking the author's statements, who «confesses that (for example) the fine-tuning of his morphemes is subject to all those norms – to those precautions – to which customary architectural design is subject (design drawing and execution drawing, study of the plan, of the single modular elements, etc.)» (Dorfles, 1969).

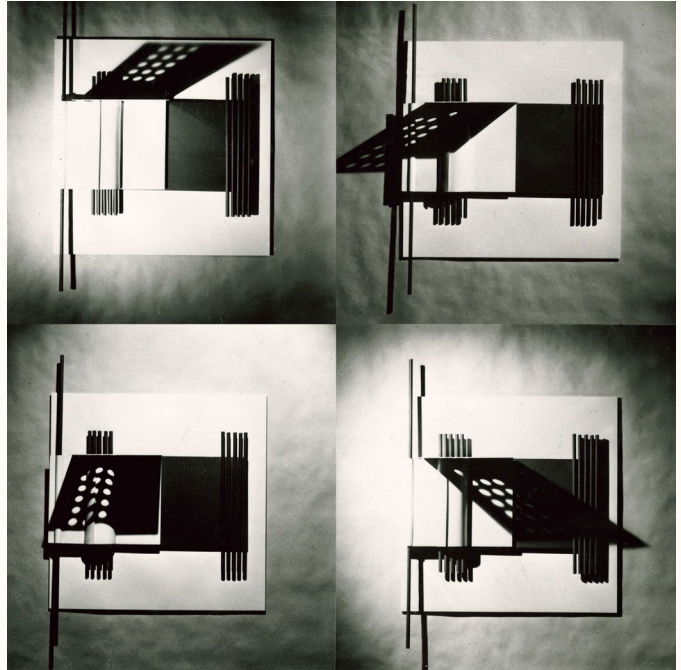
Thus he underscores how, in design and realization terms, these works are ascribable to the world of architecture.

Certainly, adds Dorfles,

the fact of being presented in an art gallery sanctions – and justifies, in a certain sense – the fact that these models may be understood as *art objects*, like the many multiples currently on the market: objects executed with modern materials (plexiglass,



4. Alberto Seassaro,
Morfema n. 467.
[Document →](#)



plastics of various kinds, etc.) according to methods amenable to an industrialization process. (Dorfles, 1969)

because although

some of these objects are *unique pieces* still relying on artisanal manufacture, this does not alter the fact that their nature fully corresponds to the characteristics of industrial-type production. Such is in fact the material used; such the type of color (decidedly devoid of any *painterly* note and of any tonal indulgence); such the very composition of the individual constituent parts, almost always elementary in their stereometric configuration and, usually, rigidly symmetrical. (Dorfles, 1969)

Therefore, while reading these works as plastic models, as possible sculptural reflections, Dorfles stresses in multiple passages that their primary horizon of reference must be sought in architecture and in design (industrial design as well). He even goes so far as to envisage, and to hope, that these works by Seassaro might become, in art and architecture schools (*so lacking!*),

most useful testimonies of how one may stimulate and increase the sense of form and of the form-structure relationship even through operations limited in size and in the use of materials; and how from the *semantics of the model* here proposed and employed, one may readily arrive at a veritable *architectural semantics, or semantics of the surrounding environment*. (Dorfles, 1969)

For, according to Dorfles,

this is perhaps the chief merit of these *morphemes*: of presenting themselves as *praeceptors* of a complex and broad operation – not merely morphemic but syntagmatic – which, after availing itself of the *metalanguage* of which these models are repositories, may lead to a global linguistic operation within the universe of the architectural discourse. (Dorfles, 1969)

Yes, it is moving to think that the far-sighted Dorfles had also discerned in those works a *didactic* potential, knowing, as we do today, the path that would lead, 30 years later, to Alberto Seassaro's founding a School of Design (and where, according to Dorfles, these *Morfemi* could have become *most useful testimonies!*). Objectively intriguing works, never banal, which also prompted a free experimenter like Ettore Sottsass to question them; in presenting the exhibition at Studio 2B he grasped the value of the research (scientific as well):

It seems to me that these white and red *things* by Seassaro are the results or perhaps only the visible and tangible moments of passage and pause of a work of *research* (as we say today), and therefore – these things – can only be placed in the category of *research* and in none of the traditional categories by which things are placed in order to get rid of them. It is no good to say they are sculptures, and it is no good to say they are architectures [...]: they are what remains clinging along the banks of research. Which, then, is a special way of facing art or architecture or these stories, meaning that one approaches art through processes and methods that should resemble or be those of science... (Sottsass, 1968)

He also underscored their formal value:

In my studio, leaning against a wall, there are these white and red plastic things made by Seassaro who has set out to search, for himself but also for others, for elementary models, for elementary groupings of simple forms, for trials of meetings and joints of rough elements with perforated elements, of tubes with surfaces, of figures with artifacts, of channels of light with reflections and so on and so forth, all these things one does to understand better what the nature of the world of forms is... 54 (Sottsass, 1968)

Morfemi thus as models of possible (highly elegant) architectures, and plastic suggestions that probe the primacy of geometry, accelerating it through plays of solids and voids, negatives and positives, emergences and slippages, in a continuous ricochet of chiaroscuro.



Works which, reread today, offer further cues for reflection. The zenithal photographs, with sharp shadows that add graphic signs to the elements of the model, seem to hark back



to the abstract paintings of Bice Lazzari, a luminous author fully rediscovered only in recent years. Works which, looked at again in their rhythmic composition, seem to converse with certain carpet designs by the legendary Eileen Gray, where graphic signs and the use of color become the foundations of a truly original moment in the history of 20th century applied arts. Works that evidently probe the meaning of forms, and that hark back to a season when great sculpture explored freely, without

ambitions to stand on museum pedestals, as evidenced by certain hard-to-classify works by singular artists such as Katarzyna Kobro, Georges Vantongerloo, and Naum Gabo. Something the author had shown – and would show again (and bring to the surface) in several projects of those same years, between architecture, interior architecture, and design, reaching further significant milestones, often in tandem with another designer who is hard to pigeonhole, Ugo La Pietra. As in the *MIA 2* project, developed with Benedetto Resio and Ugo La Pietra for the I.S.E.S. (*Istituto per lo Sviluppo dell'Edilizia Sociale* [Institute for the Development of Social Housing]) Competition in 1965: an urban and morphological research, a proposal of terraced buildings where modularity rhymes with economy, for a residential-housing solution that seems able to converse with the project *Libertà nell'ordine* [Freedom in Order], elaborated as a *research on prefabrication and programmed art* by Bruno Morassutti and Enzo Mari for the *Primo Concorso In/Arch Domosic* [First In/Arch Domosic Competition] (1965).

As in a small urban intervention, the *Fontana a Caiazzo* [Fountain at Caiazzo] (Caserta, 1966-1969, with Ugo La Pietra), an austere construction realized through the multiplication of a single type of prefabricated modular element (cups for cladding pillars in silicalcite) superposed in steps, with an overall profile that seems an homage to Getulio Alviani's *Cromostruttura speculare a elementi quadri* [Specular Chromostructure with Square Elements] (1964), yet configured by the two designers not like a chilly Donald Judd, but rather like a brutalist Vittorio Viganò!

As in two art galleries, again designed with partner La Pietra: the // *Cenobio* gallery (Milan, 1966), a large unitary object with walls, floor, and ceiling clad in aluminum sheet, a space with an industrial, almost high-tech flavor, where «the corrugation of the sheet, which perspectively deepens distances and multiplies and diffuses reflections, turns the wall into a sort of continuous luminous surface that evenly floods the whole space with light» (*Domus*, 1967) [6](#); and the private *Walter Spaggiari* gallery (Milan, 1965-1966) [7](#), once again a design of evident character, with a well-defined program – «a gallery for viewing works of art; a large cage to contain a store of works; a space for being» (La Pietra, 2000) – and articulated into two distinct zones: an upper one for the storage of works of art (realized with rotating and sliding vertical panels in perforated sheet metal), and the lower one where selected works were displayed to be admired in a setting ideal for conversation, with seats, support surfaces, and storage units designed using the «same unified base element» (*Domus*, 1968) – cubic – which would also distinguish certain private houses [8](#).

As in *Rizzi* house (Camogli, 1967, with La Pietra) [9](#), characterized by furnishing elements integrated into horizontal and vertical structures that seemed to seek an ideal dialogue with the works of Julio Le Parc, the very ones that Nanda Vigo would integrate in those same years into the celebrated *Casa Meneguzzo* (Malo, 1966-1969); a signature detail found again, with further and exceptional elaboration, in *Casa Paola Seassaro* (Milan, 1968) [10](#), where he set forth a proposal «among the newest and most promising of today's young architects» (*Abitare*, 1968) [11](#). Once again the ensemble conversed ideally



6. Ugo La Pietra, Alberto Seassaro, *Il Cenobio*. *Domus*, n. 451. [Document →](#)



7. Ugo La Pietra, Alberto Seassaro, *Galleria d'arte privata Walter Spaggiari*, Milano [Document →](#)



8. Ugo La Pietra e Alberto Seassaro, *Galleria privata Walter Spaggiari*, in *Domus*, n. 465. [Document →](#)



9. Alberto Seassaro, *Casa Rizzi a Camogli*, in *Interiors '70*. [Document →](#)



10. Alberto Seassaro, *Spazio abitativo a Milano*, in *Interiors '70*. [Document →](#)



11. Alberto Seassaro. *Progetto di interno domestico*. In *Abitare*, n. 71. [Document →](#)



with coeval art, in that case, Jesús Rafael Soto's *Sotomagie*, which the Venezuelan master would later develop as *penetrable* environments. And as in certain furnishing systems, such as the table *Addition* [12 ↘](#) and the desk *Leader* (Acerbis, 1969), where the various possible combinations of the upper elements, trays or lids, seem like a further reference and declination of the models presented at Studio 2B and recalled at length here.

After those artistic milestones, which still captivate today for elegance and enigmatic charge, and those projects between interior architecture and design, original as only rarely happens, in the years that followed Seassaro's artistic and design engagement, as noted, began to wane, and his vision and energy shifted and settled entirely on teaching. Not solely on the totalizing definition of an entire degree program in design, but in his own courses, in his own syllabi, for his own students, for whom he did not forget his *scientific* reflections of previous lustrums, accelerating them, however, thanks to the open eyes that art, practiced first-hand, had left him.

Therefore, while another transdisciplinary master – Corrado Levi, his dear friend and colleague – had students work on the *compresenza di diverse logiche progettuali* [co-presence of different design logics], Alberto Seassaro proposed to his *disciples* that they design a *kaleidoscope*: yes, precisely the «device made with two or more little mirrors arranged at an angle inside a tube, where small colored objects are placed at random; the multiple reflections form often symmetrical images that change in an unpredictable and highly variable way at each movement» (Devoto, 1967-1968). A description that seems like the caption to certain works of art from those same years, between the 1960s and the 1970s, in the orbits of Yaacov Agam, Carlos Cruz-Diez, Joël Stein, and of our own Giovanni Anceschi, Davide Boriani, and Gabriele Devecchi.

An invitation to design such an exceptional, surprising object, one that demands interaction, captivated the enthusiastic students, finally invited to dream and to propose visions. As Paolo Tinelli recalls, the kaleidoscope was for Seassaro

a machine for manipulating light. Not a machine for producing light but for shaping it. Something never heard before [...]. Yet an ex-

traordinary object for the didactics of design, capable of spanning multiple topics and, if properly understood, of granting notable openings of mind. A *tiny object* as simple as it is complex that immediately allowed the soul and personality of the one designing it to emerge. (Tinelli, 2024)

An object that produces intriguing, astonishing images which may recall the paintings of the 2000s by Maldonado (in the period of his return to painting, such as *Centrifugo-centripeto* [Centrifugal-centripetal], 2008) and certain *rotations* from the 1970s by the inimitable Max Bill. An object which, when broken down into parts, seems to allude (yet again by affinity) to the *Lampada triangolare a schermi colorati intercambiabili* [Triangular lamp with interchangeable colored screens] that Poggi produced in 1966-1967 to a design by the ever-present La Pietra.

A design theme as a spur to research on color, form, and light, after Seassaro's many trials on these subjects in other professional domains, and perfectly consistent with another of the important *openings* that he would later bring into the university: the launch of the *Corso di perfezionamento in Progettazione illuminotecnica* [Advanced Course in Lighting Design] (1985), which over the years would become a *Master in Progettazione e Tecnologie della Luce* [Master's in Lighting Design and Technologies] to continue reflecting and reasoning on this perennial topic, and which would also lead to the *Laboratorio Strumentale di Luce & Colore* [Light & Color Instrumental Laboratory]. Names of educational and academic opportunities that seem like scientific contexts for defining the frame of reference of some great artists who helped renew the language of contemporary art, like the many already cited and like Bruce Nauman and Olafur Eliasson, true masters who, precisely with light, created works essential to the culture of the visual arts.

Thus, through a series of continual ricochets, from art practiced in person to architecture and design, and then stabilizing his commitment in teaching (where he never failed to bring the openness of his gaze, formed and nourished in the years lived as an artist), Seassaro never forgot his first trials with light, forms, and color, the founding elements of every work of art, which he introduced programmatically into the university world of design, to the point of turning them into do-

mains of study and research, fully aware (from the vantage point of his personal experience) that it is often art that points ahead to where one should go: «I do not quite know how it happened, but it has always been art, first, to change our way of thinking, of seeing, of feeling, even before, sometimes a hundred years before, one managed to understand what was needed» (Eco, 1962).

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7. Imagining the Space of Inhabiting between Experimentation and System

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Few works by Alberto Seassaro are known in the field of interiors and furniture design. Nevertheless, his research was wide-ranging and articulated (unfortunately, true to his own practice, sparsely documented and preserved), and we remain confident that further projects, whether realized or not, may still come to light, allowing us to reconstruct a clearer picture of Seassaro's interesting and deserving body of research as an architect and designer across the late 1960s and early 1970s, particularly as a designer of interiors and furnishing elements.

Note 1.

At the time, degree theses did not have a specific advisor; rather, the thesis topic was chosen by the students themselves from among the research projects carried out during their studies. Seassaro and La Pietra selected a project begun in the *Istituto di Architettura degli Interni* [Institute of Interior Architecture], where, among others, Gio Ponti (with Vittoriano Viganò as assistant) and Carlo De Carli, himself formerly an assistant to Gio Ponti, were teaching.

It should be recalled at once that already during his university years at Politecnico di Milano, where he enrolled in 1959, an intense partnership, often rather tempestuous, yet clearly stimulating, formed between Alberto Seassaro and Ugo La Pietra, then students. This relationship consolidated and found significant expression in their co-signed 1964 thesis, *La ricerca morfologica. Proposta di lavoro per gli Istituti della Facoltà d'architettura* [Morphological research. A work proposal for the Institutes of the Faculty of Architecture] ¹², a demanding

theoretical elaboration that aptly represents the epochal renewal the Faculty was undergoing in response to the increasingly forceful social demands of the period. The contents of the research, inspired by the principle of the *synthesis of the arts*, addressed in an unprecedented manner the interweaving of the new artistic cultures, the visual arts, and theories of form with a political-institutional commitment aimed at defining the scientific purposes of the renewed Institutes of the Faculty of Architecture, understood as places for exploring the deep relations between research and teaching. This thesis received a then-rare evaluation of *Centodieci e lode con bacio accademico* [110/110 with honors and special commendation]. From the university period, a number of *ex tempore* projects by Seassaro as a third and fourth-year student have also come down to us. Among these, one appreciates a surprising and fascinating project entitled *La casa sopra il tetto* [The house above the roof] [1](#), a theme that anticipates by far the idea of parasitic structures on rooftops, clearly inspired by the *correalist* suggestion of Frederick Kiesler's biomorphic *Endless House* (1959/1960), which was submitted for the course *Architettura degli Interni* [Interior Architecture] led by Gio Ponti (with Vittoriano Viganò as assistant). Equally appreciable is the courageous project for an *Museo Archeologico* [Archaeological Museum] in Milan on Corso Magenta [2](#) developed, regarding the historical research, in the course *Architettura degli Interni II* [Interior Architecture II] taught by Carlo De Carli and, regarding the architectural component, in the course *Composizione II* [Architectural Composition II] taught by Cassi Ramelli (1962-1963).

During his graduation years, Seassaro worked as a skilled and recognized perspective draftsman in several Milanese practices. In particular, he collaborated with Vittoriano Viganò, whom he had met at the university as Gio Ponti's assistant in the course *Architettura degli interni* [Interior Architecture], to which both La Pietra and Seassaro became closely attached during their studies.

Newly graduated, he began an intense period of design activity with Ugo La Pietra. Both embarked passionately on research in the field of pure artistic experimentation, aligned with the contemporary experiences of concrete, programmed, and kinetic art, their design research manifested itself in interiors through provocative, avant-gar-



1. Alberto Seassaro, *La Casa sopra il tetto*.
[Document →](#)



2. Alberto Seassaro, *Museo Archeologico in Corso Magenta*.
[Document →](#)

3. Ugo La Pietra, Alberto Seassaro, *Galleria d'arte privata Walter Spaggiari*, Milano.
[Document →](#)



de projects. The first realized work, marked by a strong and in some respects *aggressive* character imparted to the interiors, was the private *Galleria Spaggiari* (1965-1966) [3](#), created for

Walter Spaggiari, who a few years later would commission Nanda Vigo to design his home, the famous *Casa Blu* (1969). In these interiors, the composition of elements is strongly geometric, abstract, with three-dimensional textures, perforated sheet metal, platforms with upholstered seating, bearing a distinctive Greek-key motif, that *float* and intersect within black environments where the exhibited works stand

out, with all pipes and conduit runs intentionally left exposed, a design choice anticipated only by the famed *birreria Splugen* [Splugen beer hall] realized in Milan in 1961 by the Castiglioni brothers.

Evident in this project, as it would be in the domestic interiors designed shortly thereafter by Seassaro alone, is a three-dimensional compositional inquiry into the formal models that, in the same period, also took shape in his pure artistic research as the *Morfemi*: architectural microstructures composed of plastics and cut, bent, and perforated sheet metal, in the classic tradition of concrete art – almost a set of prototypes of technological nodes. This instinctive and conceptual passion – for technological forms intertwined with artistic research – would recur frequently in Alberto Seassaro's investigations and would undoubtedly accompany him along the path of industrial product design, ultimately informing the origins and development of our Faculty of Design (now School of Design). On the other hand, this is clearly intuited in the incipit of the *Note semiologiche* [Semiological Notes],

4. *Made In. Bollettino della Modern Art Agency*, gennaio-febbraio 1969.
[Document →](#)



written by Seassaro himself for the 1969 presentation of his artistic research in the *Bollettino della Modern Art Agency* *Made in* [4](#), directed by Lucio Amelio: «The production of the

Morfemi (morphological spatial models) – writes Seassaro – has, since 1966, accompanied my foundational architectural research (theoretical, didactic, methodological, and experimental/operational) carried out in academic and professional settings» (Seassaro, *op. cit.*, p. 10). In the same publication, Gillo Dorfles also contributes with an insightful critical analysis, commenting:

These objects are a significant indicator of the new sensitivity to formal and structural aspects that today prevail; not only that, but it is to be hoped that they might also prompt in the viewer a greater interest in a future arrangement – no longer on a reduced scale, but indeed on an environmental and territorial scale – of analogous structures. In other words, if the poetics and practice of 'Visual Design', of which our art and architecture schools are so lacking, were strengthened, they could draw on this work of Seassaro to obtain most useful evidence of how one can stimulate and increase the sense of form and of the form-structure relationship even through operations limited in size and in material use. [...] (Dorfles, *op. cit.*, p. 4)

In this context, it is also highly interesting to read several passages from a long critical commentary by Ettore Sottsass Jr. on Seassaro's *Morfemi*, written on the occasion of the exhibition *Seassaro, I Morfemi* at Studio 2B in Bergamo, in May 1968 [5](#) ↘:



5. *Seassaro. I morfemi.*
Presentati da Ettore
Sottsass Jr.
[Document](#) →

[...] I mean that there are a lot of young people who do whatever thing and then put it there as if it were the Parthenon, as if to say that the world begins there and ends there, and if that suits you – fine – otherwise you're an idiot, you understand nothing, and good evening; I mean that there are young and not-so-young people who have a monumental idea of the work of art, a mythical idea, things of that sort – they believe that art is a definitive and absolute whole to which one either arrives or not, and once arrived no one moves anything anymore. Instead, Seassaro's idea, and that of others along this line, is that art is a continual act of approaching something that one never really reaches, because that very something is itself in continual motion – it seems to me – and

so art is like a moment of passage, like a snapshot that has come out more or less blurred depending on the exposure time: art, in substance, is a contribution to a more general process, rather than a definitive, total, absolute assertion. It seems to me that's more or less how things stand, and Seassaro has on his side youth, the strength and happiness of all the body's cells working well: he has hope on his side, and so all these things are part of the game we are witnessing, transferred into these white and red 'things' that are leaning here against the wall of my studio, and it truly seems to me that all this is worth trying and continuing. (Sottsass, in Seassaro. *I morfemi*, 1968, p. 3)

6. Ugo La Pietra, Alberto Seassaro, *Il Cenobio*, in *Domus*, n. 451.
[Document →](#)



Different, however, is the project – again developed together with La Pietra – for the spare and incisive installation of the interior of the *galleria d'arte Il Cenobio* [Il Cenobio art gallery] (1966). From the editorial presentation in *Domus*, n. 451 [65](#), June 1967, one understands the more absolute and homogeneous character of this project:

The environment itself is a single, large, unitary 'object' to be entered, in which the continuous and total use of a single element for the installation – corrugated aluminum sheeting applied to vertical and horizontal planes – causes the usual points of reference (wall, ceiling, floor) to disappear, in the impression of a single luminous space, a homogeneous space. The corrugation of the sheet, which deepens distances perspectively and multiplies and diffuses reflections, turns the wall into a kind of continuous luminous surface that evenly bathes the entire space in light. [...] (Per una galleria d'arte a Milano, 1967, p. 47)

This project, in particular, recalls the work of Nanda Vigo, who in those years was devoted to researching what she calls *oggetti* or *spazi cronotopici* [chronotopic objects/spaces] – think of *casa bianca*, also significantly named *casa Zero*, 1959-1963; the already mentioned *casa Blu*, 1967-1971; *casa Gialla*, 1970-1971; and *casa Nera*, 1970-1972 – (Bosoni, 2025; Cattiodoro, 2022-2023 and 2025; Pastor, 2006), where space and time interact, dilating the perceptual dimension; environ-

ments that are generally monochromatic and tend to elicit unexpected and uncertain perceptions; and where the dynamic involvement of the entire body within the setting produces a deliberately crafted experiential phenomenon [7۷](#).

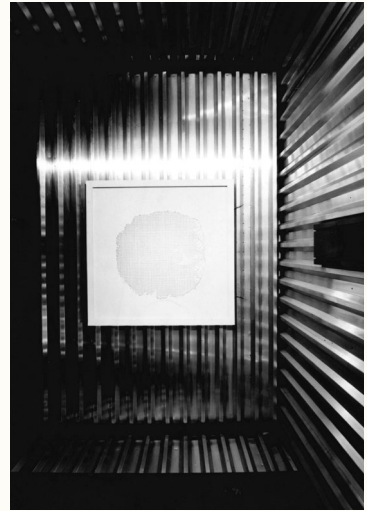
Following these two interior projects for exhibition spaces, as already mentioned, come two residential interiors – very particular for the complex weave of multifunctional frames intersecting in space – both designed by Seassaro alone: an apartment in Milan for his sister, Paola Seassaro, in 1968 [8۷۸](#), and a holiday house in Camogli in 1969 [9۷۹](#).

Although set in two very different contexts, these interventions on pre-existing buildings aim to construct an absolutely autonomous diagrammatic space, where a modular grid determines an elaborate system of service elements that permeates the entire house. Published in *Abitare* in December 1968, and accompanied by an intriguing *assonometria alla cavaliera* [cavalier axonometric drawing] that explains all the dynamic-functional aspects, it is described as follows:

The key takeaway from this proposal lies precisely in the fact that the house was not 'furnished' by simply introducing pieces; rather, the exactly opposite operation was carried out: namely, the entire inhabited volume was first studied and then constructed in its entirety, intervening on all surfaces – ceilings included – and equipping them with fixed or movable elements designed for maximum functional flexibility and, consequently, use. Only two standard elements were introduced to integrate the already complete layout of the house: a chair and an armchair. In the designer's utopian conception, this example could be configured, in its totality and in the elements that constitute it, as a handcrafted prototype of a possible industrialization of the elements themselves, which ought to be extended, with constant modularity, to cover all the possible requirements for the formation of equipment, furniture, and, in general, 'tools for inhabiting', ultimately coordinating with a parallel modularity in the building industry [10۷۱۰](#). (Geppetto '70 sul sentiero dell'industrializzazione, pp. 8-11)



7. Ugo La Pietra, Alberto Seassaro, Galleria d'arte *Il Cenobio*, Milano.
[Document →](#)



8. Alberto Seassaro, *Spazio abitativo a Milano*, in *Interiors '70*.
[Document →](#)



9. Alberto Seassaro, *Casa Rizzi a Camogli*, in *Interiors '70*.
[Document →](#)

Similarly, the project for the holiday house in Camogli features the blue color of the ceiling, the large window opening onto the terrace facing the sea, and the seating and the chaise longue – designed by Seassaro himself – made of orthogonal square-tube bearing frames from which cylindrical orange upholstered elements are suspended. Here, too, the theme of his *Morfemi* recurs, and in this sense one recognizes wall-mounted luminous structures very similar to one of his best-known *Morfemi* [11](#).

However evident the exemplary references and citations may be, above all concerning the idea of a Cartesian, neoplastic open space, from Frank Lloyd Wright to Theo van Doesburg and Gerrit Rietveld, passing also through Josef Hoffmann and Charles Rennie Mackintosh, without forgetting his university mentor Vittoriano Viganò with his brutalist approach, as in the interiors of the *Galleria Apollinaire* or his celebrated house in via Crivelli (1956), or again in the near-contemporary project for *Mollificio Bresciano* (1967-1982), one must acknowledge that Alberto Seassaro's mark carves out its own specific recognizability and autonomy.

Following these interior projects came several interesting explorations in the field of design for domestic systems: the *programma di tavoli componibili Addition* [Addition modular table program] for Acerbis (1969) and, in the same year, a modular, transformable central element in *stratificato Print ABET* [ABET print laminate], co-signed with Casertelli and Valota, with which they won the *MIA (Mobile Internazionale Arredamento Monza)* competition [12](#), whose jury included, among others, Joe Colombo, Giotto Stoppino, Gianemilio Monti, and Carlo Pagani. In 1970, *Domus* n. 489 published the prototype of one of his projects (1968): a compact, multifunctional, reconfigurable monoblock [13](#), again realized with the support of Acerbis and clearly conceived for new dwelling spaces with fully open plans; it was later included, in 1972, in the catalogue of the celebrated MoMA exhibition *Italy: The New Domestic Landscape* under the title *Central Block, containing bed, table, wardrobe, toilet, shelves* (Ambasz, 1972, p. 132) [14](#) [15](#) [16](#) [17](#).

In this period (1966-1969), another interesting design experience, initiated with Ugo La Pietra, was the consulting for the prefabricated-systems company *Silicalcite*, for which he



12. Diploma 1° premio MIA-Abet Print, Monza 1969.

[Document →](#)



13. L'intero mobile corre su rotaie, Alberto Seassaro, in *Domus*, n. 489.

[Document →](#)



14. Estratto del Catalogo della Mostra *Italy: The New Domestic Landscape*, MOMA.

[Document →](#)

15. Alberto Seassaro,
Addition, Tavolo
 attrezzato componibile,
 Acerbis.
[Document →](#)



developed several studies, also in competition formats: we may recall the project *Tuberie*, co-signed with La Pietra and involving Nanda Vigo; the realization, again with La Pietra, of a public fountain in Caiazzo, built with *Silicalcite* prefabricated



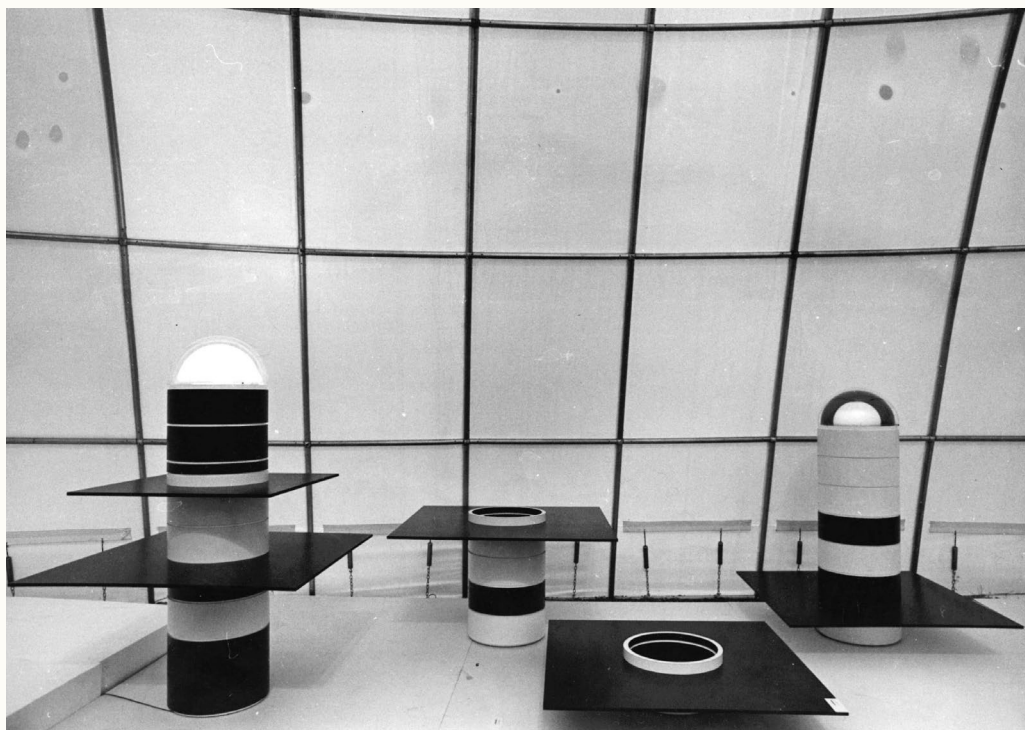
18. Alberto Seassaro,
 Stand Silicalcite,
 Montecatini Edison, alla
 Fiera campionaria di
 Milano.
[Document →](#)



modules; and typologies of housing units employing the same construction system. Also in 1965 he designed a coherent and well-controlled small pavilion for *Silicalcite-Montedison* at the Fiera di Milano 18. Alberto Seassaro saw in the prefabricated module the hope of a democratic building culture; in this sense, modular design and the industrial technologies of component prefabrication constituted a fundamental part of his design research in the professional field as well.

Even with just these few yet significant milestones, an intriguingly clear trajectory emerges of Seassaro as a designer, marked by a strong experimental vein, immediately put to the test in real projects, with the same spirit effectively displayed by some of his Milanese friends from those years, such as the group De Pas, D'Urbino e Lomazzi, with whom he also crossed paths professionally at the company Acerbis during that period. His vision of inhabited space, open, relational, interactive, diagrammatic, flexible and mobile, interprets with a strong individuality the themes of the historical *avant-gardes*, above all Constructivist and Neoplasticist. It almost certainly also draws on research into building prefabrication by Alessandro Mangiarotti and Bruno Morassutti, often intersected with furniture design, on Marco Zanuso's investigations into technological systems, and on Giuseppe Ciribini's theoretical-disciplinary studies.

It further resonates with Ettore Sottsass's 1960s research on the color/structure relationship, with Joe Colombo's contemporaneous ex-



16. 1° premio concorso *MIA-Abet Print*, Sistema componibile per
Arredo in laminato plastico.
[Document →](#)



17. Alberto Seassaro, Monoblocco per arredo integrale.
[Document →](#)

periments from 1963 onward, and with the early manifestations of Radical Design thought in Italy and abroad, as well as, given the evident affinities, with the experimentations of Liisi Beckmann, specifically the *Karelia* armchair (1966) for Zanotta, and of Fabio Lenci for Comfort Line in 1967.

In this complex trajectory of Alberto Seassaro's design research, several traits can be discerned that would remain central to his meta-design thinking (later reflected as well in his important work as a university teacher and as a designer of educational structures), namely a passion for an elaborate conception of technology as paradigm/metaphor to be assumed also as an ethical and aesthetic principle, an interest in the diverse and most innovative forms of environmental perception (color, light, sound, new industrial materials), and an idea of design that is as programmatic and systemic as it is open to continuous verification, in line with his anarchic and heterodox view of the rationalist methodological approach.

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PART 3

In the Folds of Technological Culture: Premises for the Birth of the Design System

8. The Social Role of Education and Research

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8.1 His mentors

A child of the 1963 student demonstrations, which asserted an identity claim on the need to integrate design research with the education of the architect, Alberto Seassaro, immediately after graduating, set about *putting down roots* at Politecnico di Milano, advancing research proposals aimed at renewing the contents of design pedagogy and, from the outset, undertaking teaching-assistant activities that saw him engaged not only in Milan but also at Politecnico di Torino and the University of Pescara.

Indeed, Alberto Seassaro's professional activity, outlined in the previous chapters, which led him to realize works in industrialized building, interior architecture, design, and art, though intense and at times frenetic, never diverted him from the university world.

It is 1964: Alberto Seassaro and Ugo La Pietra, freshly graduated, submit a proposal for a research project titled *La ricerca morfologica. Proposta per una sistematizzazione della bibliografia sui problemi della forma. Contributo alla organizzazione della biblioteca dell'Istituto di*

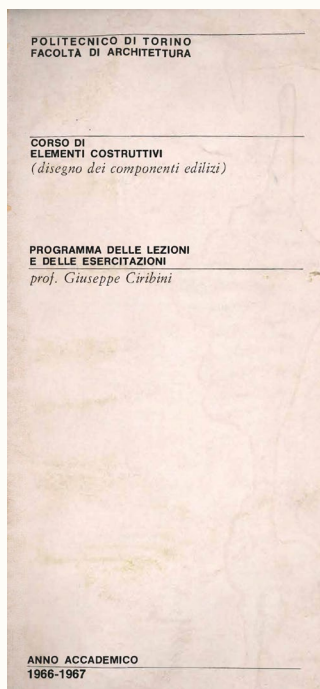
Composizione e all'approntamento degli strumenti didattici per i corsi [Morphological Research. Proposal for a Systematization of the Bibliography on Problems of Form. Contribution to Organizing the Library of the *Istituto di Composizione* and to Preparing Teaching Tools for the Courses]. The research, an immediate outgrowth of their thesis, would receive two subsequent ministerial grants aimed at defining criteria and principles for establishing a section of the library of the nascent *Istituto di Composizione* [Institute of Composition] in the Faculty of Architecture at Politecnico di Milano, dedicated to issues of form for the use of Architecture students.

The specific sectors of the disciplines on aesthetics, semiotics, the psychology and physiology of perception, etc., have always been covered 'by proxy' by the architect, without the constructive bases necessary for this operation, with a mechanism entirely analogous to that of the sociological and economic sciences with respect to urban planning. Therefore, this bibliography arises from the need to confront decisively the cultural debate on the problems of modern architecture through an adequate knowledge of problems of form and the definition of the critical and operational level at which the architect himself can intervene. (La Pietra, U. & Seassaro, A., *La ricerca morfologica. Proposta per una sistematizzazione della bibliografia sui problemi della forma. Parte prima – L'approccio deduttivo*, 1964)

These were the years that saw, at Politecnico di Milano, the establishment of the first research institutes aimed at teaching (the future Departments) and, with them, the first experiments on methods and modalities for transferring research contents into the educational sphere. In the years that followed, relations between research and teaching would become a distinctive trait in Alberto Seassaro's academic trajectory. Likewise, the very subject of the research project – the design of infrastructures for knowledge and knowing, such as a departmental library – already represents a first, clear sign of his engagement with, and attention to, the university institution and its organizational forms.

These are the beginnings. But the premises of what would come later are already discernible. On the one hand, the theoretical and ex-

1. Programma del Corso
di Elementi Costruttivi,
prof. Giuseppe Ciribini,
Facoltà di Architettura,
Politecnico di Torino, A.A.
1966-67.
[Document →](#)



perimental approach to problems of form stemming from his training in the visual arts; on the other, attention to forms of innovation and industrialization of technologies, manufactured elements, and building processes. Each of these themes, though still in an embryonic state, lays the groundwork for the accomplished developments that would characterize the years of academic maturity.

In addition to his research activities, Alberto Seassaro was immediately involved by Ludovico Belgiojoso, Vittoriano Viganò, and Cesare Blasi in teaching within the disciplinary area of *Composizione architettonica* [Architectural Composition]. Taking his first steps first as *Assistente Volontario* [Volunteer Assistant] and then as *Assistente Incaricato* [Contract Assistant], he became passionate about the themes of form and its modeling process, the design of systems and components, and didactic experimentation, topics on which he began organizing seminars and exercises, in a continual transfer of experience from artistic and professional work to the academic sphere.

Along this path, the figure of Giuseppe Ciribini, whose courses in *Elementi costruttivi. Disegno dei componenti edilizi* [Building Elements. Design of Building Components] and *Metodologia della progettazione* [Design Methodology] he assisted in Milan and Turin (Ciribini, 1966–67 [13](#)) is the one he came closest to in terms of thematic interests and design approach. Thanks to this closeness, he shifted his focus from compositional cultures to technological cultures. It is also to Ciribini – a profound innovator in the disciplinary field of *Tecnologia dell'Architettura* [Architectural Technology], who led him to open up new research perspectives, especially on building industrialization and on the impact that scientific and technological innovations were having on the construction sector – that he owes his approach to *systemic* thinking (on Giuseppe Ciribini's role in the cultural growth of the Technological Area, see Cristina Tonelli's chapter in this volume).



Figure 1.
Cover of the volume *Tecnologia e progetto*, by
Giuseppe Ciribini (1984).



Figure 2.
Cover of the volume *Introduzione alla tecnologia del
design*, by Giuseppe Ciribini (1979).

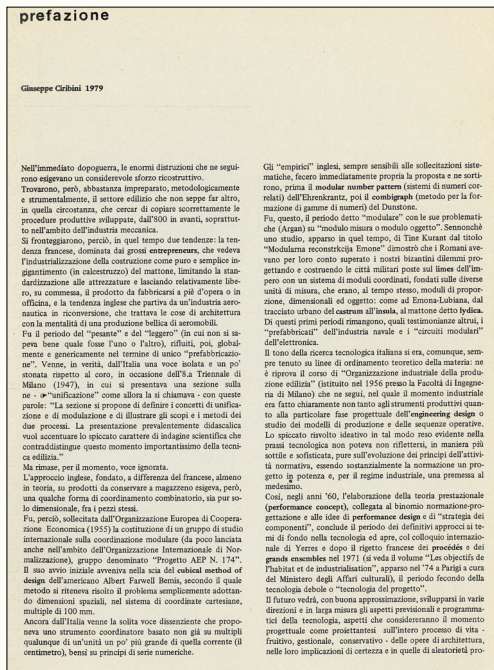


Figure 3.
Preface by Giuseppe Ciribini to the volume
*Progettazione e gestione del processo edilizio
industrializzato*, edited by Alberto Seassaro (1979).

8.2 The Imprint of Didactic Experimentation at the Faculty of Architecture between the 1960s and 1970s

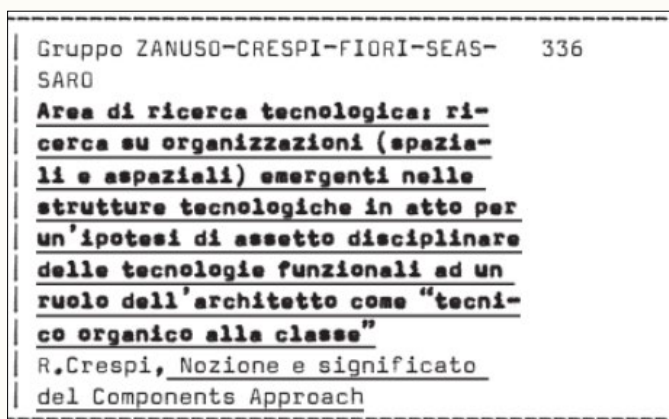
At the end of the 1960s and throughout the 1970s, the Faculty of Architecture experienced years marked by transformation, born of a particular experimental tension. The student occupations of 1963 and 1967 had the strength to trigger a profound revision of the statute of project-based pedagogy. In an initial phase, the reorganization of the educational structures proceeded by questioning the training framework based on traditional mono-disciplinary courses, moving instead toward groupings of disciplines and courses articulated into macro-themes; frameworks within which students were called to experiment with the different scales of design, from urban planning to interiors. Alberto Seassaro, in the role of Volunteer Teaching Assistant, appears with his teaching programs in thematic groupings that, over the years, would bring together different instructors. At the outset the group consisted of Marco Zanuso, Raffaella Crespi, Leonardo Fiori, and Alberto Seassaro.

Figure 4.

1969-70, with 336 enrolled students, the Zanuso, Crespi, Fiori, Seassaro grouping was among the most followed by students among those not belonging to the area of architectural composition. (AA.VV., *La rivoluzione culturale*, p. 51).

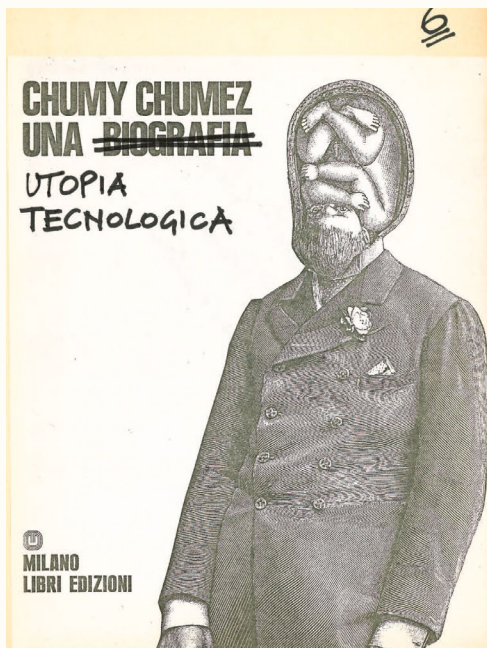
He then became a permanent member of the research-teaching group *Laboratorio di produzione del territorio* [Laboratory for the Production of the Territory], formed around the themes of housing and inhabiting and established with Giacomo Scarpini, Bianca Bottero, and Giorgio Gaetani. It is here that he began to focus on the construction sector and its trans-

formations. In this teaching context, the technological fulcrum sheds its more conventional connotations and is put at the service of the problems of dwelling. On the research front, the housing theme is addressed by: taking a wide-angle view of the economic and social issues that affect the formation of



SOMMARIO

⑨ 1984 di Powell e Grande Leri
 ⑪ Antonio e fruttini di uovna
 ⑫ La casa rivelata da Fari
 ⑬ anche tutti con e 1/2
 ⑭ città attrattiva
 ⑮ ghetto?
 ⑯ Ida Fari ne cristianita
 ⑰ oggi il non
 ⑱ deunta e affo elements. E dove liandi
 ⑲ le enle hnn della lbrna gion nnes liandi
 ⑳ Viaggio in quarcologia di Hildeau
 ㉑ e Alberto fendo illante
 ㉒ da Rolo Cuspani
 ㉓ tutti i unini mi frumti
 ㉔ l'utopia di Chumy Chumez
 ㉕ Tecnologia e Allente Sennno
 ㉖ Pooue. Anna Aldemese
 ㉗ Portfogione
 ㉘ 12 munte vinita. nnes liandi
 ㉙ l'utopia e una gienza e una bngelto
 ㉚ alla putura di Cuspani



**LA CASA
AVVELENATA**

Le testimonianze sono state raccolte da alcune famiglie che il pro-
 blima dell'abitazione lo hanno vissuto in modo eccezionale, al di
 là delle loro scelte e dei loro desideri.
 Non hanno scelto la casa alternativa.
 Non hanno scelto lo sblancimento delle metropoli.
 Né il tranquillo rifugio di campagna, della comune in Toscana.
 Abitavano la casa più borghese del mondo, la villetta con l'orto.
 Una famiglia tranquilla.
 Solo che erano in Brianza, a Seveso accanto all'Imesa.
 E dunque a loro è toccato una mattina di trovarsi, in un mondo avve-
 lenato.
 Hanno accettato il dialogo con la morte con una tranquillità perfet-
 ta.
 Hanno contato insieme ai soldi che gli toccavano per il risarcimen-
 to i nomi di quelli che si ammazzavano e morivano.
 "Il marito della Rina, la mamma della Wanda..."
 Hanno allontanato dimenticandola, la paura.
 Anche noi abbiamo fatto la stessa cosa.
 Leggere queste cose che effetto ci fa?
 Non è una preoccupazione moralista.
 La festa in giardino il giorno dopo lo scoppio della nube, dove ogni
 no senza saperlo si cibava della sua morte o della sua malattia.
 Il residence di Assago dove tutti litigavano, dove nessuno trovava
 le chiavi, gli ascensori, dove i mariti dicevano alle mogli "Tà sei
 sempre in giro", tutti i parametri sono saltati.
 L'accettazione della legge ha prodotto la rottura della legge.
 L'attaccamento alla norma lo sballo di tutte le norme.
 La vita tranquilla, la morte.
 L'inconcepibilità, la consapevolezza del rischio più drammatico.
 "Mamma buttati via questi zucchinetti, sono troppo amari".
 Ma tu hai preso le zucchine nell'orto. Le parole di quella cena le
 ho ancora in mente. Erano passati quattro giorni da quel sabato nes-
 suno ci aveva detto ancora niente. Ma la buona "arripava" tutta nel
 mangiare la verdura.
 Lo scoppio lo ricordo bene. Avevo avuto paura; mi son detta, ades-
 so l'Imesa parte al completo, o che prende fuoco. E non era la pri-
 ma volta. Il fumo si era subito alzato sopra le nostre case, con un
 fischio. Allora avevo chiuso il balcone. Arriva mio marito e mi fa
 "cosa c'è, c'è odore di metano, forse c'è il gas aperto". Sì, ma è
 stata l'Imesa che ha buttato fuori non so cosa.
 La domenica mattina, che odore, le coperte non si potevano annusa-
 re, le ho infilate nella lavatrice.
 Il sera abbiamo visto il compleanno di mia nipote che abita
 il proprio vicino a me, anche lei a due passi dalla fabbrica. Era-
 vamo in cortile e gli invitati mangiavano frutta e non frutta, tut-
 to raccolto dagli orti. Il giorno dopo tutti questi ragazzi della
 festa stavano male: vomito, diarrea. Pensavamo che i dolci fossero
 guasti. Ma nessuno ci ha detto niente fino al venerdì dopo, sette
 giorni dopo quando c'è stata l'assemblea degli operai ed è venuto
 l'ufficio sanitario.
 Eppure noi che stavamo proprio lì, era tanto che stavamo male. Di
 puzza ce n'era sempre, e anche di scoppio. Come quello del 13 gen-
 naio del '75, il giorno di Sant'Antonio.
 Il giorno di veleno ho ho respirato sempre. Nemmeno il medico sapeva dir-
 lo di veleno ma ho respirato sempre.

**● LE ARCHITETTURE DELLA LIBERAZIONE
 ● GLI IPERMERCATI DELLA RICERCA DI SE
 ● IL MERATO DEL DISAGIO E
 ● VENDITORI DI BENE ESSERE**

Oggi vorrei cominciare ad introdurre il discorso sulle architetture
 della liberazione, non solo come luoghi fisici ma anche come luoghi
 del pensiero: luoghi, supporti, proteste.

Prima di occuparmi degli ipermercati della ricerca di sé, come Bas-
 les in California e Poma in Italia, dove la tecnologia della libe-
 razione è più avanzata, dove i laboratori d'incontro si chiamano
 "more joy" (più gioia) come a Baalen, vorrei risalire alle matrici
 prime che hanno segnato la traccia poi seguita da molti dei delusi
 della rivoluzione mancata, prima che si avviasero sulle strade del
 la terapia.

Una serie di punti che sono i punti di un interessarsi di fili che van-
 no dall'antipsichiatra, cioè dalla dialettica di liberazione al mer-
 cato delle sue tecniche. Mercato disomogeneo oscillante fra defferen-
 ti strutture di discorso.

Gli antipsichiatristi di ieri oggi si chiamano terapeuti popolari, psi-
 coterapeuti per il territorio, samaritani scalzi impegnati a porta-
 re soccorso alle sofferenze e a schierarsi al fianco di chi "contro
 la nevrosi combatte davvero". Psicoanalisti da combattimento che per
 mantenersi in vita ha bisogno di essere sempre "più contro". Il fan-
 tasma della reciprocità diventa protagonista nel rapporto analitico,
 mantenuto entro le strette seduttive dell'hoic et nunc. Il rapporto
 inter pares approda alla terapia reciproca.

Psicoterapeuti confessori, ma nella confessione (scrive Freud in "Il
 problema dell'analisi del non medico") "il peccatore dice quello che
 sa", non è chiamato a dire di più.

La relazione analitica non si basa più solo sulla parola, entra in
 gioco lo sguardo, il contatto, lo scambio emotivo e sentimentale, la
 dimensione della intrapsichica, che Lacan ha definito ironicamente
 della "intrasubordinazione". In nome della cura il dire si tra-
 sforma in atto, il rapporto si fa apparentemente lineare, faccia e
 faccia, diretto dialogico. La parola regredisce al lamento.

Le ambiguità, le parate, le astuzie, i giochi di prestigio e di ri-
 versità innescono la relazione analitica: il padrone modernizzato ac-
 cetta di dialogare, il sapere coincide col portare a conoscenza, di-
 venta saper fare, saper curare: l'ars sanandi campeggia sulla scena.

Ma con le tecniche di importazione americana e d'Oriente i curatori
 d'anime diventano massaggiatori d'anime. L'esaltazione dello sballo
 e della destrutturazione psichica, i flussi desideranti antipsichici
 e percorsi rizomatici ("dobbiamo perdere la testa per entrare nel
 corpo" ammoniva già Jacques Couper in "Grammatica del vivere") pre-
 parano alla regressione dell'intelligibile al sensibile, al prota-
 gonismo del corpo.

L'esaltazione del non sapere, il trionfo dei valori del corpo avul-
 si dalle fatiche della riflessione aprono la strada al massaggio-
 ri reichiani, maratoneti, ai guru nostrani o di importazione, ai ma-
 nipolatori del corpo, liberato o in via di esserci.

Figure 5.
 From the collection of teaching materials and student reflections from
 the strand *Abitazioni, classi sociali e territorio - filone 3* [Housing, Social
 Classes, and Territory – strand 3].

Figure 6.
Clippings, reworkings,
photographic enlargements and
reductions ready for new collages
(Alberto Seassaro Archive).



housing demand and the logics of supply; tracing, through a political rather than disciplinary lens, the relationship between economic status and the quality of demand; highlighting the political imprint of housing reforms and the dynamics of land rent and the real-estate market; bringing to the fore the emerging politico-economic problems in the productive organization of the building process in the face of industrialization; investigating the role of technicians; the fragmentation and deskilling of the sector, up to and including a *political* reading of the *Italian road to industrialization*, developed from a critical analysis of the catalogue of prefabricated manufactured elements by Montecatini-Edison. Central throughout are the micro-dynamics of dwelling, observed with an anthropological, ethnographic, almost psychoanalytic gaze. The political tenor led him, in those same years, together with Ida Farè, Corrado

Levi, and Adriano Di Leo, to activate experimental teaching activities (seminars, projects, listening and consciousness-raising groups) under the title *Il privato è politico* [The personal is political].

I recall in particular the seminar he led with Corrado Levi, titled *Il privato è politico* [The personal is political], in which students' unrest and their rejection of architecture were addressed through a method that paired the design process with a simultaneous recognition of personal experiences and sensibilities. The seminar was followed with great enthusiasm by many students who, through this experience, discovered a novel way to approach architecture and to grasp its allure. (Bottero, 2024)

Decisively political, too, was the way project themes were handled in teaching, having students grapple with the city's concrete problems, with the active involvement of society (the Tenants' Union, neighborhood collectives and committees, housing-occupation and housing-struggle committees, factory workers' coordination groups, grassroots trade-union groups, the Student Movement, self-man-

aged social groups, grassroots actors articulating demands actively at the political and social level, etc.) in order to gather and rework needs and urgencies, forging a link between workers' struggles and student struggles.

Political and experimental, finally, is this operating *in the thick* of society, moving away from the path of academic exercises *in vitro*, bringing multidisciplinary contributions into teaching so as to refine the inquiry into the problems of inhabiting with a gaze that links the private and the political within the dimension of dwelling 2ۛ. The teaching activities were preceded and followed by a substantial production of written documents. As was typical of the Faculty of Architecture in those years, these teaching support and companion documents took the form of the *dispensa* [course booklet] – a tool used to disseminate *grey materials* useful for instruction. They are accounts of the activities carried out with students, bulletins, chronologies that gather previous experiences, comment on them, identify critical elements and deviations from objectives, and are offered to students in subsequent years as material for reflection, as a starting point for activities.

The programs in the *Guida dello studente* [Student Guide] are serious business as well. They arise from cultural proposals by the working group, debated and approved at discussion tables. We have chosen to reproduce below the introductory section of the program of the research-teaching group *Abitazioni, classi sociali e territorio – filone 3* [Housing, Social Classes, and Territory – strand 3], of which Alberto Seassaro was a member, pertaining to the courses of the 1977/78 academic year 3ۛ.

A true essay – at times irreverent – able to convey the cultural climate, the freedom of thought, the linkage between teaching and social problems, the political sensitivity present in course syllabi, and the importance of language and terminological references to a cultural system in transformation.

In drafting the syllabus, the group's first act is to strike out the official course title, annotating, in the text that follows, the reasons why each term composing that title is outdated and



2. Aiuto, Corso di Tecnologia dell'Architettura II, prof. Alberto Seassaro, Facoltà di Architettura, A.A. 1978-79.
[Document →](#)

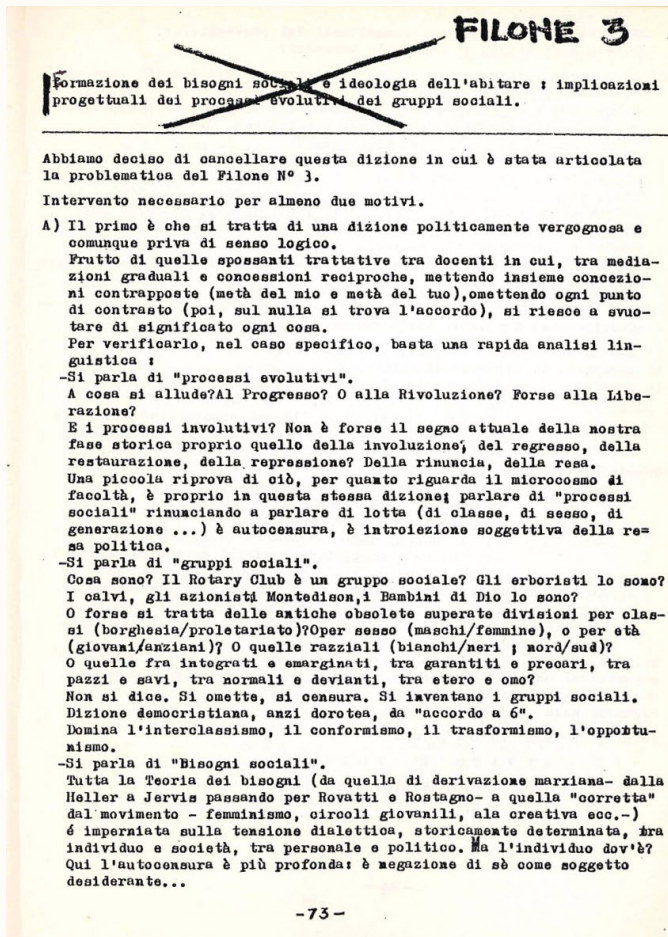


3. Programmi 1977-78 Ambito n. 1, Abitazioni, classi sociali e territorio.
[Document →](#)

Figure 7.
Cover of the teaching booklet produced using the collage technique by Alberto Seassaro.



Figure 8.
Excerpts from the 1977-78 syllabi,
Area n. 1, *Abitazioni, classi sociali e
territorio* [Housing, Social Classes,
and Territory], p. 73.



politically unacceptable. The table of contents shaping the presentation shows, already from the headings, a clear vocation of the teaching programs for experimenting with alterna-

tive ways of thinking about pedagogy (research conducted jointly by students and instructors; terms such as *consciousness-raising sessions*; evening seminar programs outside standard teaching hours, etc.), but above all it proposes innovative contents for design activities. Taken together, they amount to a true counter-culture manifesto. In 1980, with his appointment at Politecnico di Milano –first as Associate Professor and then, in 1990, as Full Professor of *Architectural Technology*, he became the holder of the chairs *Unificazione edilizia e prefabbricazione* [Building Standardization and Prefabrication]; *Tecnica ed economia della produzione edilizia* [Techniques and

Economics of Building Production]; *Architectural Technology*; *Organizzazione della produzione* [Production Organization]. He brought into teaching not only theoretical research but, above all, the experiments in building industrialization and prefabrication conducted at Montecatini's Project Center.

In his research-teaching proposals, whether for seminars or design exercises, a few keywords stand out for their anticipatory force regarding themes that would become central when he was later tasked with designing the educational framework of the Bachelor's

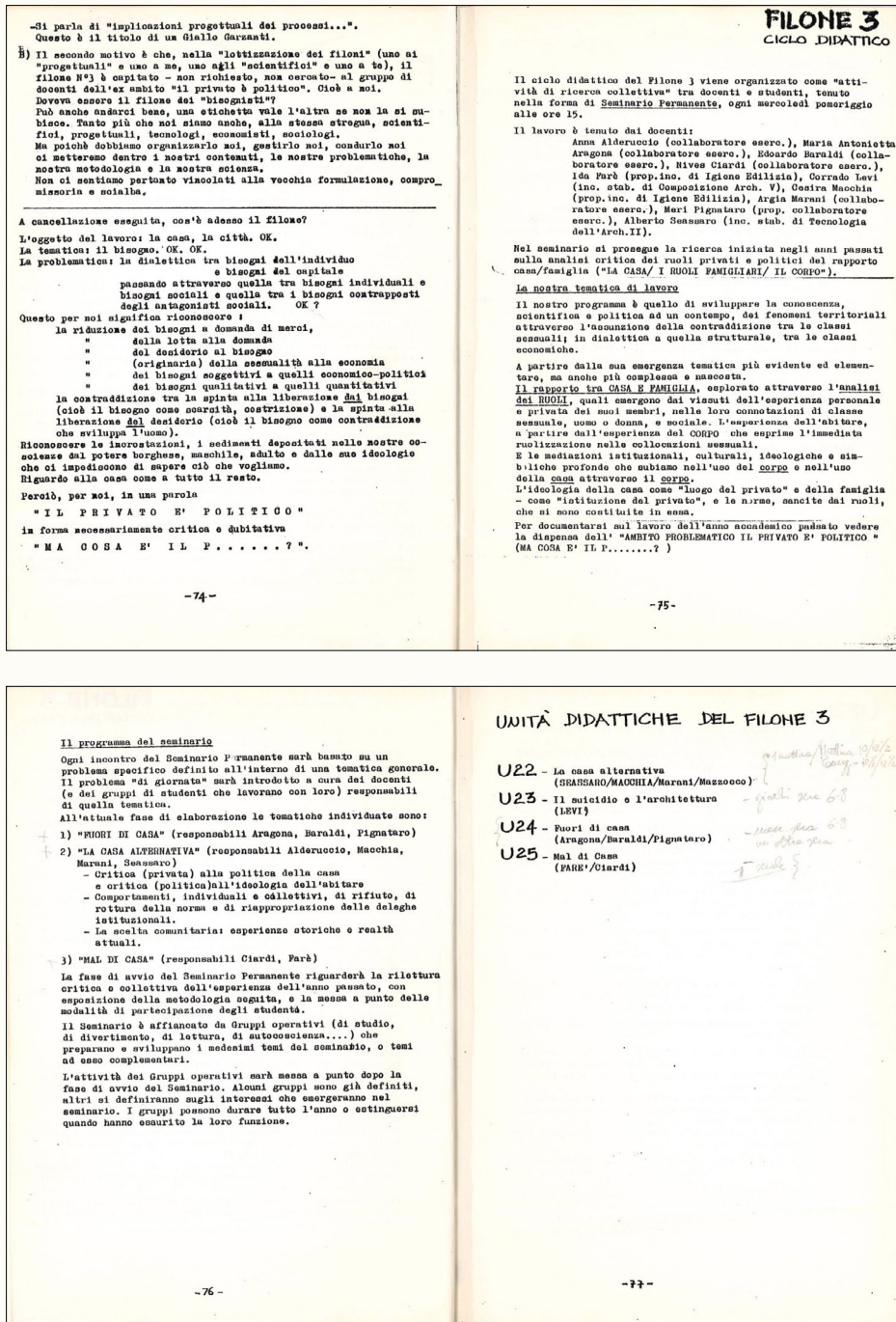
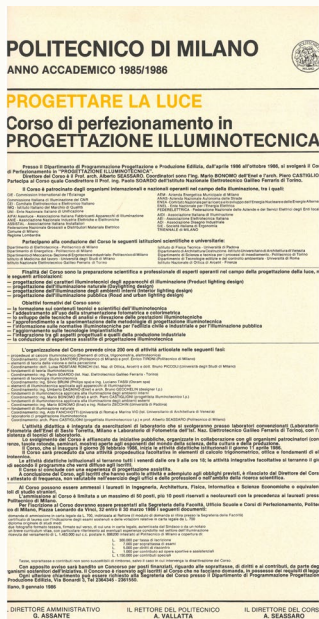


Figure 9. Excerpts from the 1977-78 syllabi, Area n. 1, *Abitazioni, classi sociali e territorio* [Housing, Social Classes, and Territory], pp. 74-77.

4. Progettare la luce. Corso di perfezionamento in progettazione illuminotecnica, Politecnico di Milano. Document →



Degree in *Industrial Design*: meta-design as an interdisciplinary methodology; the design of systems and components; *merceologia* [commodity studies]; attention to the processual dimension of the project and not only to the final product. Within the courses he taught at the Faculty of Architecture, he brought his youthful explorations in the art world, introducing the theme of light and project experiments on light-based artifacts, of which the kaleidoscope was, for those of us who were students in those years, the emblematic object we all still remember (Tinelli, 2024). His vocation for teaching reform and his interest in designing innovative, experimentally oriented activities also engaged him on the front of *Istruzione Permanente* [Continuing Education]. From 1984 to 1993 he served as Director of the Continuing Education Program of the Faculty of Architecture.

His was the first *Corso di perfezionamento in Progettazione illuminotecnica* [Advanced Course in Lighting Design] (1985), a course that cultivated one of his areas of teaching interest and of scientific and design research, and that would later become the *Master in Progettazione e tecnologie della luce* [Master's in Lighting Design and Technologies], which he directed until 2010 4↘.

From 1987 to 1989 he was Co-director of the *Corso di perfezionamento in Metodi e tecniche della progettazione e del controllo ambientale. Ambiente e tecnologia* [Advanced Course in Methods and Techniques of Environmental Design and Control. Environment and Technology] (Director: Maria Bottero) and, in those same years, he was Coordinator of the *Corso di perfezionamento in Progettazione energetica dell'ambiente costruito. Energia e architettura* [Advanced Course in Energy Design of the Built Environment. Energy and Architecture] (Director: Gianni Scudo).

8.3 Technological Culture and Research

We are straddling the late 1970s and the early 1980s. While actively engaged in teaching studios on housing, the home, and the territory,

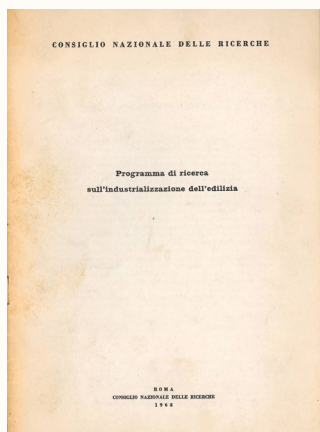
Alberto Seassaro simultaneously set in motion an intensive research activity that feeds, completes, and deepens these themes, and then uses the teaching moment as a testing ground. The teaching-research dyad is another distinctive trait that aptly describes his way of inhabiting the university, and one we will see characterize his years as Dean of the Faculty of Design, when this very dyad would become paradigmatic of his institutional mandate.

The roots of this approach, which also contains a precise political vision of the university and its role in society, can already be found, in embryonic form, in these years of continuous transfer between research contents and those of teaching. On the research front in particular, Alberto Seassaro initiated innovative thematic lines, transferring the experience gained in the 1960s in prefabrication, standardization, and building industrialization, carried out with Giuseppe Ciribini and Marcello Grisotti. These experiences and contents were developed in the realm of design activity for the construction industry, undertaken on behalf of ANCE *Associazione Nazionale Costruttori Edili*, CRESME *Centro di ricerche economiche, sociologiche e di mercato per le costruzioni*, ASSOMARMO, ANDIL *Associazione Nazionale degli Industriali dei Laterizi*, ASSOARREDO, etc.; for SPRED S.p.A. (*Società per la razionalizzazione dell'Edilizia*, established with Montedison and Finsider S.p.A., Milan); and above all for Montecatini Edison.

It was precisely thanks to these concrete project activities that Alberto Seassaro was able to bring into the university sphere the many relationships he had cultivated in his professional practice, also showing a marked ability to build synergies and weave important networks of relations.

When, in the early 1970s, he was commissioned for the CNR research program *Programma di Ricerca per la Industrializzazione Edilizia (PRIE)* [Research Program for Building Industrialization] (Director: Romani) and became coordinator of the *Gruppo Progettazione funzionale del componente* [Functional Design of the Component Group] with Raffaella Crespi and Guido Nardi, Alberto Seassaro found the opportunity to launch important relationships between the CNR research group and university research institutes which, within a few years, would lead him to establish the *Gruppo Nazionale CNR – Produzione Edilizia* [CNR National Group – Building Production].

5. Consiglio Nazionale
delle Ricerche,
Programma di Ricerca
sull'industrializzazione
dell'edilizia.
[Document →](#)



6. Documenti di lavoro
sullo stato della
Ricerca C.N.R. nel
settore Architettura e
Urbanistica.
[Document →](#)



If, in establishing the CNR National Research Group, he glimpsed the opportunity to structure the system of scientific knowledge and research in the building sector, he nevertheless did not withhold his critical view of the potential misuse of the knowledge produced by this research system, due to the CNR's dependence on industry and to the power clashes between the CNR and the university [54 64](#).

We nevertheless find in this experience, undertaken when Alberto Seassaro still held no formal role within the university, an approach to research open to exchange. All his writings from these years are *Proceedings* and *Reports* of seminars and conferences, often promoted and curated by him, involving the entire national academic community and many protagonists from the worlds of institutions, the professions, design, and entrepreneurship. In this participatory form we recognize the hallmark that would characterize the most mature phase of Alberto Seassaro's work: engaging others in debate; constituting national research groups; bringing different experiences to bear on the same topic in order to appreciate its facets and render the thematic framework more complete; fostering the emergence of diverse points of view.

The curatorship of conferences and seminars is the editorial form that, more than any other, proves effective in ensuring a plural vision. On this matter we can cite volumes such as *La produzione del territorio. Settore delle costruzioni e programmazione edilizia* [The Production of the Territory. The Construction Sector and Building Programming] and *Normative e metodologie di progettazione* [Regulations and Design Methodologies]. Both are proceedings collected from the *Seminari La produzione del territorio* [Seminars The Production of the Territory], promoted precisely within the activities of the C.N.R. National Coordination *Produzione Edilizia*, of which Al-

berto Seassaro was Director in those years. It should be specified that the National Coordination represented the informal aggregative phase which, through the definition of organizational models, research themes, and research methods, preceded and laid the groundwork for the formal phase of establishing the CNR National Research Group.

This work lasted more than two years. The speakers' names (Matilde Baffa, Bianca Bottero, Cristina Cocchioni, Massimo D'Alessandro, Paolo Deganello, Mario De Grassi, Giorgio Gaetani, Franco Lattes, Ezio Manzini, Carlo Olmo, Piercarlo Palermo, Antonio Parisi, Giacomo Scarpini, Edmondo Vitiello, Virginia Gangemi, Enrico Fattinnanzi, Sergio Bracco, Gianfranco Carrara, Valerio Di Battista, Giampiero Donin, Remo Dorigati, Giuseppe Turchini, etc.) are clear evidence of the disciplinary plurality, cultural openness, and multiplicity of Italian universities and research institutions involved.

The nature of the themes addressed (*Housing conditions and territory; Production of social services and economic planning; Connection of social services across territorial scales; Building production, economic institutions, and territorial governance; Reorganization of labor in residential construction; Comparison of productive factors in construction; Environmental resources and settlement processes; Research on the production of design; Housing needs and planning of the residential sector; Crisis of the mechanisms of territorial production; Productive structure and labor market in building rehabilitation; Training demand in the productive and reproductive processes of the territory*, etc.), which frame, perhaps for the first time through case studies, the dynamics of the construction sector by observing it from the economic standpoint and its capacity to respond to social needs, orient the extension to construction-sector economies of the inter-sectoral analyses already mature in the study of other industrial sectors, of other product categories and other markets.

The vantage adopted in these reports is innovative because it concentrates attention on the changes under way in a sector considered traditional and little inclined to innovate. The case studies bring to light the initial processes of reconfiguration of the productive structure, the organization of the project-system, and the new professional roles emerging with the introduction of new technologies. They also foreground local specificities dependent on territorial resources and the new problems of economic, social, and even environmental sustainability tied to the evolution of the construction sector as a consequence of its industrial transformation.

This analytical perspective culminated in the 1979 volume edited by Alberto Seassaro, *Storia e struttura del settore edilizio in Italia dal do-*

poguerra ad oggi [History and Structure of the Construction Sector in Italy from the Postwar Period to Today], which synthesizes the findings of research, teaching experiences, and studies promoted and funded by the C.N.R.

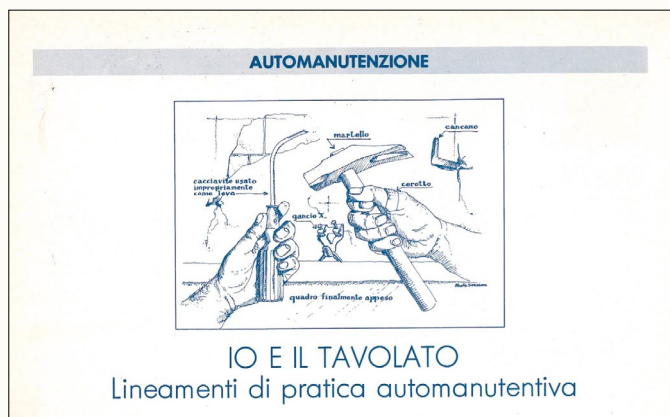
Through the contributions of various authors on the evolution of the structural features of the building production cycle; changes in the dynamics of housing demand and supply; the reorganization of the labor market and site processes; the reorganization of the construction firm and new forms of division of labor; the impact of the regulatory apparatus on the reconfiguration of the sector's features; new modes of producing the project; new technological experiments in construction; and the shift to component-based industrialization, Alberto Seassaro arrives at the definition of the characteristics of a *Terzo ciclo edilizio* [Third Building Cycle]. Characteristics that, in his view, would supplant the economic and planning logics of the two preceding cycles.

It is the starting point of a line of research that would occupy him in the years that followed, characterized by an original approach, alternative to those then in vogue, which were more inclined to theoretical abstraction and to analyzing the world of building production in the form of the decision-making process (see, in this regard, the *1° Congresso Nazionale dell'Area della Produzione Edilizia – Atti – Volume II*, CNR, 3-5 May 1984). Alberto Seassaro chose a path tied to the concreteness of the construction sector's dynamics, while grounding his inquiry on solid theoretical bases, taking as reference the studies of Joseph Schumpeter (1971) and Alfred Marshall (1959). He drew on the former to anatomize innovation processes in the construction industry, distinguishing, in Schumpeterian fashion, among types of innovation concerning new products, new production methods, new sources of supply, the exploitation of new markets, and alternative ways of organizing a firm. And, in a decidedly innovative move for studies in this specific sector, he followed Marshall's teachings to launch a meticulous, long-term research effort on the construction *indotto* [supply-chain spillovers] and on the logics of the geographic and territorial concentration of firms producing intermediate goods, with the aim of sharing resources, know-how, and labor, creating external economies to bolster competitiveness (*1° Congresso Nazionale dell'Area della Produzione Edilizia, Atti – Volume II*, 1984, pp. 389-400).

We find this thorough, meticulous analysis the following year in *Produzione edilizia e tecnologia dei materiali* [Building Production and the Technology of Materials] (Seassaro, Macchia, eds., 1985), which considers the evolution of materials, components, and semi-finished products used in the construction industry (cement, binding agents, steel products, reinforced-concrete structures, mortars, cement-based manufactured elements, bricks, plasters, infill walls, marbles and stones, assembly technologies, etc.) and relates them to all the soft processes (knowledge acquisition, design activities, reorganization processes, etc.) required for their working and implementation in the built artifact, thus reconstructing, starting from the basic product categories, the dynamics of the sector's industrial supply-chain spillovers.

In addition to edited volumes of conference and seminar contributions, Alberto Seassaro's oeuvre also includes the curatorial format of *collections* of pieces that had appeared in journals and were republished in book form. Assembling and juxtaposing essays distant in time and cultural imprint once again serves to articulate and deepen issues in technological culture, allowing their different latitudes – and their evolution – to be appreciated. An example of this way of gathering and comparing contributions already published in journals is the substantial volume *Progettazione e gestione del processo edilizio industrializzato* [Design and Management of the Industrialized Building Process] (Seassaro, ed., 1979), with a preface by Giuseppe Ciribini. The articles, collected and catalogued by thematic areas, are excerpted from issues of the journal *Prefabbricare* from 1968 to 1973. The thematic sections: *Premesse di metodo* [Methodological Premises]; *Il design per l'edilizia industrializzata* [Design for Industrialized Building]; *La normazione e coordinazione dimensionale* [Standardization and Dimensional Coordination]; *L'organizzazione del processo edilizio industrializzato* [Organization of the Industrialized Building Process]; *I fattori strutturali* [Structural Factors], contain contributions that define new disciplinary frontiers and methodological practices introduced into the corpus of architectural design culture by industrial procedures; that show interest in meta-design procedures for industrialized building; that highlight the connections between the production of the project and the production of the built artifact and the effects these have on the aes-

Figure 10.
Sketch by Alberto Seassaro
in *Recuperare. Edilizia Design
Impianti*, n. 31, 1987.



7. Alberto Seassaro, *Io e il tavolato. Lineamenti di pratica automanutentiva*, in *Recuperare. Edilizia Design Impianti*, n. 31. [Document](#) →



thetic component; that address modularity and industrialized components and their relationship to project and process management. They identify the importance of the design of the industrialized building component and of attention to detail. Along this path, two cultural touchstones stand out: Giuseppe Ciribini, with the themes of complexity, systems, and the search for structural links among factors, as found in *Introduzione alla tecnologia del design. Metodi e strumenti logici per la progettazione dell'ambiente costruito* (Ciribini, 1978) and *Tecnologia e progetto. Argomenti di cultura tecnologica della progettazione* (Ciribini, 1984); and Giacomo Scarpini, with his focus on process actors and on the impact of political logics in the organizational evolution of production.

As we approach the 1990s, his output also includes numerous journal publications (*Recuperare*, *Prefabbricare*, *Modo*, etc.) addressing the industrialization of components and building systems, sector policies, and housing issues. The range runs from pieces in technological culture, where the extensive experience gained during the Montecatini Edison years designing prefabricated elements clearly surfaces, to delightful texts (see, for example, *Io e il tavolato. Lineamenti di pratica automanutentiva* [Me and the Stud Wall: Outlines of Self-Maintenance Practice], 1987 [72](#)) offering user guidance on how to handle the small problems of *edilizia della quotidianità* [everyday building/maintenance], providing advice, in the form of a *vademecum semiserio* [semi-serious vade mecum], to make users, where possible, independent of the building trades' supply chain (electricians, masons, plumbers, window-and-door fitters, etc.). It was an intuition, still embryonic, of the need to educate users, to transmit and share experience, which today has found wide diffusion online.

These themes kept him engaged until the mid-1980s. From the late 1980s through the 1990s his research turned to environmental design,

in collaboration with ENEA, ANIE, the Istituto Galileo Ferraris in Turin, ENEL, AIDI (Associazione Italiana di Illuminazione), and others, developing, in particular, the subject of natural and artificial lighting. The theme of light retraces, deepens, and reinterprets the early interests of his career: experimental aesthetics, the world of forms, and the role of light in shaping forms and surfaces.

The revival of these early thematic interests is tied to his new academic placement in the newly founded *Facoltà del Design* [Faculty of Design], where, starting in 1993, he would conduct his teaching and research activities.

The book reorganizes and systematizes the findings of the permanent seminar on construction materials technology, launched from the 1983/84 academic year within the Technological Track.

With the new reordering of studies in the Faculties of Architecture, introduced by law (DPR 920 of 31.10.81), a series of significant innovations were established [...]. With DPR 920, then, a formally defined technological disciplinary area was constituted, remarkably broad in scope, encompassing a wide arc of teachings that range from design disciplines such as industrial design, environmental design, and the technological culture of design to programmatic-normative subjects such as Methods and techniques of building standardization, production-oriented subjects, and those more specifically technological. From our standpoint as scholars of building production, who have long worked to establish this line of inquiry, [...], the *Tecnologia dei materiali da costruzione* [Technology of Construction Materials] reappears, significantly, a course which, although belonging to the traditional academic corpus of architectural studies, had in recent years been deactivated everywhere and removed from curricula. The reinstatement of this discipline, in this renewed context, has taken on for us a particularly important meaning for interpreting trends present in contemporary architecture. [...].

Construction materials represent, for Architectural Technology in general – and particularly for disciplines that approach this study from the productive viewpoint – the central element in the *construction of the artificial environment*, the basic principle of

the *transformation of the physical environment*, the constitutive production factor of the building process itself: the matter to which flows of labor, information, and energy are applied in the act of producing architecture.

Technological innovations, operating inexorably at the levels of materials and components production, of changes in technological know-how, in construction procedures, in the organization of site labor, and in corporate organization, have transformed the building product in substance, profoundly altering the construction tradition. Its outward appearance remains what it has always been, but the materials and components have changed in depth. All the technological innovations brought to materials in this sector lack any morphological and symbolic elaboration; they have not become language. The image of the house conceals the technological innovations it has absorbed in its production process; in construction, innovation is a *hidden innovation*. To use a familiar metaphor: if the industrial process has made the oil lamp into the electric lamp and the carriage into the automobile, the house has remained a house, one essentially alien to any innovative quality. Alberto Seassaro's interest is to treat the general issue of materials in the construction sector by seeking to arrive at a definition of the concept of material that links it to the evolution of the factors of production [...]. Construction, the sector that materially produces architecture, risks appearing as a separate, placid island, resting on the certainties of an idealized and ideologized tradition which, repudiating the innovative vocation historically expressed by the architectural avant-gardes, lingers in elaborating its own specific, particular postmodern discourse that cannot manage to be post-industrial, just as the modern movement had failed to be industrial. (*Produzione edilizia e tecnologia dei materiali*, edited by Alberto Seassaro and Cesira Macchia, 1985, Preface, pp. 1-4)

8.4 Institutional Projects

The 1970s and '80s were, for Alberto Seassaro, a veritable training ground of projects for the university institution.

normativa e metodologie di progettazione

Atti del seminario promosso dal
GRUPPO NAZIONALE C.N.R. "PRODUZIONE EDILIZIA"
tenutosi presso la sede dell'INARCH, Roma, giugno 1979

a cura di Alberto Seassaro

relazione generale di Enrico Fattinanzi
interventi di: Sergio Bracco, Gianfranco Carrara, Margherita De Simone, Valerio Di Battista, Gianpiero Donin, Remo Dorigati, Pietro N. Maggi, Elena Mortola, Antonella Ottai, Giovanni Salvestrini, Alberto Seassaro, Giuseppe Turchini.



la produzione del territorio settore delle costruzioni e programmazione edilizia

Atti del seminario promosso dal
GRUPPO NAZIONALE C.N.R. "PRODUZIONE EDILIZIA"
tenutosi presso la sede dell'INARCH, Roma, giugno 1979

a cura di Alberto Seassaro

relazione e interventi di: Matilde Baiffa Rivolta, Bianca Bottero, Cristina Cocchioni, Massimo D'Alessandro, Paolo Deganello, Mario De Grassi, Giorgio Gaetani, Franco Lattes, Tamara Levi, Ezio Manzini, Carlo Olmo, Piercarlo Palermo, Antonio Paris, Giulio Rizzo, Giacomo Scarpini, Alberto Seassaro.



Ezio ARLATI
Aurelio CORTESI
Paolo DEGANELLO
Valerio DI BATTISTA
Leonardo FIORI
Stefano GARAVENTA
Roberto QUERCI
Riccardo SARFATTI
Giacomo SCARPINI
Fabrizio SCHIAFFONATI
Alberto SEASSARO
Claudia SORLINI
Oliviero TRONCONI
Francesco VANNUCCINI
Edmondo VITIELLO

a cura di Alberto SEASSARO

STORIA E STRUTTURA
DEL SETTORE EDILIZIO
IN ITALIA DAL DOPOGUERRA A OGGI



progettazione e gestione del processo edilizio industrializzato

a cura di
Alberto Seassaro
prefazione di
Giuseppe Ciribini

Testi di: L. Bandini Bui, A. Bolognani, A. Castelli, G. Ciribini, G. De Angelis, F. De Miranda, G. Dorfin, M. Foti, E. Freni, F. Giannico, G. Giusti, L. Gotti, G. Guarnieri, D. Leonini, F. Levi, P. N. Maggi, L. Martelli, A. Marzini, A. Migliacci, J. Morfini, G. Nacci, G. Oberti, C.P. Odascachi, M. Pignaro, H.P. Parenteau, L. Perinace, R. Rossi, L. Serpachini, F. Santagostino, A. Seassaro, L. Seassaro, M. Simonazzi, N. Sinigoi, G. Turchini, G. Urbani, E. Zambelli.





Figure 11.
Excerpts from Alberto Seassaro's published output (late 1970s–early 1980s).

This terrain was, in fact, the further site of his *maturation*, where research interests and political vocation were fused. Freshly graduated, in the mid-1960s, he and Ugo La Pietra advanced a proposal to establish a *Centro di Arti Visive* [Center for Visual Arts] within the Faculty of Architecture. The project never came to fruition, but it already signaled his bent for designing organizational transformations aimed at nurturing specific cultural domains. In the 1970s, more mature yet still without a formal university role, he developed a series of proposals to redefine the *disciplinary areas*, riding the process that, in the years to come, would accompany the birth of degree tracks and the transformation of Institutes into Departments.

In the 1970s, the conditions were in fact laid for a number of key transitions which, over the span of little more than a decade, would lead, in the early 1980s, to the establishment of degree tracks and, subsequently, in the early 1990s, to the articulation of the single Degree programme in *Architecture* into several degree programmes and then into several faculties. On the research side, by contrast, this period saw the emergence of institutes specifically devoted to the education of architects, an embryonic form of what would later become departments as we know them in their current configuration.

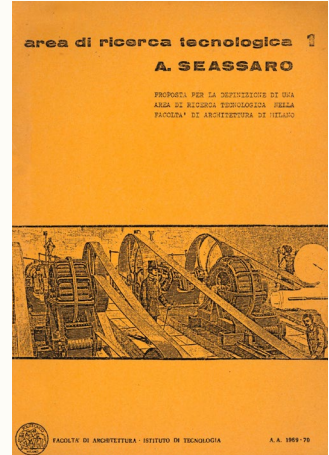
Most of these transformations arose under the pressure exerted by student movements.

Both fronts, teaching and research, saw a not-yet-thirty-year-old Alberto Seassaro engaged in developing contents and tools intended to steer the ongoing evolution, convinced that the students' demands had met, on the institutional side, with little more than merely formal responses.

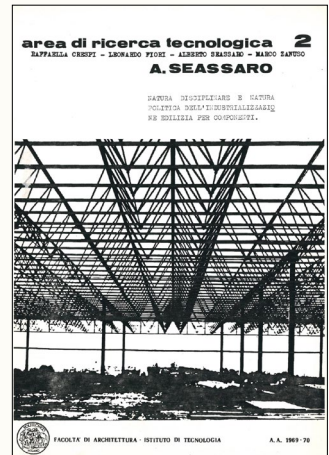
A particularly significant step was the establishment of a *Laboratorio di idee* [ideas laboratory] *per il rinnovamento della cultura tecnica in architettura* [for the renewal of technical culture in architecture], designated as the *Area di Ricerca Tecnologica della Facoltà di Architettura del Politecnico di Milano* [Technological Research Area of the Faculty of Architecture at Politecnico di Milano].



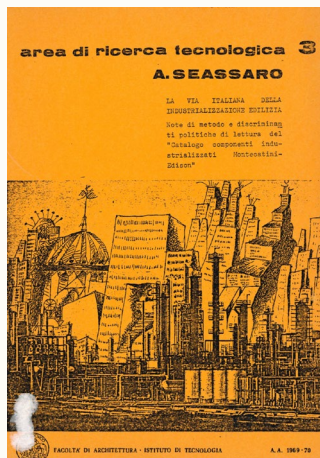
8. Alberto Seassaro, *Area di Ricerca Tecnologica 1, Proposta per la definizione di una area di Ricerca Tecnologica nella Facoltà di Architettura di Milano, A.A. 1969-70.*
[Document →](#)



9. Alberto Seassaro, Raffaella Crespi, Leonardo Fiori, Marco Zanuso, *Area di Ricerca Tecnologica 2, Natura disciplinare e natura politica dell'industrializzazione edilizia per componenti.*
[Document →](#)



10. Alberto Seassaro,
*Area di Ricerca
 Tecnologica 3, La
 via italiana della
 industrializzazione
 edilizia*, A.A. 1969-70.
[Document →](#)



11. Progetto di iter
 didattico per l'Indirizzo
 Tecnologico.
[Document →](#)



The proposal document, co-signed by Marco Zanuso, Raffaella Crespi and Leonardo Fiori (1970), sets out a sharp critique of the reforms introduced by the Faculty in response to student demands, judging them to be empty of content and limited in their impact on education, particularly with regard to the role of research in teaching; the issue of disciplinary obsolescence; the problem of technical qualification on a mass scale, etc. The document concludes by calling for «the commitment to the refounding of the discipline and the design of mass education for an alternative clientele» (p. 28).

Although the document is *dated*, both in certain issues that are closely tied to its historical context and in a language that is fully immersed in the *spirit of its time*, it nevertheless raises many general questions that the university system has repeatedly had to confront whenever social and technological changes have driven projects to reform its educational structures. The ideas laboratory equipped itself with a *Bulletin*, directed for years by Alberto Seassaro, which would mark the various stages in the process of disciplinary redefinition, acting as a megaphone for political and cultural initiatives [89](#) [99](#) [109](#).

These initiatives, like those undertaken at national level by CNR, constitute significant building blocks in the development of a cultural trajectory aimed at promoting the disciplinary autonomy of Architectural Technology.

In the early 1980s, the maturity attained in the organisation and management of complex institutional programmes became clearly apparent in the design and subsequent coordination (from 1981 to 1989) of the degree track in *Architectural Technology* – one of the tracks within the *Corso* degree programme in *Architecture* – which marked the starting point for important experiments and the opening up of new lines of work that would prove to be forerunners of what was to come.

They would in fact anticipate his appointment as Chair of the *Corso di laurea in Disegno industriale* [degree programme in *Industrial Design*] – a role taken on informally in 1993 and formally in 1995 – then as Dean of the *Facoltà del Design* [Faculty of *Design*] in 2000, and finally as the architect of a major university system: the Italian Design

System. The painstaking work underpinning the establishment of this course of study is summarised in this scriptographic table, drafted by him, which sets out the subjects that make up the track [119](#).

While the coordination of the degree track in *Architectural Technology* can be regarded, at the same time, as the culmination of the long transformative process of the Faculty of Architecture and as a springboard for its subsequent innovations, in which Alberto Seassaro would play a prominent role, the theoretical and political outcomes of the cultural and research activities on the structural features of the building system and on the market for technical-intellectual labour in the construction sector are reflected in the founding project of the *Dipartimento di Programmazione e Produzione edilizia* [Department of Planning and Building Production] (1979/80).

In this way, a cycle that had served as an incubator for institutional experience and technological culture came to a close, and a new one opened, whose lineages are not hard to discern: this is the cycle of university *Design*, the testing ground and challenge of an Alberto Seassaro in the full maturity of his academic career.

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9. Two or Three Things I Know about Him

Luciano Crespi

Formerly professor at Politecnico di Milano

Everyone will tell you that I am not a musician. That is true. From the very start of my career I immediately classed myself among the *phonométrographes*. My works are pure *phonometrics*. Take *Fils des Étoiles*, the *Morceaux en forme de poire*, *En habit de cheval*, the *Sarabandes*: one perceives that no musical idea presided over the creation of these works. It is scientific thought that prevails. (Satie, 2010)

Erik Satie's *Mémoires d'un amnésique* begin this way (Satie, 2010). I think Alberto Seassaro would have liked to sign on to such an assertion, by an innovative, irreverent Dadaist who was anything but naive, merely substituting designer for *musicien* and lighting technology for *phonométrie*. He would tell it while sporting, with a slightly *blasé* air, one of his inimitable narrow crocheted ties and a jacket whose pockets were so crammed with pencils and markers as to seem a miracle of the laws of statics. I well remember one of the young up-and-coming professors who, in the 1980s, frequented the legendary rooms of Via Bonardi, home of the PPPE department – from which begins the long

story destined to culminate in the birth of the Faculty of Design – slyly remarking that dressed like that he would never be made full professor.

And I also recall never having heard Alberto claim to be a designer: for this very reason it could only be he who founded the first Faculty of Design in Italy. Without renouncing, like Satie, leading us astray, letting us believe he was an anarchist, adopting a breezy tone even on the most important occasions while at the same time maintaining a subtle sense of institutions, coupled with the ability never to lose sight of every small detail of the world around him so as to inscribe it within the design he had in mind.

To understand better, one needs to take a step back. On September 7, 2020, *Domusweb* published a short piece of mine entitled *In ricordo di Alberto Seassaro, padre della Facoltà del design del Politecnico di Milano* [In memory of Alberto Seassaro, father of the Faculty of Design at Politecnico di Milano] ¹, in which I maintain that the January 1970 document entitled *Proposta per la definizione di una Area di ricerca tecnologica nella Facoltà di Architettura di Milano* [Proposal for the definition of a technological research area in the Faculty of Architecture of Milan] (Crespi, Fiori, Zanuso, Seassaro, 1970) – also signed by Raffaella Crespi, Leonardo Fiori, and Marco Zanuso, but certainly written by Alberto Seassaro ¹ – contains, in embryonic form, many of the ideas destined to guide the path toward the birth of the Faculty of Design. I am still convinced of this. By

that date, Alberto Seassaro had graduated in Architecture in 1964 and had carried out investigations on prefabrication and building unification for both national research bodies such as the CNR and companies of great prestige such as Montecatini Edison, for which he conducted studies and design exper-



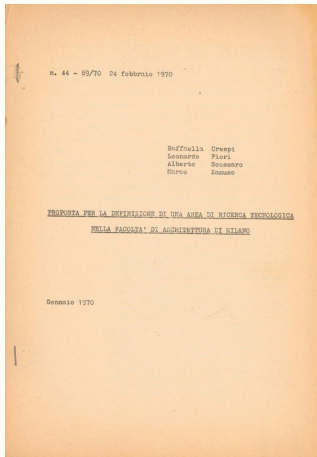
1. Luciano Crespi,
In ricordo di Alberto
Seassaro, padre della
Facoltà del Design del
Politecnico di Milano.
[Document →](#)



Note 1.

The document, in fact, is preceded by other documents of similar content signed solely by Alberto Seassaro (cf. Seassaro, 1969 and 1970).

2. Proposta per la
definizione di una area di
Ricerca tecnologica nella
Facoltà di Architettura di
Milano.
Document→



Note 2.

Also from 1967 is Jean-Luc Godard's film, *Two or Three Things I Know About Her*. She is Paris; the movie's principal aim is to understand not how society can be changed, but how one can live with it.

iments on building components. Fundamental to his training was his collaboration with Giuseppe Ciribini, a leading figure in the technological area, for whom he served as assistant in Turin before becoming a professor in Milan at the end of the 1960s. In those same years he drafted several documents aimed at discussion of the establishment of a disciplinary area of Technology within the Faculties of Architecture, among which this very one cited (*ibidem*) 23.

The document opens by denouncing the stalemate in which *experimentation* finds itself, the process of disciplinary refoundation set in motion within the Faculty starting in 1967 24 and centered on a didactic model that envisages replacing monodisciplinary courses with Research Groups. A stalemate due «not only to the insufficient radicality of application» of the model and «to the mystification with which the faculty chose to interpret it, but also and above all to the superficiality with which it was expressed and proposed» (*ibidem*).

In the face of the advanced degradation of disciplinary standards in the Italian university, and in particular in the Faculties of architecture, the document calls for a choice between two models of training: between a school as a center for preparing the new «political aristocracy, future class of bureaucrats» and «a mass school, functional to society as a whole, in the perspective of class struggle» (*ibidem*). I consider the latter point crucial.

In 1970, as a result of the liberalization of access to the university following the student protests, the student population at Politecnico di Milano had risen to about 6,500 students. The document highlights how this datum, together with the ongoing general process of the *proletarianization of intellectuals*, was destined to produce, in particular, a loss of decision-making power for the figure of the architect, owing also to the presence, within the process of territorial production, of other actors more functional to the system and destined to relegate that figure ever more to marginal roles. The response offered by experimentation to the problem is deemed polarized around two mirror-image attitudes, both inadequate: the one that leads to rejecting the discipline, considered the patrimony of the ruling class, and the one bent on its *academization*.

The solutions proposed in the document are arranged on two planes: on the political plane, with the goal of creating a structural – not *superstructural* – relationship between technicians and the working class in the struggle to lay bare the intertwining among science, technology, and their capitalist use; on the ethical plane – yet also functional to improving the teaching offer – through opposition to professionalism (understood both as the use, by the instructor, of the university to promote their own professional activity, and as the transformation of teaching into a vehicle for transmitting the technical and instrumental patrimony proper to professional practice) and through disciplinary refoundation via *the negation of* «disciplinary dequalification and the construction of a mass pedagogy for an alternative clientage» (ibidem). The concluding paragraph of the document, entitled *Ruolo politico della tecnologia* [Political Role of Technology], begins from an examination of the relation between theory and architectural praxis in the postwar period; it denounces the inability of the most authoritative components of design culture to grasp the «crisis of architecture as a crisis of confidence in the clientage that generates this discipline» (ibidem) and proposes, also within Schools of Architecture, a critical examination of the role of technology and of the notions of *technological rationality* and *rationalizing waste*, of Habermasian derivation ³². The aim is a general revision of technological instruction, capable of conferring on it the character of a *globalizing discipline* and of filling the void left by architectural culture through its choice, on the one hand, to operate predominantly at the scale of the city, and, on the other, to aspire to a «pure formal research devoid of technological concerns» (ibidem). In this scenario, architectural technology is defined as «the study of problems that pertain to all the technical processes capable of making physically perceptible the image of space understood as the place of human activities at the various scales» (ibidem). In this part of the document one finds concepts set out on several other occasions by Marco Zanuso (Grignolo, 2013; Crespi, Tedeschi, Viati, 2020; Zanuso, 1987) and present in the research previously carried out by Alberto Seassaro on industrialized components (Seassaro, 1969; AA.VV., 1971). The document falls within the historical period 1969/1971, in which Alberto Seassaro was part, with Crespi, Fiori,

Note 3.

Especially in the more political parts of all the documents, there are frequent references to economists of the the Manifesto milieu rather than to the workerist culture heir to *Quaderni rossi* [Red Notebooks] of Raniero Panzieri, represented by Mario Tronti and Sergio Bologna, who, as I seem to recall, taught for a time in the Faculty of Architecture.

and Zanuso, of the technological research group within the Institute of Architectural Composition in Milan and was an appointed professor in Milan, after being Giuseppe Ciribini's assistant in Turin. I did not have much occasion to work with him, owing to my stronger political affinities with the *Città fabbrica* [City-factory] research group of Magnaghi, Perelli, Sarfatti, and Stevan, in whose activities I took part, and subsequently with the group of Bianca Bottero and Giorgio Gaetani. When in 1974 I graduated, my supervisor was Cesare Stevan, not officially, since he was among the professors whose appointment had been revoked by the Technical Committee. I do not recall who signed the degree document at the last moment in his stead; such was the climate.

The 1970s were years of normalization. In the a.y. 1977/1978 the Faculty adopted as the unifying theme of instruction the ambit *Abitazioni, classi sociali e territorio* [Housing, Social Classes, and Territory], regarded as of great social relevance and capable of addressing the educational demand of new social actors destined to intervene in the country's realities. It was structured on the basis of thematic strands, each articulated into Didactic Units. Seassaro, confirmed appointed professor of *Architectural Technology*, is present in Thematic Strand 2, *Processi produttivi per l'edilizia* [Production Processes for Building], with the Didactic Unit *Cronaca tecnologica degli anni '60* [Technological Chronicle of the 1960s], and also in Thematic Strand 3, whose instructors, refusing to label themselves with titles in which they did not recognize themselves (in the parcelling out of the strands it was to have been the strand of the *bisognisti*, proponents of a needs-based approach), prefer to call themselves *Il privato è politico* [the personal is political]. His Didactic Unit *La casa alternativa* [The Alternative House] provides for a critique of the ideology of inhabiting and the calling into question of all the commonplaces with which architecture had contented itself, so as to obtain a renewed practice of designing.

The 1980s represent the *incubation* period of the idea of the Faculty of Design. Seassaro, together with Fabrizio Schiaffonati, was the driving force behind all the cultural and institutional initiatives that would lead to the establishment of the *Istituto di Tecnologia dell'architettura* [Institute of Architectural Technology] at Politecnico di Milano, informally taking on directing duties until the 1979 election of Fabrizio Schiaffonati, who in the meantime had become Full Professor;

from 1979 to 1981 he was director of the CNR National Group for Building Production, Rome; in 1980 he promoted the establishment of the *Gruppo Nazionale Produzione Edilizia del CNR* [CNR National Group for Building Production], which he chaired until 1984, serving on the Scientific Council until 1994. From 1981 to 1989 he was President of the *Consiglio di Indirizzo Tecnologico del CdL in Architettura* [Technological Track Council of the Degree Course in Architecture] at Politecnico di Milano. It was within this *primordial broth* that the conditions took shape to institute first the Degree Course and then the Faculty of Design. When I was brought into the research by Fabrizio Schiaffonati, at the beginning of the 1980s, the Technological Area was acquiring its own identity, ratified by two conferences, in 1984 and 1987. In 1984 Marco Zanuso became Full Professor of *Industrial Design*, after nearly ten years teaching *Progettazione artistica per l'industria* [Artistic Design for Industry]. Cesare Stevan states:

1984 was the final step: thus the idea took hold of having a Degree Track in order to promote a Degree Course in Industrial Design. Another ten years passed before realization, from '84 to '93, and almost as many again to reach the outcome I had hoped for, a Faculty of Design. I hoped for this not only in the abstract, for cultural reasons, because in this opening toward design I saw a new, open culture that would address the new design realities, but I cared also because it was, since the founding of the Politecnico, the only true innovation of the Ateneo: to go from two to three Faculties [3.2](#). (Stevan, 2023)



**3. Cesare Stevan,
Professore Emerito del
Politecnico di Milano.
[Document →](#)**

These are also the years in which the *Cultura tecnologica del progetto* [Technological Culture of Design], cultivated by figures such as Giuseppe Ciribini (Ciribini, 1995) and Enzo Frateili (Frateili, 1991), whose thinking had great influence on design pedagogy, played a decisive role of linkage among technology, architectural design, and industrial design.

When Alberto Seassaro set in motion the process of founding the Faculty of Design, the student body had grown to the thousands, the dequalification of the figure of the *technical architect* had entered an advanced phase, and the *proletarianization of intellectuals*, analyzed

in the 1970 document as a possible condition for the spread of an anti-capitalist consciousness, was becoming tainted by the new climate of cultural restoration of the 1990s. These were the years in which, with the entry into force of the *new ordinance*, in response to Directive 85/384 defining the competencies of the European architect, the *Laboratori di costruzione dell'architettura* [Laboratories of Architectural Construction] were instituted within the Faculties of Architecture, composed of multiple integrated modules with lead instructors drawn from the area of *Tecnologia dell'architettura* [Architectural Technology] belonging to SSD ICAR/12.

In September 1995 the first national meeting, coordinated by Nicola Sinopoli, on the results of the laboratories (Tatano, 1996) was held in Venice, with the task of comparing the experiences conducted in the various sites. Representing Milan were the instructors affiliated with the DiTec Department, heir to the old PPPE Department; they were responsible for *Progettazione di sistemi costruttivi* [Design of Construction Systems], the course characterizing the laboratory, integrated by a module in *Architectural Design* and one in *Structural Design*. I am of the view (based only on circumstantial elements) that Alberto Seassaro judged it inopportune to *Industrial Design* into the Construction Laboratories, so as to avert the danger of ending up performing a *service role* to *Architectural Technology*, at the very moment when he already had in hand the cards to set in motion the process of

Note 4.
ICAR 12 and ICAR 13 remain
associated within competition
sector SC 08/1.

recognizing Design as a scientific-disciplinary sector autonomous from ICAR 12 4v.

What happened at the end of the century is well known. If we reconsider the contents of the 1970 documents, it is easy to think that the project of the *Design System*, composed of Faculty, Consortium, and Department, represents an educational offering intended to address problems, from the dequalification of the figure of the architect to the need for a radical change in the competences required of the designer, already identified at the time, and to institutionalize their embryonic proposals. It is an idea of design that goes well beyond what is commonly understood as industrial product design, and in which one finds the project experimentations carried out with Ugo La Pietra in the 1960s, the studies on *Morfemi*, the research on the relationship between art and science, installation projects, and a deep familiarity

with the art world, all of which confer on it the character of a discipline with a high content of innovation and transcultural resonances. A mix of components that enter into the project of a School of Design, a place of education altogether original with respect to those existing worldwide in the field of design, and in which technique is regarded as the support for a critical mode of thought committed to changing the way we live, work, and inhabiting.

Figure 1.
Book presentation by Ugo La Pietra (2009). From left in the photo: Beppe Finessi, Gillo Dorfles, Ugo La Pietra, Arturo Dell'Acqua Bellavitis, Luciano Crespi, Alberto Seassaro.



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10. Catalyzing Energies and Ideas. Alberto Seassaro's Role at the Inception of the Degree Course in *Industrial Design* at Politecnico di Milano

Fabrizio Schiaffonati

Emeritus Politecnico di Milano

There are moments that mark important institutional evolutions. Long-latent problems find an outlet thanks to a set of convergences and opportunities capable of arriving at a synthesis. Thus studies, theories, social and subjective demands precipitate into a solution, as in a chemical reaction that gives rise to a new product. These sudden changes are almost always linked to figures able to catalyze energies and ideas: the function of the leader, like that of the entrepreneur with the capacity to innovate, in Schumpeter's sense. The ability to bring to bear upon the order of things new organizational and technological processes.

As I set about writing this contribution, Schumpeter came back to mind not by chance. He reminded me of a conference held in Rome in the early 1980s, at the CNR, promoted by the *Gruppo Produzione Edilizia* [Building Production Group], which brought together professors of *Tecnologia dell'Architettura* [Technology of Architecture] and some of *Composizione Architettonica* [Architectural composition] from different faculties. What had united us, for a decade already, was a different approach, set against a revived academicism, to analyze the complex-

ity of the design process in its phases, with the various actors, the regulatory context, the productive organization, and technical innovations, in the economic perspective of building cycles and of the issues of the construction site.

The CNR had recognized this grouping of ours, which annually submitted funding requests for coordinated research projects. Funding that enabled us to promote seminars, meetings, and conferences such as the one in Rome.

During the conference, reports were given on the progress of the various research projects, which also presented different interfaces with construction firms, institutions, and sector bodies. Of those two days of proceedings, the contributions of the various colleagues fade with the passing years, while Alberto Seassaro's intervention still stands out in my memory.

Alberto Seassaro addressed the theme of technological innovation, not so much with reference to the processes then under way, but in general and projective terms, invoking Schumpeter's thought, to most, I think, unknown. A genuine paper, articulated and in-depth, which left us astonished, because we had had no inkling of these studies of his, anything but rote, nor had he made any mention of them to us Milanese when we met to coordinate teaching and research activity.

In that paper of his, which I hope has not been lost, Alberto Seassaro intuited that shortly thereafter technological innovation would determine a sudden leap beyond the already advanced methods of building production and design, evolving toward an entirely new scenario. This entailed overcoming codified logics and methodologies, opening up to the pragmatic and experimental culture of design. Stated today, it may sound obvious; we technologists were indeed familiar with the Anglo-Saxon *component approach*, yet we were entrenched in the economism and workerism of our late 1960s ideological references. Our strength, but also our limit. Alberto Seassaro said that we needed to go beyond, that the added value incorporated in the new products arriving on site was radically changing the conception and the modes of the design and construction of architecture.

By those mental associations that trace back to our lived experience, as I write I make another leap back in time that saw Alberto Seassaro and me as protagonists, on the occasion of the *Venice Ar-*

chitecture Biennale of 1980, directed by Paolo Portoghesi. The program included the two exhibitions *La presenza del passato, Venezia e lo spazio scenico* [The Presence of the Past, Venice and the Scenic Space] and the work of our Gruppo Produzione Edilizia entitled *Lavorare in architettura* [Working in Architecture], of which Portoghesi entrusted me with the direction. A sort of laboratory, a countertrend to the spectacular *Via Novissima* [The Newest Street] of brash, short-lived Postmodernism, which allowed us to document our ideas in various seminars, meetings, debates.

On that occasion I had the idea, mindful of my youthful cinephile passion, to propose to RAI a film with the same title, namely *Lavorare in architettura* [Working in Architecture]. I drafted a meticulous script, *ironclad*, as the jargon had it, with the locations, the figures to interview, the texts of the voice-overs. It was accepted, and a full-scale crew was made available for the shooting. A feature-length film of more than an hour, it aired in prime time on Rai 3, watched by many because on the other networks they were discussing election results.

I had envisaged a figure that would function as a binding element among the scenes, the interviews, and the contexts that documented the different approaches to the design and construction of architecture, against the backdrop of the social dynamics that would give rise to the reformist process of the 1980s, with urban planning and public building at the center of politics. I had thought of an actor, but I immediately discarded the idea because Alberto Seassaro was the right person, he did not need to get into character and his lanky figure of a modern cowboy suited it well. I handed him the script with few words. He accepted immediately. Punctually he was on set, for the off-the-cuff interviews and present in the various moments in which the narration unfolded. Then, with Paolo Luciani, we proceeded to the editing and to the sound commentary.

I have recounted these antecedents because, among the many I could recall, they seem to me emblematic of a particularly strong-willed personality that marked the process of educational renewal set in motion in the 1980s and that would lead to redefining the degree courses of the Faculty of Architecture in Milan, with repercussions in other faculties as well. The reference is in particular to the Degree Course in *Industrial Design* and then to the new Faculty.

The establishment of the Degree Course in *Industrial Design* represented, at Politecnico di Milano, at the end of the last century, a renewal equal in importance to the establishment in 1932 of the Faculty of Architecture. An educational and research initiative capable of engaging the Faculties of Architecture and Engineering in a shared project, overcoming long-standing diffidences.

The principal author was, without doubt, Alberto Seassaro.

With a common education in the area of *Architectural Composition*, and newly graduated, Alberto Seassaro and I shared a disposition to delve into *Architectural Technology*, setting to work in the following decade to establish an Institute, of which in 1979 I assumed the directorship.

Pupils of Rogers, Belgiojoso, and Albini, we attained our chairs in Milan following our challenges to an *ancien régime* of teaching reluctant to take account of the fresh wind of the first center-left, with urban planning at the center of the political debate. Architecture, too, was swept up in it, and we, with youthful boldness, radicalized the opposition to a profession uncritical toward real-estate speculation.

A protest that then flowed into the tensions of the 1970s, with the suspension of Portoghesi and of our *Maestri*, followed by ours, of about 15 appointed lecturers.

After the reinstatement of all the suspended faculty, we technologists had moved away from the extreme positions of rejecting the project as a compromising act and had placed ourselves in a critical stance toward a resurfacing academicism, supporting an approach to design that started from the structural aspects of the building process and from an autonomous role with respect to the ancillary function to *Architectural Composition* previously performed by the propaedeutic teachings of *Constructive Elements*. We underscored the term *edilizia* [construction] to mark the distance from an idealist position, expressed by Benedetto Croce in *Aesthetica in nuce*, of a hierarchy between architecture and building. A path that would lead, precisely, to the establishment first of the Institute of Technology and immediately afterward, in 1980, of the Department of Programming, Production, and Building Design (PPPE).

An initiative capable of catalyzing multiple interdisciplinary interests. In this direction Alberto Seassaro distinguished himself by an uncommon breadth of vision with the curatorship, in 1979, of *Storia e*

struttura del settore edilizio. In Italia dal dopoguerra ad oggi [History and Structure of the Building Sector. In Italy from the Postwar to Today], with contributions from the faculty who in 1980 would converge into the PPPE Department – the first technology-area department in Italy. Alberto Seassaro and I drafted the programmatic document, shared by Marco Zanuso and then presented by him, with authority, to the scrutiny of the University Commission for subsequent ministerial approval.

I was then elected Director of the Department for six years, during which we strengthened our ranks with the appointment of Tomás Maldonado from DAMS in Bologna and Achille Castiglioni from Turin. The success of the initiative, which brought together some sixty faculty and assistants, led Eduardo Vittoria, a member of the *Consiglio Nazionale Universitario* [National University Council, CUN] and a friend of Zanuso as well through their shared Olivetti experience, to urge me to promote a Specialization Course in *Industrial Design*.

The professional and productive *milieu* of Milan was fertile for such an initiative, yet not easy to secure ministerial approval for unless adequately structured. A post-graduate Specialization Course, therefore, reserved for a small number of students who could gain access only after an entrance examination. An option, then, elitist and narrow, yet which, in Vittoria's view, would have made it possible to open a breach within the faculties of Architecture against the stubborn resistance to broader disciplinary innovations.

Vittoria's vision, mindful of his American experience, brought to light the limits of the courses in *Furnishing* and *Interior Architecture*, increasingly distant from the culture of designing objects for everyday use. Thus in Milan, with Carlo De Carli having shifted toward positions closer to architectural design with the theory of *Spazio primario* [Primary Space], and the marginal role of Alberto Rosselli – who later died prematurely – who, by contrast, had a clear sense of the Anglo-American conception of design. Relations with the capillary manufacturing base of furniture production in Brianza within the educational context had also withered, and the *Triennale*, born from that productive reality, had by then set off on other paths.

The design of furniture elements had now become the province of professional practice, in a lucrative market rapidly expanding to meet

new needs and changing habits and lifestyles, with no educational provision capable of training future designers.

Sharing Vittoria's stance; I therefore set about initiating the not uncomplicated procedure for a Specialization Course, and, in the Council of Full Professors of the Department, I proposed a commission coordinated by Zanuso with Maldonado and Castiglioni. After a reasonable time, Zanuso reported to me the difficulties encountered owing to colleagues' limited willingness to structure the proposal. Therefore, the initiative did not go forward.

But the issue remained topical. It was being discussed and, toward the end of the 1980s, the idea emerged of resuming the initiative in order to provide an outlet for a demand for education that, in the Milanese context, had found a response in various private schools, some quite successful, instead considering – in a favorable phase of revision of the educational regulations – the opportunity to promote a Degree Course in *Industrial Design*. A hypothesis that was by no means a given and anything but easy. We often discussed it with Alberto Seassaro, together with Valerio Di Battista and Antonio Scoccimarro.

The matrix could only lie in the cultural orientation of the PPPE Department, with a pragmatic and interdisciplinary bent, open to the Anglo-Saxon culture of design.

At the beginning of the 1990s, we then decided that it was necessary to commit ourselves directly. At a dinner among the four of us, with Alberto as cook in his attic flat overlooking the rooftops of Corso Garibaldi, we discussed late into the night who among us should take on the task of dedicating themselves to that difficult project; we agreed it should be Seassaro, also because of his familiarity with designers and artists, and his important early projects in partnership with Ugo La Pietra.

Alberto Seassaro did not immediately declare himself available, not hiding from the difficulties and the considerable commitment that all this would entail. A couple of months went by, during which, whenever we saw him, we pressed him. Reflective, he was ripening his decision. Shortly thereafter, he accepted.

A familiar attitude. His contribution to the development of departmental initiatives was marked by periods in which his presence was latent, followed by an engaging activism in teaching and research. At those times he would galvanize others, with organizational systema-

ticity and an uncommon knowledge of institutional mechanisms – another facet of his creative personality.

This double register was certainly at the basis of an initiative that was nothing short of incredible, in a context reluctant to innovation. Probably only Seassaro could have succeeded in involving so many faculty from other disciplinary areas at Politecnico di Milano, cultural figures, and professionals outside the academic world.

Therefore, in 1993 the Degree Course in *Industrial Design* was launched, followed by the Department and the Faculty. A path that would then be taken up by other Italian universities.

As I set about bringing this note to a close, where objective facts intertwine with personal memories, I ask myself whether this is the best way to contribute to a text whose aim is to delineate the figure of a faculty member who played a significant role, as often happens in scientific communities.

Over time I have increasingly attached value to testimonies and to episodes apparently marginal, in order to cast proper light on the relation between known facts and the motivations that prompted them.

All the more so for Alberto Seassaro, who wrote little, unlike the often bulimic academic output. He did not have the time for it, an anomaly in that world so often devoted to piling up titles in an ivory tower. It was clear to him that every hypothesis and theory that nourishes research needs to be put into action, so as to be transmitted and to change the state of things and to produce a genuine advancement of knowledge. All the more so in university education, which ought to be attuned to the real needs and demands of society. The points of arrival of his thought therefore had to translate into tangible facts in the evolution of educational frameworks and in the organization of the university structure. In my *Lettera a un aspirante architetto* [Letter to an aspiring architect], (2021) – with a generous preface by Paolo Portoghesi that goes back to the moments of those renewals experienced with Alberto – and in other writings of mine, I delve into the context in which the initiatives of which Seassaro was a protagonist were generated. In the epigraph I cited a thought by Kader Abdolah:

**When you are young you do not realize that, in fact, the paths
of your life are already traced, and that you simply have to fol-**

low them. Some manage to follow them to the end, others stop halfway, and still others are driven away from them. (Schiaffonati, 2021)

Alberto Seassaro followed his path to the very end, devoted to a project that proved capable of catalyzing energies, of growing over time by structuring itself and adapting to change. As institutions ought to do in order to meet social needs and demands.

One last consideration I wish to add. More than once I have asked myself what our relationship was, and how it was shaped; what our mutual acquaintance truly consisted in. We had common academic paths, in episodes shared over more than half a century. Our friendship was different from what is commonly meant by that word. Not intimate, as if there were some impediment. We travelled together; with our families we shared holiday houses; convivial occasions and meetings were frequent. Yet there was always a certain reserve between us, more explicable on my part than on Alberto Seassaro's, given his openness to relationships. Never a quarrel, nor any disagreement on how to pursue and bring shared projects to completion; exchanges of opinion were frequent, yet without any waste of words, without going round in circles, but coming straight to the crux of matters. Respect, which characterized our relationship.

References

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11. The Construction of the *Design System* in the Context of Technological Disciplines in Italy: How It All Began with a *Penguin* Who Set Out to Coordinate a Group of *Bats*

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If I think back to those years between the close of the last century and the start of the new one, the figure of Alberto Seassaro stands out sharply and, I would say, absolutely, in his dimension as *homo faber* of the fate of the university discipline of Industrial Design.

Guided by firm determination and by a vision that might have seemed impracticable, with the gifts of a fine strategist, concealed by irony and by a *dégage* manner that neither intimidated the world of architects nor alerted them to his real intentions, he succeeded in creating a reality first Milanese and then national, forging cohesion among groups that by their nature were wary and devoted to the fine art of obstructionism or inertia.

Today, I find myself explaining not how this could have happened but what it started from, and thus clarifying why the *Technological Area* within the Faculties of Architecture came to champion a movement of confidence in the discipline of design as a subject to be valorized within an educational project, bringing it to the forefront of the Academy in late years – very late – relative to the success it had already attained on the stage of the profession, of enterprise, of the market, and of con-

sumption. The question requires – not only by virtue of my being a historian – going back to a moment – the 1950s – in which neither Industrial Design nor *Tecnologia dell'architettura* [Architectural Technology] existed as university disciplines, yet the university landscape already had today's features, albeit simplified by a limited number of faculties of architecture in the country – Venice, Milan, Turin, Florence, Rome, Naples, Palermo – and by an equally limited number of full professors, able therefore to craft their policies and agreements with greater ease.

I will try to sketch this history, so as not to bore you, in the most concise way, though it is made up of circumstances, actors, and situations that would deserve continual in-depth inquiry to restore its full cultural climate. It will be in part conditioned by my own background, since I came to the study of *design history* in the mid-1970s.

At the time I was repeatedly told of the uselessness of studying that subject, with the obvious exception of my academic mentors: my university *mother*, Paola Barocchi, when I was a fellow at the Scuola Normale di Pisa, and my university *father*, Giovanni Klaus Koenig, when, from Pisa, already a young researcher, I moved to the Facoltà di Architettura di Firenze (1981-1982).

The *others*, all the *others*, the university professors with whom I was in contact, after Koenig's sudden death in 1989, accepted my scientific research – because, thank heavens, freedom of choice was contemplated – provided I fulfilled the teaching requirements, which clearly did not include the topics to which I was devoting myself (necessary aside: in the meantime I studied other subjects – and in depth – in order to carry out honestly the educational task assigned to me). Yet whether good-naturedly, with condescension, or even with good intentions, all of them pointed out to me the absence of an academic future if I continued along that path, until, suddenly, in the mid-1990s, I and my papers became timely and even useful! Let us see how and why.

11.1 Early Attempts to Promote *Industrial Design* within the University

In the early 1950s there was a growing awareness of the importance of industrial design. It was a new discipline that American *soft power*

sought to promote, for example already at the *IX Triennale* (1951), as a tool capable of defining mass-produced objects, low-cost, useful, and of quality, testifying to the achievements of a democratic civilization, a liberal way of life, and both economic and social development.

That Italy lacked industries capable of sustaining this emerged as the knot that would lead, in its stead, to presenting as industrial objects items made by artisanal methods, with qualitatively and creative-

ly artistic contents, in a mystification between decorative and industrial art that only Alberto Rosselli, at the time from the pages of *Domus*, sought to stem, and would do so with greater authority, from 1954 onward, in the pages of *Stile Industria* (Rosselli, 2022).

As is well known, 1954 would be an important year for industrial design: in June a journal entirely devoted to the subject was founded, *Stile Industria*, entrusted to Rosselli; *la Rinascente* created an award, the *Compasso d'oro*, for those industrialists who, in their products, expressed technical and aesthetic values of industrial culture; while the *X Triennale*, centered on presenting national and international milestones of the discipline, would host in October an international congress that broadly addressed its themes, in the hope of providing reassuring certainties from which to proceed. Giulio Carlo Argan, who had held important roles as an official for Antiquities and Fine Arts, while also engaging with issues of art education, the practice of university teaching, and the contemporary realities of industrial design, took part with a paper that would remain a point of departure for scholars of the discipline, in which he launched the proposal to create «a great School of Design [...] with an international character» ¹⁴.

The idea was not new. In Italy, the issue of art education began to be discussed as early as the end of the First World War, faced with the unfavorable comparison between our products and foreign ones that became apparent with the reopening of markets (Tonelli & Michail, 1987). The debate led nowhere and resumed in the postwar period: *mutatis mutandis*, whereas previously it had concerned the education of the artisan-craftsman, it now concerned the training of a techni-

Note 1.

The papers presented at the Congress did not at the time have the honor of publication. This has been remedied recently with the publication of *La memoria e il futuro* [Memory and the Future]. For the moment, only Argan's paper was published by Argan himself in the journal *Aut aut*. I underline a passage that I consider equally important, when Argan proposes modifying the curricula of schools with a humanistic orientation in order to «harmonize the culture of *professionals* with the type of culture that is defined through the various species of design». I think Argan was alluding to the *licei classici* [classical high schools], which, according to the Gentile reform, granted access to every university Faculty, so that the young student, once graduated and become a professional in any capacity, would be able to assess the non-negligible importance of design in defining a product, should they find themselves in a professional situation requiring such an evaluation. I also recall that a commented selection of the papers was published around 1960 by Pierluigi Spadolini in his coursebook on industrial design, in Part III entitled *Commenti alla critica dell'Industrial Design* [Comments on the Critique of Industrial Design]. On this point, see in the recent book I edited on the figure of Giovanni Klaus Koenig my essay *Koenig e l'industrial design* [Koenig and Industrial Design].

cian in the service of industry. It was not only a question of subjects and content – matters that might have been resolved by mediating the experience of foreign schools, well documented by Rosselli in *Stile Industria* – but also of placement (within the university system or within the Institutes of Art?) and of terminology: *industrial design* (with its unwelcome reference to another culture); *disegno industriale* [industrial design] (with its awkward opacity evoking the tasks of the technical draftsman); *progettazione artistica per l'industria* [artistic design for industry], suggested by Carlo Scarpa 23, with its embarrassing translation of creativity into an artistic corollary? It was also a matter of will and agreements. Hence an organic, multi-year public school did not come into being, although it was deemed useful.

It is therefore striking that the Faculty of Architecture in Florence, Dean Attilio Arcangeli, professor of *Scienza delle costruzioni* [Structural Mechanics], decided in 1955, on an experimental basis, to establish a free course in *Industrial Design* and to entrust it to Leonardo Ricci, an architect and artist, a restless intellectual concerned with the synthesis of the arts, with a not insignificant relationship to the United States. The course was organized with pragmatic adherence to the design problems of the object – historical framing of the evolution of taste, technical and expressive research on the materials used, the student's design exercise with working drawings and a small model 33 – thanks above all to the presence as assistant of Pierluigi Spadolini, an architect who was already operationally embedded in industrial design practice, having opened a Milan studio for this purpose to pursue collaborations with several Lombard firms.

As early as 1956 the course would replace *Decorazione* [Decoration] and continue over time, with only a change of instructor and of title: from 1959 Spadolini would be appointed to lead it, after Ricci had obtained a *libera docenza* [university teaching qualification] in *Disegno* [Drawing], while the name would change – so as to assuage ministerial indignation at the use of foreign terms – to *Progettazione artistica per l'industria* [Artistic design for industry].

One might hypothesize that this was the product of a refined exercise in academic barony by Raffaello Fagnoni, Spadolini's father-in-law and, from 1956, Dean of the Faculty, to pave the way for his son-in-law's academic career, were it not for the fact that Spadolini truly possessed

Note 2.

According to Paolo Felli, whom I thank for the information, it was Carlo Scarpa who suggested it.

Note 3.

The organization of the course is documented by Leonardo Ricci himself in the pages of *Stile Industria*.

Note 4.

The profile of Spadolini as a designer has been outlined in many texts devoted to his work: I recall a brief yet illuminating essay by Giovanni Klaus Koenig from 1985, on the occasion of an exhibition held in Agliana; the subsequent text by Giuseppe Chigiotti; and the entries that delve into some of his products in the MuDeTo – Museo del Design Toscano database, authored by myself and by Maria Camilla Pagnini, Umberto Rovelli, and Pier Carlo Santini.

Note 5.

The committee was composed of Franco Albini, Carlo Mollino, Carlo Scarpa, and two other members whose names have been lost. The candidates had to deliver a lecture, drawing its topic by lot from several proposals devised by the committee members and presented in a sealed envelope. Once the title was drawn, they had twenty-four hours to prepare it and then present it. How broadly the committee understood the themes the subject could address is attested by the lecture given by Spadolini, which focused on the concept of the module. Giovanni Klaus Koenig, in a text devoted to Spadolini as a designer on the occasion of an exhibition held in 1985 in Agliana, recalls the episode.

Note 6.

I do not address the birth of the Corsi superiori di *Disegno industriale* [Advanced Courses in Industrial Design] in the 1960s, nor the continuation of their story, because their establishment is closely tied to the reality of the *Istituti d'arte* [Institutes of Art]. Their history is discussed in various texts and in detail by Anty Pansera (Pansera, 2015).

the talent, experience, and preparation to manage the course successfully [4v](#).

The Florentine episode had no replicas on the national academic scene, not even in Milan. Caution prevailed as they awaited, in a sense, the explicit regulation of the discipline within the university system, which came in 1961 with the organization of the first *concorso di libera docenza* [private lectureship qualification competition] in the subject, a competition that saw five winners: Carlo De Carli, Roberto Mango, Alberto Rosselli, Pierluigi Spadolini, and Marco Zanuso [5v](#). Consequently, a course was activated in Naples in 1962, entrusted to Mango, and in Milan in 1963, entrusted to Rosselli. At the end of the decade, Turin would follow with Achille Castiglioni and Palermo with Anna Maria Fundarò.

Thus, so limitedly represented, *Industrial Design* would remain a dormant university presence in the subsequent decades, certainly cherished and followed by students, yet without an organic, systematized role and without a close relationship with local production realities [6v](#).

11.2 Giuseppe Ciribini Shapes the Field of *Architectural Technology*

Meanwhile, let us look to the other front, that of *Architectural Technology*, which – as I mentioned – did not exist in the university regulations. The course that represented it at the time was *Elementi costruttivi* [Construction Elements], whose task was to describe the prevailing construction system, to inform about materials and their modes of assembly, to document the feasibility of the project, and to present design activity as a natural extension of artisanal modes of production [7v](#).

It recorded the traditional building landscape, consolidated in techniques and construction practice, the one borne witness to in those years largely by the works of the *INA-Casa* plan (1949-1963), which addressed the problem of reconstruction, with ideological and political motivations, rejecting prefabrication

methods so as to guarantee both respect for local building customs and the character of place, and the employment of a substantial surplus of unskilled labor. In other words, the course content did not register the possibilities of construction techniques based on industrial logics that, in France, Great Britain, or the United States, had already been successfully tested in the years preceding the conflict, nor did it reflect on the experiments presented in the first postwar editions of the *Triennale*; suffice it to cite the exemplary case of QT8, well documented by the exhibitions organized within the *VIII Triennale* (1947), which framed that effort, or the testimonies of building industrialization presented at the *IX* (1951) and *X Triennale* (1954). Nor was there reflection on the effort to update construction aspects implicit in the studies of the *Centro studi sull'abitazione del CNR* [CNR Housing Studies Center], strongly supported in 1948 by Alberto Colonnetti, the enlightened President of that body, in the hope of promoting the adoption of systems to be realized in series (AA.VV., 2022).

Referring to this Study Center gives me the opportunity to introduce a pivotal figure in delineating the boundaries and contents of what would become *Architectural Technology*: Giuseppe Ciribini, an engineer since 1936, assistant in *Architettura tecnica* [Technical Architecture] at the Faculty of Engineering at Politecnico di Milano from 1940, and from 1949 a member of international governmental commissions on standardization, as well as director of the Milan section of that aforementioned Study Center.

In taking stock of the achievements of the first three years of his research group's work, with a view to its closure two years hence, Ciribini set out the need to reorganize the Center, making it a central body for inquiry into the industrialization of construction, with a program that introduced key concepts for technological research, inspired also by his experience of foreign contexts ⁸². Although his proposal was not accepted, it served as the premise for the founding in 1955 of the *Craper – Centro per la ricerca applicata ai problemi dell'edilizia residenziale* [Center for Applied Research on Residential Building Issues], with the aim of promoting the study of theoretical problems and applied developments relating to residential construction, of which he would be director.

Note 7.

See how Fabrizio Schiaffonati outlines the discipline in the preface to Luciano Crespi's book on the articulation of *Architectural Technology* (Crespi, 1987).

Note 8.

For this and other information on Giuseppe Ciribini, see Daniela Bosia's writings (Bosia, 2013).

The body supporting it featured as principal actor the *Istituto autonomo per le case popolari della Provincia di Milano* [Independent Institute for Public Housing of the Province of Milan], alongside Politecnico di Milano, the *Ente nazionale di unificazione* [Italian Standards Body], the *Collegio costruttori* [Builders' Association], and *INCIS – Istituto per le case degli impiegati statali* [Institute for State Employees' Housing] – an intelligent assemblage of scientific excellence and local operational realities, guarantors of the quality of the study and of possible applied outcomes. Moreover, *Craper* also envisaged a collaborative relationship with analogous foreign research centers under the aegis of the *AEP – Agenzia europea di produttività* [European Productivity Agency].

The program foresaw four themes articulated into subpoints: research on population issues; applied research to achieve *Minimi Livelli* [Minimum Standards]; research on economic-financial problems; and research on labor and materials, on industrial products, on building units, and on equipment; meanwhile, the activity proceeded from the definition of a theoretical line of action to applications in the field of experimental research. In other words, Ciribini shows himself to be moving with a pioneering research practice: local yet embedded in the international circuit; theoretical yet with validating applied-practice implications; linked to bodies – public, private, and para-state – that, while providing financial support, left it autonomous in management; carefully communicated in the specialist literature; and transmitted in foundational education thanks to the transfer of those studies' findings into the academic structure – namely, the course *Organizzazione industriale dei cantieri* [Industrial Organization of Construction Sites], created expressly in the Faculty of Engineering at Politecnico di Milano and taught by Ciribini himself.

In short, *Craper* did not present itself as a simple place of study and intellectual education for young architects and engineers, whose commitment would later also be rewarded with privileged access to an academic career, but as an articulated node of relations, useful for creating synergies among commissioning bodies – public, para-state, private – construction industries, and universities, and for indicating the theoretical and practical importance of the technical-productive aspects of construction, underscoring a change of pace in that disciplinary field.

In this sense, given its outcomes, in 1964 *Craper* transferred its experience to a new body, *Aire – Associazione italiana per la promozione degli studi e delle ricerche per l'edilizia* [Italian Association for the Promotion of Studies and Research in Building], without changing its objectives and methods, only expanding the participating organizations and consequently increasing its client base, which would see the CNR alongside the *CER – Comitato per l'edilizia residenziale* [Committee for Residential Building], the *Consiglio superiore dei lavori pubblici* [Higher Council of Public Works], the *Regione Lombardia* [Lombardy Region], and the *Consiglio regionale lombardo degli IACP* [Lombardy Regional Council of Public Housing Institutes].

Surely *legge 60 del 14 febbraio 1963* [Law 60 of February 14, 1963] which, in closing the *piano INA-Casa* [INA-Casa program], reopened with other actors support for a ten-year plan to aid *Edilizia Residenziale e Pubblica* [residential and public building], as well as the ten-year plan for schools developed by the Fanfani government and taken up again in 1959 by the Segni government, with their implicit funding schemes, also in view of the *Riforma della scuola media unica e obbligatoria* [1962 reform establishing a single, compulsory lower secondary school], will have carried weight. Be that as it may, *Craper* first and *Aire* thereafter would serve as models for other, similar structures created between the 1960s and 1970s, useful, among other things, for bringing the researchers involved closer to the dynamics and problems of the industrial world (I recall *Tecnocasa*, to name but one). One should also recall the not insignificant role played by Ciribini in shaping SAIE [the Bologna Building Exhibition], whose first edition dates to 1965, not as a mere trade fair but as an occasion to address current themes of building industrialization, with exhibitions and related publications – the *Cuore Mostra* [Exhibition Heart] – through which to involve young scholars from the university world and from the aforementioned study centers.

I have dwelt on Ciribini to underscore his dimension as a theorist who introduces and substantiates themes relating to the industrialization of construction, such as integral design, the practice of collegial study, the codification of norms, criteria of typification and unification, the determination of minimum levels, as well as the design of *prototypes (industrial design edilizio* [building industrial design]) for the coordinated fabrication of quality series, a specific scheduling of

the construction site, and a new approach to the construction firm. Subsequently he sharpened a rigorous methodological approach to design founded both on the correspondence between requirements and performances, the so-called *teoria esigenziale* [requirements theory], which places the user at the center of design reflection, and on procedures that harmonize the preliminary phase of data gathering and analysis with that of formalization in the design response through

Note 9. a codifiable process called meta-design 9.

Alberto Magnaghi, after graduating in 1965 from Politecnico di Torino, received a CNR scholarship, with Giuseppe Ciribini as his supervisor, through which he undertook the codification of meta-design.

Attention to the relationship among technology, human beings, and the environment then led him to further proposals on retrofit, on maintenance, on the need for a design practice that participates in the environmental system, and to foresee, well in advance, the possibilities of informatics and telematics in renewing design methods and tools.

In other words, Ciribini, as an intellectual and a technician, indicates the contents of the technological discipline of architecture and all its possible research outlets and academic training paths, defining an area and infusing it with cultural content that would be taken up, followed, and deepened by the many colleagues with whom he was in contact, and examined together with other young researchers whom they would train. In this, a general change of pace occurs because, unlike Ciribini, who did not directly engage in design practice, all of them, besides being involved in the Academy, were practicing designers, interfacing the project at the scale of the building and at times also of the object, and establishing the practice of a lively exchange among speculative research, factual application, and the transmission of knowledge.

Although it is difficult to reconstruct these ties in their singularity, one may hypothesize, for example, a relationship with Spadolini already prior to 1962, when Ciribini was involved by the Ministry of Public Education in establishing those Industrial Design courses within the art institutes, in which Spadolini figured among their supporters and advocates. Spadolini was both a professor and a practitioner in the fields of product and architecture, attentive to the values of composition – albeit to be understood with the proper distinctions in the two domains – by that date engaged with the problems of industrialization in both sectors, alert in bringing his design experience into the-

oretical reflection and, concomitantly, the latter back into the former, while both became lifeblood for his teaching activity. A 1963 text of his – *Pierluigi Spadolini esperienze e studi 1952-1963* [Pierluigi Spadolini: experiences and studies 1952-1963] – attests this clearly and indicates how, in the decade under consideration, the experience conducted as a designer – from group work to composability – influenced the architect's choices – modular coordination, mechanization of the construction site, production by components – as well as those of the teacher. In 1963 he published new course booklets for *Artistic design for industry*, integrating those from a few years earlier, entirely dedicated to the design and production of the serial object, where he addressed the theme of prefabrication. About two years later he refined them with a new version, in which he brought the two fields together, indicating similarities of approach and method [10](#).

And in both, references to Ciribini's positions are frequent. In other words, one infers that, at least from 1963, the course presented the problem of industrial design in the round, leaving it to the students' exercises to determine which field to address individually. It is also interesting to note, in terms of teaching, a two-year experiment launched in 1963 pairing Spadolini's chair with Domenico Cardini's *Composizione* [Architectural Composition]. The aim was to complete the knowledge of the architecture student, prior to graduation, in the broad field of new construction techniques linked to industrialization and prefabrication, with an exercise applied to a real case envisaged by the Florence Master Plan [11](#). And this marked the beginning of practices, theoretical reflections, research, and para-state assignments [12](#) that Spadolini would coordinate, infusing the discipline, with a group of scholars: young Florentine graduates such as Mario Zaffagnini, Paolo Felli, and Romano Del Nord [13](#), and equally young scholars, temporarily in residence, such as Nicola Sinopoli and Giuseppe Turchini.

The latter can be taken as an example of the *mobility* of the most brilliant figures: a voluntary assistant to Rosselli, a collaborator with Aire alongside Ciribini, he would come into contact with Spadolini through one of his graduating students and would then follow him in the research of his lively

Note 10.

Both sets of course booklets are undated, though their date can be inferred from the bibliographic references.

Note 11.

The information is reported by Anna Maria Talanti.

Note 12.

I refer to Spadolini's long-standing collaboration with Italstat.

Note 13.

Romano Del Nord acknowledges a formative debt to Ciribini. This emerges both in his testimony reported in Daniela Bosia's text on Ciribini (Bosia, 2013) and in the book dedicated to him, edited by Roberto Bologna and M. Chiara Torricelli (2021).

Note 14.

Giuseppe Turchini's relationship with Ciribini is recalled by Turchini himself in Daniela Bosia's text (2013); his relationship with Spadolini is documented in the conference in memory of Spadolini ten years after his passing, the proceedings of which were edited by Eleonora Trivellini (2013).

Florentine School ¹⁴. In these same 1960s years, Edoardo Vittoria and Marco Zanuso engaged with the design dimension at both scales and

Note 15.

See, for example, an essay by Zanuso in *Prefabbricare* [Prefabricate] (Zanuso, 1967), where he addresses the problem of the relationship with industry at both scales.

brought their research into university education ¹⁵. So too Alberto Rosselli, a measured practitioner in the fields of product design and architecture, but above all an intellectual of considerable stature, who had already tackled with vigor in *Stile Industria* the problems of building industrialization. From 1963

his course *Artistic design for industry* addressed, in line with Ciribini's thought, the question of method as a systematic design approach, one that considers the building process in relation to the design process, without neglecting the social context. In the new scenario of industrialized building, for Rosselli the architect's intervention «could no longer be the single, final gesture of an artistic operator, but had to stand alongside that of other technicians in a succession of phases

Note 16.

Adriana Baglioni, his assistant in the 1960s, remembered him thus on the occasion of his passing.

that transcended the limited moment of design» ¹⁶. A decisive lesson for students, enriched by the concept of system, by the system of requirements and that of functions, grounded in a confidence in the industrial solution as a response to collective problems. Equally decisive for young researchers, to whom he indicated a path that would be taken up by the Aire and CNR research groups.

11.3 The Affirmation of *Architectural Technology* within the University Context

An equally dynamic and forward-looking scenario takes shape, one that ramifies its potential for enhancing the discipline thanks to Decree 995 of October 31, 1969, known as *Riordinamento degli studi delle Facoltà di Architettura* [Reorganization of Studies of the Faculties of Architecture], which updates the teaching ordinance of the Degree Programme in *Architecture* and assigns to the Technological Area thirteen new subjects that can be activated, including *Architectural Technology*, *Cultura tecnologica della progettazione* [Technological Culture of Design], *Progettazione ambientale* [Environmental Design], *Sperimentazione di sistemi e componenti* [Experimentation on Systems and Components], *Unificazione edilizia e prefabbricazione* [Building Standardization and Prefabrication], as well as *Industrial*

design, to replace the earlier *Artistic design for industry*, rightly allocated to that area because of its close relation to both the technical and productive aspects of design definition. As can readily be inferred, the new subjects respond to all those recommendations that Ciri-bini's reflection had already theorized. Until that moment the course *Construction Elements* had provided information on the principal, traditional construction techniques in support of the course *Architectural Composition*; from this point onward the ancillary position of the technical aspect with respect to the compositional one falls away, and *Technology* acquires a role that underscores both the importance of a methodological approach to design and the need to respond to requirements expressed in terms of requisites and performances, asserting, thanks to the new possibilities of industrialization, the management of design in a perspective of integration among conception, design, and realization. In substance, owing to the potential change in the building's modes of production, the architect's technological preparation becomes essential in relation to the increasingly complex reality of the profession, leading the technological subjects to acquire weight in training, in research, and in the compositional response.

The situation was then strengthened by the promulgation of Law 910 of December 11, 1969, titled *Provvedimenti urgenti per l'Università* [Urgent measures for the University] and known to history as the *legge Codignola* [Codignola law], which – issued to quell the severe student unrest that had paralyzed the country's universities in the preceding two years and to address some of the demands it had articulated – liberalized university admissions and provided for the right to submit individual study plans; moreover, for Architecture it abolished the two-year/three-year barrier and reduced the number of exams. This allowed students to choose a study plan different from that envisaged by the teaching ordinance, thereby giving value, for thesis work, to disciplinary areas that had hitherto remained marginal.

Clearly, from our perspective, one can readily foresee that the Technological Area would become the object of in-depth study across the many strands it proposed.

11.4 The Milanese Technological Area and the Figure of Alberto Seassaro

It is essential to recall this scenario in order to introduce, among the scholars who gravitated around the aforementioned professors, the figure of Alberto Seassaro.

Seassaro graduated in *Architecture* at Politecnico di Milano in 1964 with a thesis, produced in collaboration with Ugo La Pietra at the *Istituto di Composizione* [Institute of Architectural Composition], titled *La ricerca morfologica. Proposta di lavoro per gli Istituti della Facoltà di Architettura* [Morphological research. A work proposal for the Institutes of the Faculty of Architecture]. The thesis addressed the modes of research proper to a university institute, distinguishing between its objective and its direction so as to leave ample room, by privileging the latter, both for the researcher's autonomy and for an understanding of the issues within the Institute's field of inquiry. An erudite thesis, then, which already identifies in the young student positions that are both critical and ideally constructive.

The years immediately following tell of a Seassaro who alternated artistic and aesthetic experimentations with work as a draftsman – as was customary at the time – in prominent Milanese architecture firms, without neglecting university activity, to which he devoted himself as a voluntary assistant. In short, he pursued – as his thesis indicated – a direction that did not foresee immediate outcomes but opened him to a horizon of possibilities.

The possibility he seized, with enthusiasm and almost at once, in 1963, was to follow Giuseppe Ciribini to Turin, where from that year he was full professor of *Construction Elements* at the Faculty of Architecture of Politecnico di Torino. The fascination of Ciribini's thought won him over, absorbed him; he deepened its suggestions, embracing, with the frenetic and restless vitality that would be his moral hallmark, the theme of building industrialization in his work of didactic support,

Note 17.

This is what Seassaro asserts in the *Introduction* to the text on the Italian building sector, which he edited in 1979.

in professional practice, and in research assignments for the CNR [17](#) and for the construction industry. He established a research relationship with Montecatini Edison that lasted several years, from 1965 to 1969, preceded and accompanied by the

design testing of a prefabrication system based on Silicalcite panels for single-family houses [18](#). The research focused on developing a catalogue of prefabricated Silicalcite elements [19](#), and, if read closely, it reveals a Seassaro fully aware of Ciribini's lesson, perfectly aligned with the latter's theoretical positions and well informed about the broader landscape of building industrialization issues. In a balanced manner, he proposed successive phases leading to the definition of a prototype, its engineering, production, and commercialization.

The intermediate objective was the fine-tuning of an *object module* with infinite combinatory possibilities for every possible building typology, distinguishing among *structural object modules*, *superstructural object modules*, and *accessory object modules* that would guarantee a design solution obtained by decomposing functional typologies into sums of standard elementary typologies, that is, into *object modules*. The final aim was to refine a catalogue of architectural elements that would satisfy the needs of all actors involved – from the consumer to the entrepreneur-client to the designer – and resolve as many construction problems as possible, so as to enable the Company to pursue a policy of anticipating demand, to overturn the traditional relationships between client and entrepreneur that impeded the effective industrialization of building, and to place the architect in a position to carry out an *integral design for industry*. The method adopted, partly theoretical and partly characterized by design verifications, is rigorous; it aligns with that typical of engagement with the industrial world, insofar as it had already been articulated by Rosselli, to name but one.

The work was rewarded with the continuation of the relationship with the Company: in 1971 Seassaro joined the Montedil Research Center of the Montecatini Edison Group as the person responsible for the development, coordination, and integration of building products and for supervising the implementation of projects for the various building complexes carried out by the Montecatini Edison Technical Office and by external designers. In these years, then, Seassaro proved homologous to the other young researchers we have seen engaged in various research centers; like them he would also take part in CNR programs on building industrialization, although – unlike them – he

Note 18.

See, regarding Montecatini Edison's experience in the construction field, what Seassaro writes in *La ricerca e la sperimentazione tecnologica in edilizia dal dopoguerra fino al P.R.I.E./C.N.R. del '70* [Technological research and experimentation in building from the postwar period to the P.R.I.E./C.N.R.], in the volume he edited and already cited in note 20, where he also explains what Silicalcite is and the unexpected problems Montecatini Edison faced in obtaining a suitable material.



1. Alberto Seassaro. The demiurge.
[Narrative →](#)

also measured himself against the furniture industry. For Acerbis he developed several successful products based on the concept of composability, as well as a distinctive prototype that would be presented at the 1972 New York exhibition *Italy: The New Domestic Landscape*: a nonconformist, articulated cubic volume to be placed freely within the domestic space and used at the user's discretion for either the night or the day zone, since it included a pull-out bed, wardrobes, a table that could likewise be pulled out, a bar cart, illuminated shelves, and drawer

Note 19. units 19 2 3.

The prototype was published in *Domus* no. 489 in 1970, and in the catalogue of the New York exhibition.

2. *L'intero mobile corre su rotaie*, Alberto Seassaro, in *Domus* n. 489.
[Document →](#)



3. Alberto Seassaro, Addition, Tavolo attrezzato componibile, Acerbis.
[Document →](#)



Like the scholars mentioned, he would communicate his reflections – and his experiences – on building industrialization in specialist journals, although in that period there was not the vehement chase after publications by researchers that has characterized the last few decades. For example, in 1968 he published a long article, practically an essay, on the *Component Approach* and the changes it brings about in design methodology and operational practice. His reflection, once again revealing the importance of Ciribini's thought, is guided by concern for the rift between architecture and building and for «the progressive disengagement of a large part of architectural culture from the issues of industrial design and, in particular, from building industrialization [...] perceptible in professional practice [...] in teaching and in critical and theoretical debate». The framework he outlines, well documented across differing positions, with case studies and international references, reassesses open prefabrication provided that the component «to be meaningful insofar as it is a design product aimed at constituting an architectural language», «to be destined for industrialized production», and is compatible with the available repertoires of components. He closes, unsurprisingly, with a caution regarding the aesthetic criteria of judgment that criticism must elaborate in the face of the new *modus operandi* of industrialized architecture, as of industrial design (Seassaro, 1968).

It is worth noting that, at the conclusion of his article, Seassaro reports the teaching experience from Ciribini's *Construction Elements* course in the 1966–1967 academic year, devoted to the *design of building components*, where the exercises assigned to students did not provide «typological prefigurations that might compromise the origi-

nality of design outcomes» (Seassaro, 1968), so as to foreground the possibilities of design by components for the integral reformulation of the building envelope theme. I mention this to introduce the position that Seassaro would assume as appointed professor – first of *Building Standardization and Prefabrication*, then of *Architectural Technology* – at Politecnico di Milano from 1969.

Let us recall that 1969 is the year in which, replacing *Construction Elements*, the discipline *Architectural Technology* entered the *Ordinamento* of the Faculties of Architecture as a subject pertaining «to the morphology and the use of materials in Architecture for the attainment of figurative results, also in relation to new industrialized procedures» (Crespi, 1988) ²⁰. Let us also recall the makeup of the Faculty of Architecture at Politecnico di Milano at that time. From as early as 1963, well in advance of the 1968 student protests, students had begun to press for reforms and to occupy buildings; Deans alternated without being able to resolve the crisis, while the police had become part of the university scene. The *Codignola* law halted the protest for a brief period, opening a season of experimental teaching with group research projects, to which Seassaro adhered by creating in 1969–1970, together with Marco Zanuso, Raffaella Crespi, and Leonardo Fiori, a Technological Research Area that addressed emerging (spatial and aspatial) organizations within the technological structures in place, toward a hypothetical disciplinary configuration of technologies functional to a role for the architect as a *technician organically linked to the class*. In the subsequent academic years the technological sphere proposed to students research on the themes of technocratic illusion, design by components, and then on the building sector and its transformations with reference to housing, while Seassaro established, as their point of reference, the *Laboratorio di Produzione del territorio* [Territorial Production Laboratory] with Giacomo Scarpini, Maria Bottero, and Giorgio Gaetani.

In other words, in Milan too an area of instructors attributable to Architectural Technology took shape, although the persistence of the revisionist crisis, partly resolved in other universities, forced the Milanese faculty to reckon with a slippery reality that did not allow, except only apparently, for calmly organizing study, or for probing and structuring the discipline's possible trajectories in an organic way, capable

Note 20.

That definition appears in a ministerial circular and is reported in Crespi (1988).

Note 21.

See, in this regard, the clear-sighted analysis Seassaro offers of the research methods carried out within university Institutes, from which one infers, at least in the Milanese setting, the absence of a tenured professor as a catalytic and ordering figure for the Institute's researchers and their studies (Seassaro, 1972).

4. Alberto Seassaro,

La politica della

ricerca in edilizia,

Facoltà di architettura,

A.A. 1972-73.

[Document →](#)



Note 22.

Thus the full professors of *Architectural Technology* – who, I recall – were at the time few, influential, and close to one another, were affectionately rechristened. At one of their dinners, after yet another meeting, to underscore their lively mobility around Italy, from one conference to the next, a playful ditty was sung that echoed a character from a song by the *Piccolo Coro dell'Antoniano di Bologna*, the penguin Belisario, who had volunteered for a legendary launch to the moon. In the version tailored to our technologists, the original spacebound destiny was transposed into the more prosaic railway routes they traveled, so the refrain became *il pinguino Belisario che sta sempre sul binario* [the penguin Belisario who is always on the platform]. The little tune was appreciated, and with it that label, which became a kind of badge of a (powerful) coterie.

of securing a School identity profile. Milan lacked, at that moment, intellectually unifying faculty [21](#) who would involve and steer the research domains and give them visibility on the national scene [4](#). In short, Milan lacked one of those *penguins* present in other university seats [22](#) who could do so much and did so much. The political commitment that permeated the classrooms of Politecnico di Milano informed the teaching proposals of the Technological Area research group in the 1970s.

The introductory documents for the research to be assigned to students, written mostly by Seassaro, are ambivalent in their tenor: some are strongly politicized, as was in the spirit of the time, and others delineate in exemplary fashion the landscape of technological studies, its principal directives, the results achieved between the theoretical-methodological moment and economic and productive practice, and thus, disciplinarily speaking, are informed and learned.

The aim was to spur students to a critical reflection that would unmask the ways in which private and state capital had addressed the problem of building industrialization without a genuine interest in the good of the country. From these accounts a certain split in Seassaro's persona comes into view: on the one hand, the practitioner who works neutrally in the service of that capital, also driven by the needs of a growing family; on the other, the politically attuned academic, who warns of the risks of the operation in light of the *conflict between hegemonic classes and subaltern classes*.

If the assignment proposed to students in the 1969-1970 academic year was to start from his Montecatini Edison catalogue of industrialized components for building, in relation to the positions of the *Components Approach*, it was structured in a way quite different from what Ciribini had proposed a few years earlier, because the aim was to articulate a political

reading of the explicit *capitalist use of technology*, which contradicted the *democratic* intent presumed by component-based industrialization [23](#) [5](#) [6](#) [7](#). In another 1970 document, Seassaro, beyond the specific definition he gives of the architect as «the organic technician of society as a whole, within the logic of class struggle» (Crespi, Fiori,

Seassaro, Zanuso, 1970), and beyond the political positions he adopts there, affirms his belief in the importance of technology – for its *formative* character – in architectural education and in professional practice, convinced that only when «the architect's technical capacity becomes a *matrix factor* in design, such that training in the use of techniques is placed among the initial components of the process through which design is expressed» (Ibidem).

This conviction leads him to state, in the text, that the courses pertaining to *Technology* constitute a *globalizing discipline* [83](#). Seassaro would reiterate this point in a later piece devoted to research within the university setting, where he argues that it is necessary to establish a more organic research program within the university, one he likely saw taking shape elsewhere and deemed indispensable for Milan (Seassaro, 1972). It is precisely this confidence in research that characterizes Seassaro's position in the 1970s.

His professional activity unfolded not only in private design practice but also in consultancy with public bodies operating in the building sector and in participation in CNR programs on prefabricated construction. In other words, in clear-eyed counterpoint to the critical political analyses set out in the university documents mentioned above, he pursued, unaffectedly, experiences that enriched his profile as a technologist. This is what emerges from a volume he edited in 1979, for which he involved faculty from the area whose studies and acquired expertise he had followed, from Giacomo Scarpini to Valerio Di Battista to Fabrizio Schiaffonati. The undertaking implied the intention to give a voice and an identitarian profile to a group that was devoting itself with enthusiasm to university work without, like him, holding any stable and recognized institutional role, and to highlight its relations with the *Gruppo nazionale CNR Produzione Edilizia*, within which he held coordinating and directing roles. The purpose of the publication was to retrace the characteristics of the Italian building sector since the postwar period, outlining and delineating the most recent modifications in its structural configuration. The essay Seassaro reserved for himself analyzes research and

Note 23.

See the documents supplied to students as reproduced in *Design Philology*: A. Seassaro, *Area di Ricerca Tecnologica 1. Proposta per la definizione di una area di Ricerca Tecnologica nella Facoltà di Architettura di Milano*, A.A. 1969-70 [academic year 1969-70]; A. Seassaro, R. Crespi, L. Fiori, M. Zanuso, *Area di Ricerca Tecnologica 2, Natura disciplinare e natura politica dell'industrializzazione edilizia per componenti*, A.A. 1969-70; A. Seassaro, *Area di ricerca tecnologica 3. La via italiana della industrializzazione edilizia. Note di metodo e discriminanti politiche di lettura del Catalogo componenti industrializzati Montecatini-Edison*, A.A. 1969-70.



5. Alberto Seassaro, *Area di Ricerca Tecnologica 1. Proposta per la definizione di una area di Ricerca Tecnologica nella Facoltà di Architettura di Milano*. [Document →](#)



6. Alberto Seassaro, Raffaella Crespi, Leonardo Fiori, Marco Zanuso, *Area di Ricerca Tecnologica 2. Natura disciplinare e natura politica dell'industrializzazione edilizia per componenti*. [Document →](#)



7. Alberto Seassaro, *Area di Ricerca Tecnologica 3. La via italiana della industrializzazione edilizia*. [Document →](#)



technological experimentation up to 1970 and reveals a steady hand, stripped of any polemical charge, analytical and erudite, confirming him as a reliable scholar (Seassaro, 1979). Yet the true objective was to underscore the cultural profile of those researchers gathered under the aegis of the Institute of Technology of the Faculty of Architecture in Milan, in no way inferior to those at other institutions.

11.5 An Enterprising Department within a Receptive University

In 1980, the Italian university system underwent a significant change, albeit one lacking a fully articulated reformist vision. It did not address the issue of admissions, whose growth had been so substantial that one now spoke of a *mass university*, nor the relationship between the educational offer and the labor market, but only the matter of faculty staffing, with the aim of stabilizing the large number of precarious positions – *borsisti*, *assegnisti*, *contrattisti*, *incaricati* [scholarship holders, research fellows, contract lecturers, adjuncts] – through which the vertiginous rise in enrollments had been managed. *Legge 28 del 21 febbraio 1980 – Delega al Governo per il riordinamento della docenza universitaria e relativa fascia di formazione, e per la sperimentazione organizzativa e didattica* [Law 28 of February 21, 1980 – Delegation to the Government for the reorganization of university teaching staff and the related training tier, and for organizational and educational experimentation], accompanied by *DPR 382 dell'11 luglio 1980 – Riordinamento della docenza universitaria* [Presidential Decree 382 of July 11, 1980 – Reorganization of university faculty], established the ranks of full and associate professor, contract professor, and researcher; introduced the option of full-time or defined-time appointments; instituted the doctoral degree; enabled the creation of Departments to promote and coordinate research activities; and, in a more tentative way, envisaged the possible creation of degree programs.

Thanks to this, a small organizational *tsunami* swept through the Italian university system and, in our case, the Faculties of Architecture. A series of competitive examinations rewarded scholars, providing the various campuses with a substantial number of full professors, asso-

ciate professors, and researchers, while each faculty set up a Department to gather them according to their cultural profile. In 1981, *Dipartimento di Progettazione Programmazione Produzione Edilizia (PPPE)* [Department of Building Design, Planning, and Production] was created at Politecnico di Milano; it brought together faculty belonging to the technological field, among them Marco Zanuso, Raffaella Crespi, Fabrizio Schiaffonati, Valerio Di Battista, Achille Castiglioni, and Alberto Seassaro himself who, having become an associate professor in 1983 and opting for full-time status, devoted all his energies to shaping the area, organizing conferences, encouraging colleagues to present their studies, and developing research of his own on behalf of CNR, ANCE, CRESME, AICAR, and Assoarredo, on the relationship between design and production, as well as on the economic and productive structure of industrial sectors, particularly construction though without neglecting furniture. Other fields he addressed were environmental design and lighting design. Thanks to all this, he was appointed full professor in 1990.

In a short span, the Milan technological area succeeded in closing the gap noted in the 1970s with respect to other national centers, finding its shape and acquiring a cultural and proactive profile ²⁴. The change of pace had been fostered, everywhere, by those early-1980s competitive examinations which, by opening a large number of tenured posts and stabilizing people, spread, evenly across all campuses, a substantial cohort of motivated and well-prepared faculty, making it possible for every Faculty of Architecture to have a Department of Technology that was proactive and intellectually lively. The strategy of our *penguins* was unified, guided by the goal of consolidating the discipline across the many cultural trajectories in which it had taken shape and of asserting it, with its constructive stances, in both research and teaching. It increasingly emerged as a given that architectural technology – understood in a broad sense – should no longer be considered an ancillary subject to *Architectural Composition*, but an autonomous discipline, endowed with its own features and thematic possibilities, integrated in social responses, proactive in environmental ones, and engaged in a conscious, positive dialogue with industry. Moreover, it claimed a design role, more constructive than that of Composition, and, thanks

Note 24.

A profile of the PPPE Department can be found in the essay by Elena Mussinelli, Monica Lavagna, Gian Luca Brunetti, and Matteo Gambaro, and in the piece by Erminia Attaianese and Mario Losasso on research in environmental design.

to its methodological structure and its criteria both for responding to human needs expressed as requirements and performance and for managing the building project – in relation to the complexity of technical standards and environmental regulations, as well as to changing modes of building production – it was better equipped to oversee conception, design, and realization as an inseparable whole.

Meanwhile, Alberto Seassaro served as Chair of the Technological track of the Degree program in Architecture. In 1982 a decree was issued – *DPR 806 del 9 settembre 1982 – Modificazioni all'Ordinamento didattico universitario* [Presidential Decree 806 of September 9, 1982 – Amendments to the University Teaching Regulations] – that changed the Regulations for studies in Architecture, with the aim of defining students' competencies. It envisaged a structure of courses in nine disciplinary areas, with the possibility of four degree tracks, the defining ones of *Design*, *Restoration*, *Urban Planning*, and *Technology*. This was a recognition for our field, to which as many as thirteen subjects were assigned, including *Industrial Design*. Moreover, the decree allowed other tracks to be activated at the discretion of individual faculties. Seassaro therefore devoted himself with conviction to composing a curriculum for the Technological track, outlining, based on the competencies of the faculty then in place, three distinct strands: one in programming, one in design, one in production, echoing, in some way, the very name of the Department. In the final year, for the thesis, the capstone reaffirmed as indispensable the centrality of project development, emancipating it and freeing it from *Architectural Composition*. Seassaro's elaborate 1981 plan would soon be reconsidered.

The Milan technological area enjoyed prominent representation in Industrial Design in its twofold sense, product design and design for industrialized construction, with two full professors of no small national stature: Achille Castiglioni, long attentive to the definition of the object, and Marco Zanuso, who in his teaching addressed, with assured command, industrial themes in both building and small-scale products. The latter could also count on two of his pupils, Francesco Trabucco and Alessandro Ubertazzi, already integrated into the academic ranks and trained by him to engage with the topic. From this *substantial* presence came the idea of leveraging it to propose a novelty, at least for the university world, an exclusive track in *Industrial Design*.

The position was strongly promoted by Cesare Stevan, Dean of the Faculty of Architecture, a figure keenly aware of institutional and political dynamics and endowed with a marked capacity for listening, including to students' expectations. The ever-growing number of enrollments in Architecture, considered worrisome by the university because it upset the balance hitherto maintained with those matriculating in the Faculty of Engineering, was vigorously defended by him. In light of this, he investigated that excessive level of appeal, asking himself what its reasons and attendant expectations might be. He therefore set about updating the educational offer, removing from *Architectural Composition* the dominant centrality deemed no longer suited to the moment. To secure acceptance of the new track he nonetheless involved a liminal wing of *Architectural Composition*, that of *Architettura degli interni* [Interior Architecture], albeit at the risk of confining design within the perimeter of furniture. The underlying rationale was justified not only by the Lombard production context, devoted above all to furniture products, but by the collaborations and possible professional outlets it could open or secure. Thus, with the alliance of part of the compositional area, the proposal took shape to activate, alongside the four degree tracks considered standard – in *Progettazione architettonica* [Architectural Design], *Tutela e recupero del patrimonio storico-architettonico* [Protection and Restoration of the Historic-Architectural Heritage], *Urban Planning*, and *Technology* – a fifth, experimental one in *Disegno industriale e arredamento* [Industrial Design and Furniture]. This would gratify all constituencies within Architecture, allowing the various disciplines to enhance their own autonomous design agendas; it would strengthen both the technological area and design itself, no longer dispersed among the other avenues of project development in the technological discipline; it would leave the Technology track free to address its core themes of industrialized building, prefabrication, components, and environmental design. In addition, it would signal an adjustment to contemporaneity, beneficial to the image of Politecnico di Milano, already appealing and attractive to students.

In 1984, once this pilot was activated, a series of meetings was held at Politecnico di Milano to reflect on curricular content, needed tools, and critical issues. It is instructive to read the speakers' contributions and the cues that emerge, because the themes addressed, the doubts



voiced, and the warnings articulated would, a few years later, shape the creation of the Degree program in *Industrial Design* (Piccinno, Servetto, 1984) [9](#).

The Milan technological area's enhancement of industrial design did not stop there. In 1988, drawing on the possibilities set out by *DPR 382/1980* [Presidential Decree 382/1980], it considered establishing a PhD in *Industrial Design*, justifying it by the need to reflect on product design in relation to changes brought about by ongoing technical innovation, by the environmental question and the challenge of a proper use of energy resources, by the advent of new designable materials (consider the interest aroused by the 1986 volume *La materia dell'invenzione* [The Matter of Invention] by a young Ezio Manzini), and by the communicative possibilities of digital tools.

Its structure was calibrated, appropriately, not only to the timeliness of these themes but also to the cultural profile of the unit's faculty, from Raffaella Crespi to Tomás Maldonado (who in 1984 had come to Politecnico from *DAMS* [Discipline delle Arti, della Musica e dello Spettacolo]), from Achille Castiglioni to Ezio Manzini to Francesco Trabucco, summoned to a commitment that was perhaps demanding in teaching and organizational terms, yet stimulating and rewarding, repaid by the experience of working with a small number of motivated candidates, a mere fraction compared to the roughly fifteen thousand students enrolled in the Faculty. It was also the first doctoral program in this discipline at the national level which, while granting Politecnico di Milano an institutional visibility aligned with contemporaneity, showcased the full proactive potential of the Milan technological area and established it, relative to other campuses, as a context capable of advancing all its voices.

It should be said, for historical accuracy, that in Palermo Anna Maria Fundarò, full professor since 1977, had long moved with assurance, working largely on her own, to promote design teaching. She succeeded in creating an experimental degree track in *Industrial Design* in the first half of the 1980s, a *Scuola di specializzazione* [postgraduate specialization school] in 1989, and, roughly at the same time, a *Dottorato in Disegno industriale, arti figurative e applicate* [PhD in Industrial Design, Fine and Applied Arts], in cooperation with the Faculty of Humanities and Philosophy of Palermo. In a sense, Fundarò anticipated Milan's

steps and, like Milan, sought to engage with the scale and character of place. Aiming to rebuild Sicily's productive vocation and its heritage of material culture, she delved into local crafts to regenerate them and improve the quality of places, within a pedagogical model that – though appreciated by certain circles of the Milan design scene and surely worth revisiting today, when much confusion surrounds craft and the relationship between craft and design – is very different from that of Politecnico di Milano. Her venture therefore slightly precedes the one under consideration, yet it takes a path which, however exemplary, is of limited usefulness in its cultural profile for being considered a fruitful precedent.

It should also be said that other Italian campuses offered teaching in *Industrial Design*, and with faculty of proven stature, Florence, for instance, with Roberto Segoni, whose teaching was further supported by Giovanni Klaus Koenig's absolutely charismatic course in *Storia del design* [History of Design], yet none of these could count on a level of confidence and willingness to invest, on the part of colleagues within their Department, comparable to what was present in Milan. The reason likely lay in their inability to organize a close collaborative relationship with local production sectors – moreover scarcely investigated by the almost nonexistent design historians of the time – which might have served as useful interlocutors for a more orderly takeoff of the discipline. To stay with the Florentine example, Koenig was, at that point, speaking of the opportunity to create a postgraduate specialization school in *Industrial Design*, but his sudden death in 1989 deprived the initiative of his considerable cultural experience and, above all, of those useful contacts in the transport sector which, combined with his aptitude for conceiving and involving, could have given the project substance.

Thus, when it nevertheless took shape in the early 1990s, it closed within a short time. In other words, Italian faculty in *Industrial Design* seemed satisfied with their teaching remit and with their students' appreciation, and were not moved by the burning drive to advance the discipline more comprehensively. Although Koenig, in jest, defined the designer as a *pipistrello, mezzo topo e mezzo uccello* [a bat – half mouse and half bird] – alluding to the intelligence, adaptability, and curious concreteness of the one, and to the ease and endurance

of flight of the other – Italian design faculty managed only the timest of flutters!

By contrast, the Milan technological area is cohesive, though composed of diverse cultural sensibilities, drawn together by a close relationship with industry, albeit one that, here too, varies from one faculty member to another, and it works synergistically with the Faculty of Engineering, its sister within the polytechnic fold rather than a separate institution impermeable to collaboration. Both, moreover, shared a common denominator, the same matrix: an educational approach conceived as the integration of scientific-technical knowledge with humanistic perspectives, lending credibility to projects in teaching that elsewhere might have been deemed high-risk in terms of their chances of success.

11.6 A Degree Program in Industrial Design. And Much More

In the meantime, in 1989 a *Ministero per l'Università e la Ricerca Scientifica* [Ministry for Universities and Scientific Research] was established, autonomous from the *Ministero della Pubblica Istruzione* [Ministry of Public Education], giving the university its own locus of governance. This opened a season of reforms. *Legge 341 del 19 novembre 1990* [Law 341 of November 19, 1990], with the aim of aligning the system with international standards, recognized the educational autonomy of universities and allowed them to award, in addition to the traditional *laurea* [degree], the *diploma universitario* [university diploma], the *diploma di laurea* [degree diploma], the *diploma di specializzazione* [specialization diploma], and the *dottorato di ricerca* [doctoral degree], on condition that all curricula be devised with a new sensitivity to the entrepreneurial fabric of place, so as to guarantee graduates employment and precise professional competences.

The Faculty of Architecture at Politecnico di Milano was quick to seize the opportunity.

Dean Stevan, an enlightened figure, open both to addressing the challenges of a mass university and to interpreting contemporary transformations, who had consistently supported his technologist

colleagues' efforts to consolidate their presence in the name of adapting the university institution to the demands of the present, envisaged the possibility of establishing a degree program in *Industrial Design*, given that design, with its full complement of associations, bodies, journals, exhibitions, as well as enterprises, constituted a specifically Milanese hallmark. He deemed it necessary to overcome the anomaly whereby the Italian university lacked a pathway dedicated to a professional figure so significant for the country's image, and essential that it be Politecnico di Milano to assume this responsibility, in light of the role played by Milan in its international success. Beyond the prestige the Politecnico di Milano would derive from it, its creation would produce two results: one, prosaic, of easing the pressure of the number of students enrolled in the *Architecture* degree program; the other, as a cultural service, of meeting students' expectations for a track aligned with the professional market.

Stevan had by then a firm grasp of institutional mechanisms, and he acted on the Ministry front, using as leverage Tomás Maldonado's favorable opinion, assuming that his viewpoint would be regarded as authoritative, above all thanks to his international background, and capable of countering the Ministry's latent provincialism. He turned to Angelo Cortesi, then president of ADI [Associazione per il Disegno Industriale], to secure his support and help in addressing the problem of a professional framework for future graduates, independent of the *Ordine degli architetti* [Order of Architects], something that could reassure them about their prospects. And he found in Minister Antonio Ruberti an ally so receptive to the project as to resolve the statutory issues that existed ²⁵.

At that point he turned to Fabrizio Schiaffonati, Director of the PPPE Department, a learned, approachable, and perceptive lecturer, above all institutionally astute, to devise a convincing draft plan. He obtained his full willingness, although the task was not easy: the educational objectives and the teaching structure had to be defined, the level of design resolution, requiring the establishment of laboratories for the necessary technical-productive verifications, had to be envisaged, and any possible disciplinary gaps had to be filled. And not only that. The ongoing changes in the production landscape were identifying new profession-

Note 25.
 With *Decreto 24 febbraio 1993* [Decree of 24 February 1993], the Ministry amended the *Ordinamento didattico* [Teaching Regulations] of degree programs, introducing the degree in *Industrial Design*, and appended a new *Tabella XXX* [Table XXX] with the Teaching Regulations envisaged for it.

al profiles as against the generic label of designer, profiles whose contours had to be specified and anticipated in the articulation of study tracks so as to align with the professional market. In the background lay the question of the proposal's appeal which – obviously – was not in doubt, quite the contrary. The real issue was how to organize a structure that would be concrete, functional, and efficient in view of a student body that would certainly be substantial.

The technological area, building on the earlier, successful organizational outcomes of the degree track and the PhD, guaranteed the prospects of success. And Schiaffonati firmly believed in its potential, even though it was no small step: to construct an educational path independent from that of the architect, to shape a professional figure with technical, economic, social, and cultural dimensions, capable of linking them to propose a design synthesis free of stylistic concessions and of temptations toward passing fashions. The concreteness and seriousness demonstrated by the technologists in deepening their themes, their relationship with industry – attentive to its problems yet devoid of any deference – their capacity for dialogue with state and para-state bodies, their aptitude for connecting technical issues with social or human needs, all became guarantees for the successful outcome of the undertaking. It was therefore not only the presence of *Industrial Design* within their area that made them necessary interlocutors, but also their organizational, as well as cultural, capacity, demonstrated in the conduct of their basic research and, above all, of their applied research, together with the related dexterity in managing dialogue with industry.

Schiaffonati, however, after first involving Achille Castiglioni, Marco Zanuso, and Tomás Maldonado, did not obtain the positive response he expected, having failed to appreciate how all three, despite their penchant for leadership, were unable to engage with the bureaucratic and administrative mechanisms of the polytechnic machine, and were hampered by the fact that the first two were already retired from active service and the third was approaching retirement. Unable to count on their contribution, he appointed a new internal committee within the area, bringing together faculty who, by virtue of their expertise, could take on the courses to be planned, and it managed to present a plan for the first year only, drawing on the explicit *Table XXX* of Decree of

February 24, 1993. It was an elementary, almost perfunctory plan, yet sufficient to quiet Stevan's pressure and to launch the degree program in academic year 1993-1994. It was therefore possible to begin, but a Chair was needed who could take on the challenge: capable, intellectually lively, confident and determined, adroit at moving nimbly within institutions, at building relationships, at anticipating needs, convinced of the challenge and eager to carry it forward. In short, a *penguin* with the qualities of a *bat*, one who could speak to *bats*!

Schiaffonati knows whom to back: Alberto Seassaro.

And Seassaro, not without some initial doubts, takes up the gauntlet. Officially he became Chair of Degree program only in 1995, but he very likely began working some time earlier.

He immediately set to work on the curriculum, and the telltale sign is the *Guida dello studente* [Student Guide] for academic year 1994-1995. Compare it with the spareness of the previous year's, which lacked an *incipit*, any kind of anticipatory framing, or even a reassuring note. The new Guide, by contrast, presents, explains, clarifies, and reassures the reader about the pathway; it outlines a program that is already complete and clear, synergistic with the various components of the university, with cultural and professional profiles clearly specified, with the three cycles envisaged by the decree implemented, with the courses activated and described in detail in terms of objectives, method, and examination requirements. The man's constructive restlessness then turns to the organization of the structure, moving adroitly within the polytechnic institution and, again, both within and beyond it, to recruit lecturers from among those of the Faculty, those of the university, and the professionals or experts needed for specific courses and for the laboratories, as well as firms willing to host interns. To give meaning and weight to the new reality, he promoted an expanded configuration of the PPPE Department, which was transformed, in both name and structure, into DI.Tec – *Dipartimento di Disegno industriale e Tecnologia* [Department of Industrial Design and Technology]. But this was only a first step. An autonomous Design Department would soon be established – IN.D.A.CO – *Dipartimento di Industrial Design, Arti e Comunicazione* [Department of Industrial Design, Arts and Communication]. A shrewd move that would enable him, shortly thereafter, to request the creation of a Design Faculty, the *Terza Facoltà di Architettura*



[Third Faculty of Architecture] at Politecnico di Milano, which Stevan would grant without difficulty, considering it «the university's only true innovation] since its foundation» ²⁶. He envisaged the need for dedicated breathing spaces, necessary both for sound operation and for institutional dignity; he negotiated with his friend Stevan and accepted without hesitation the proposal of a peripheral location – Bovisa – which, from a renunciatory hypothesis, a marginal suburb, would be transformed into a reality of winning energy, also a symbol of continuity between its, not by chance, entrepreneurial past and its present of training for enterprise. Not content with this, from the outset he presented himself to the lecturers operating nationwide, at various levels, in the field of university education for *Industrial Design*, as their point of connection: to listen to their needs, to coordinate joint cultural-research initiatives, to reflect on the future of those competitive examinations that would follow in order to strengthen, like a good *penguin*, the disciplinary sector according to the urgencies posed by the various campuses, yet without creating discord or disorganized arrangements. A researcher tied to CNR, he proposed CNR for the first joint research – *Innovazione, qualità e ambiente nel Disegno industriale* [Innovation, Quality, and Environment in Industrial Design] – involving the campuses of Milan, Turin, Genoa, Naples, Florence, Venice, and Rome, and then extending it to Pescara and Palermo, so as to connect and unite, to ensure that debate would stir the dormant and spur them to help the area grow within the various communities, to anticipate and to take flight. With himself as the reassuring navigator of the course.

Seassaro, pressing forward, accomplished all this in a handful of years, and, still pressing forward, he would continue in the years that followed, those of the new century, to create a *Sistema Design Milano* [Milan Design System] and then a *Sistema Design Italia* [Italy Design System]. Not content, he would lay the groundwork to spur his students to secure international recognition for this reality. Schiaffonati and Stevan had placed their bet on the right piece to entrust with their vision of the future for the design area.

Candid and poised, Seassaro had shown, when he steered the Technological track, that he was operational yet not a mere executor, able to move within the university with a blend of tact and mild impertinence; likewise, he made his organizational gifts manifest in struc-

turing the *Corso di perfezionamento in Progettazione illuminotecnica* [Advanced Course in Lighting Design] in 1986, knowing how to enlist professionals, experts, and national and international bodies to lend technically and scientifically rigorous standing to a subject still in need of validation. He displayed the technologist's typical qualities – pragmatism and concreteness – while his earlier, if distant, background in the figurative-aesthetic sphere and in the field of furniture reassured one of an open, even audacious, mindset, yet one ready for the critical exchange consistent with the polytechnic philosophy. As a person he had pragmatism, realism, and tenacity; as a lecturer he was clear about the value of research, the importance of human capital, the necessity of merit-based selection, the obligation to build relationships; as an intellectual he showed neither prejudices nor cultural gaps. Entrusting him with shaping the discipline within the university context was therefore no gamble. And indeed Seassaro proved open to innovation, to new technologies, to combining a culture of design and a culture of product, to broadening teaching domains – think of fashion, nautical design, and *Beni Culturali* [Cultural Heritage] – to creating synergies. In an enlightened way he sought out faculty and teaching collaborations among technologists, architects, engineers, sociologists, and designers. And while structuring his Degree program, he persuaded many lecturers in *Industrial Design* across Italy that they could do something similar by reconfiguring themselves within their faculties, cutting the cord to the technological area, and, with the alliance of our *demiurge*, finding opportunities for personal growth and for the growth of their students. In a word, he built, successfully and generously, something once unthinkable.

Thank you, Alberto, magnificent *penguin*, on behalf of the *bats*!

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12. Alberto Seassaro. Struggle and Open Debate

Bianca Bottero

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As I try to draw from the heated period of student struggles some memories with which to speak about Alberto, what surfaces moves me with tenderness, and this act of delving into recollections leads me to speak of events that today seem almost otherworldly.

I came to know and spend time with Alberto Seassaro when, at the Faculty of Architecture in Milan, everything was being called into question, and the disciplines of traditional courses were contested by students who demanded a more direct and conscious relationship with society. It was the famous 1968, and I recall it with longing because then we were young, and we believed in those things with enthusiasm. At that time Alberto expressed his great vitality and his exceptional organizational skills in creating moments of struggle and also of free debate, and in forming study groups aimed at reflecting on the deeper meaning of designing.

Alberto and many of us, all *subordinate lecturers*, together with the students, challenged the teaching courses and many of the official professors. And we organized ourselves to practice an alternative didactics, discussing social housing and *power to the people*... We held

continuous assemblies and public demonstrations, also in support of the workers' struggles then demanding the Workers' Statute.

And also, as a provocation, we decided to welcome into the Faculty the families from the shanties who had occupied the public housing of Via Tibaldi after being evicted by the police. For this we spent a night gathered in a pseudo-assembly (presided over, moreover, by Dean Carlo De Carli) to justify the Faculty's nocturnal activity as *educational activity*! In the morning, however, they took us away, arrested us, and we spent a day at the police headquarters – only one day, as far as I remember – but first we lined up, raising our fists and singing *Bandiera Rossa*... Then we were dismissed as well, but that is another story...

Yet beyond the struggle, Alberto also possessed the ability to foster forms of free exchange between students and teachers. I recall, in particular, the seminar he held with Corrado Levi, titled *Il privato è politico* [The Personal is Political], in which the students' unease and their rejection of architecture were approached through a method that combined the design process with a simultaneous recognition of personal experiences and sensitivities. The seminar was followed with enthusiasm by many students who, through this experience, discovered a new possibility of approaching architecture and of uncovering its allure ¹².

And I think now that even the architectural choices and interests later cultivated by Alberto – the careful study of technologies and his love for design – were ways of deconstructing those weary forms, by then emptied of vitality, that academic tradition proposed. They were, in other words, the path – which would prove fruitful in the field of ecological thinking, and beyond – towards bringing architecture closer to life again.



1. Manifesto del
movimento degli studenti
di architettura, *Uniti si
vince*.
[Document](#) →



13. Alberto Seassaro and the Construction of the Italian Academic Design Network

Luigi Bistagnino

Formerly professor at Politecnico di Torino

A fragmented vision of the world, as a set of separate facts, episodes, and products, gives rise to a behavioral paradigm in which each person acts independently and in a self-referential manner. Society, culture, the environment, production, the economy are likewise considered as independent of one another and, within themselves, as made up of separate parts that operate autonomously and look only to their own existence.

It is therefore obvious that with such a vision one finds oneself in a situation of profound crisis, first and foremost cultural and, as a consequence, social and productive.

What we need instead is a common vision in which we see ourselves as actor-subjects who exist in a naturally relational rapport with others, and for whom the actions of individuals, aimed at a common end, join positively with those of others in a harmonious, vital, and enduring flow. A new vision no longer *individual*, but *collective*.

Design, within this general stance, is a domain in which diverse competences converge to develop a project as the outcome of a balance composed of reciprocity, relations, exchanges, and mutual assistance.

Alberto Seassaro, in his manifold project and research activity, understood very well that design must not rest solely on one's individual creativity and project management; when it came time to found a Degree program in design, drawing on his broad work experience, he conceived of creating a relational network composed of diverse competences and of the encounter among bodies of knowledge, from technology to sociology, from engineering to economics, from ergonomics to knowledge of materials, from production to material culture, from history to sensory perception, from art to informatics. All these forms of knowledge, in continuous dialogue, indeed create a wide project culture with which to develop properly a productive reality that also serves as a stimulus for the milieu in which it is situated.

But how can all this be put into practice, moving from words to deeds? It is necessary to involve the various experts with their competences. Therefore, in the mid-1990s, just after founding the first Italian Degree program in design, Alberto Seassaro, with foresight, conceived of creating a relational network of faculty who taught design courses and related courses, operating within the Faculties of Architecture of all Italian universities, and of inviting them to Milan to lead a workshop or a design studio ¹². This action, anything but trivial, gave students the opportunity to become acquainted with and put into practice a multiplicity of approaches and visions, broadening their project culture.

At the same time, this very action generated the first meeting of all Italian instructors in the discipline, thereby fostering mutual acquaintance and creating a multidisciplinary group which, under the coordination of Alberto Seassaro, began to interact and, over the years, set in motion the interest and the conditions for several Degree program in design to be launched in the various Italian university sites.

This new cultural ferment brought design to the forefront as a new domain of research and teaching, across all Italian universities, amplifying the scope of what had previously been compressed and confined within the Degree Courses in *Architecture*. The dialogic contact among the research groups present in the various universities then also found, in

Note 1.

In the a.y. 1996-97 the following ran Workshops: Luigi Bistagnino (Politecnico di Torino [Polytechnic University of Turin]), Gabriella Caterina (Università Federico II di Napoli [University of Naples Federico II]), Tato Dierna (Roma, La Sapienza [Sapienza University of Rome]), Virginia Gangemi (Università Federico II di Napoli [University of Naples Federico II]), Ermanno Guida (Università Federico II di Napoli [University of Naples Federico II]), Tonino Paris (Roma, La Sapienza [Sapienza University of Rome]), Cecilia Polidori (Università di Reggio Calabria [University of Reggio Calabria]), Antonio Quistelli (Università di Reggio Calabria [University of Reggio Calabria]); Design Studios: Almerico de Angelis (Il Università di Napoli [Second University of Naples]), Giorgio De Ferrari (Politecnico di Torino [Polytechnic University of Turin]), Gabriella Peretti (Politecnico di Torino [Polytechnic University of Turin]); History Course: Vanna Pasca Raimondi (Università di Palermo [University of Palermo]).

SID *Società Italiana di Design* [Italian Design Society] its venue and instrument for growth and exchange, developing a culture of design that has been enriched by a broad panorama of research and development proposals, which have helped the design sector to grow, bringing it to an ever wider public of entrepreneurs and companies, and making the figure of the designer essential in multiple fields of application.

This, in summary, is the birth and development of the Degree programs in design in Italy, of which Alberto Seassaro was the initial spark, the spur, the point of reference, the coordinator of a cultural and relational process that is continuing to develop. *Thank you, Alberto!*

PART 4

Building the Institution to Open Up to Emerging Content

14. Collage and Bricolage. Or How Alberto Seassaro Invented the Italian Design System in Spite of Everyone. Even Himself

Antonella Penati

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14.1 In that little room at Via Bonardi 3

There he is, alone with his thoughts. A pencil in his meditative mouth; between his fingers, a cigarette *worn down* to the impossible – strictly *Nazionali senza filtro* [unfiltered Nazionali], soft green pack – and a deck of cards ready for yet another game of *solitaire* to be played in the event of pressing duties to face, like an institutional phone call, or a grueling delivery ahead of a meeting of the Academic Senate where there is *a battle to be fought*.

An *crowded solitude* in the 4×4 departmental cubicle on via Bonardi – by then the Dean's Office, which he shared with all the secretarial staff – *my girls*, as he affectionately called them –; with his closest collaborators; with his course and studio assistants (a sizeable group, since he had also inherited the assistants of his friend and colleague Giacomo Scarpini). It often happened that he was alone, with his ideas and visions that others – even we who worked with him side by side every day – managed to understand only after they had materialized, giving concrete form to his thought.

Inside that little room, meetings of the Degree Program Council were also held (before the hard-won conquest of dedicated spaces); there were meetings with colleagues, a constant coming and going, and he even met with students, whom he received at all hours without the need for an appointment. There, where everything began when there was nothing, I came to know his informal, forthright way of relating to others: from the most junior student to the Rector. He felt at ease in every situation and put everyone else at ease, without any need to play the buddy. In fact, he addressed students strictly in the formal register, even though he was always well disposed to listen; which did not necessarily mean it was easy to wrest a yes from him. With students in particular, he was reluctant to grant *exceptions to the rule*, because he always kept firmly in mind that the same principles had to apply to everyone.

That little room of *forced coexistence* revealed another side of Alberto Seassaro to me. He had his own notion of privacy. He was, at his core, a free person, and precisely for this reason he could, with complete calm, discuss delicate matters with colleagues in front of everyone present, just as he could make confidential phone calls to family members without censorship. An open book.

At first I was unsettled by such a public kind of private life, but over time, and as I came to know his human and political story, I understood that this was a radical trait of his: to be what one is, with no need for pretenses or hypocrisies.

Entering that little room, you found yourself facing a cabinet crammed with neatly catalogued documents and, roughly stuck on the central door, the cartoon: *Hai voluto la bicicletta? E adesso pedala!* [You wanted the bike? Now pedal!], a playful tribute from his collaborators, because he hadn't wanted the bike, they had more or less made him get on it, but from that moment he promised himself and those working with him that there was pedaling to be done, and without too much complaining! The aforesaid cabinet served as a visual separator for a small area that housed two PC workstations for the secretary's office. Apart from these two stations, the entire room was literally colonized by large white tables, with the sole exception of a small passage (more a narrow opening than anything else) just sufficient to reach the presidential seat. A place entirely similar to those

Figure 1.
Caricature portrait of Alberto
Seassaro by Paolo Ciuccarelli
(1996).

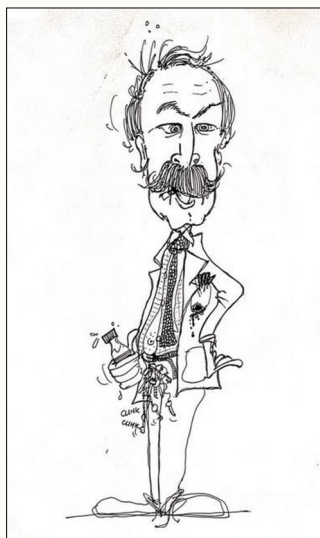
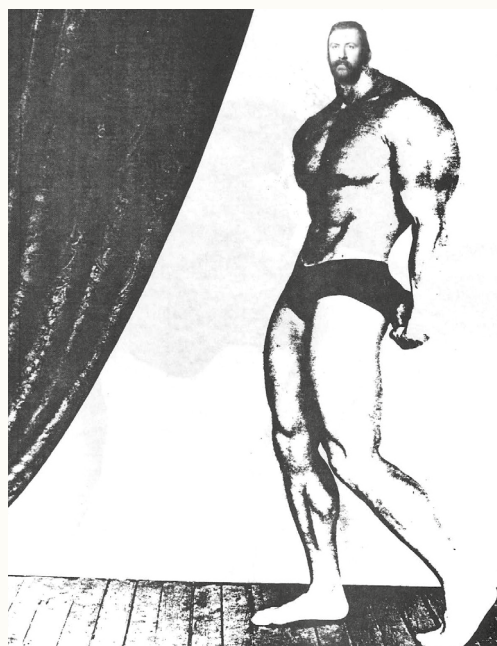


Figure 2.
Collages created by Alberto
Seassaro for teaching materials
(1980s).



of his secretaries, personalized only by a small display cabinet on the wall behind him. On the cabinet door, small snapshots of the newest arrivals in the Seassaro family, first his granddaughter Caterina, then his great-grandson Enea; a large photographic image of the Dean, Cesare Stevan, with a cut-out of a human heart in anatomical form glued to his chest and, drawn beneath it in red marker, a cascade of little droplets of blood: a collage made by Seassaro himself. Inside, proudly on view, a few little elephants – his cherished animal –, gifts from colleagues returning from some exotic trip; fines to be paid; airline tickets; loose sachets of *Aulin*; *Citrosodina*, which he gulped by the spoonful or poured straight into his mouth from the yellow tin; spray cream – the antidote to the *Citrosodina* – which he would spray into his mouth during long phone calls, producing that characteristic sound of a moka pot coming to the boil, a noise that those of us around him always suggested he decode for whoever was on the other end of the line. He felt no such need, so serenely did he live and behave, freed from the pruderies of the etiquette rules of a conformist good-manners guide.

On one side of the cabinet, a clipping from *La Repubblica* of a cartoon by Massimo Bucchi with the line *L'ambizione più diffusa è restare fermi un giro* [the most widespread ambition is to sit out a round], replaced a few years later, in the new dean's office in Building B1 on via Candiani, as a sign of a thought that updates with time while remaining the same, by an Altan cartoon reading *Vorrei vivere alla giornata, ma mi manca la necessaria visione strategica* [I'd like to live day to day, but I lack the necessary strategic vision].

Small flashes of an everyday working context that, taken together, become a self-presentation of the Seassaro spirit.

To bring it into focus, we need to pause, since we've mentioned them, on his proverbial work tables. Tables with heaps of sheets of every format (but chiefly A3 sheets, *because on A4 you can't unfold even the simplest thought*), in every color (I recall his passion for vividly colored reams of A3, which he sought out because color functioned as a tool of thematic classification and, consequently, as a visual cue amid the welter of documents inhabiting tables and surfaces), mixed with (equally colorful) document folders; clippings from magazines and newspapers; photographic images; layers of semi-worked materials; doodles, posters, flyers, mail, business cards, phone numbers; notes, *pizzini* [slips of paper], and missives from colleagues: the gathering, sediment, and stratification of a way of working in which no work can ever be said to be concluded and in which time does not proceed linearly but travels on multiple parallel planes, where many things occur at once, sometimes separately, sometimes intersecting, producing even unplanned solutions. Like searching for a particular competence to add to the teaching framework and finding the name he hadn't thought of in the catalogue of the exhibition lying there before his eyes, on the table, precisely. The table is also the place where public and private problems coexist, bills to be paid and letters to the Rector in a continuum that is life itself [14](#).

After all, planes are the philosophical places of singular and chance encounters, as Foucault teaches us (Foucault, 1978). Places where information, data, problems, and concepts, coexisting as distinct material, can, precisely by virtue of unusual proximities and juxtapositions that at first glance seem unlikely, arrive at innovative syntheses. It is not so much the singularity and heterogeneous nature of what



lies on the table that captures the imagination but, according to Foucault, the very power of contagion, the possibility of generating unthinkable mixtures deriving from the «reduction of the interstices» separating one thing from another (Foucault, 1978, p. 6).

The pileups of elements originally separate that later find affinities allow us to grasp certain modes of contemporary innovative thought that works through *collage* and *bricolage*, techniques of making and thinking widely used by Alberto Seassaro, who was accustomed to producing

innovative – at times risky – juxtapositions starting from conceptual materials and, at times, even from human materials that were not easily associable at first glance.

After all, the criteria that drive associations and analogies are personal and strongly connected to the subject's cultural history, a history inclined to include rather than exclude. And indeed, as Maffessoli teaches us, collage does not discriminate because «collage is *stricto sensu* a metaphor that carries into the same place, that brings together» (Maffessoli, 1986, p. 123).

The studio posters themselves can be considered a place – the place – where Seassaro brought distant and diverse thoughts and people into convergence, as Michel Foucault put it: «like, on the operating-room table, the umbrella and the sewing machine» (Foucault, 1978, p. 6). The most disparate materials on the table, gathered over time, cut out from their original contexts, constituted, in fact, a reservoir of suggestions from which to draw so they could be re-aggregated. These elements, in fact, once brought together, then and only then, existed and took shape, becoming real and, above all, realistic, possible, indeed obvious. Behind those names juxtaposed at first by sheer intuition, there followed hours of dialogue, discussion, verification, adjustments, changes of course. In this, he was certainly helped

by solid knowledge; by his artistic and personal history, rich in encounters, friendships, loves, relationships, opportunities, experiences cultivated in what he liked to call *cazzeggio libero* [unstructured messing around], to which he attached considerable importance and to which we will return in the closing.

And he was probably helped as well by always being in a sought-and-willed *altrove* [elsewhere] with respect to the places, debates, and salons of design, whose mainstream, for him, authentically popular, was always to be observed from a proper distance.

His way of designing the new consisted in proceeding by parts and by integrations, without letting himself be shackled by preordained schemes or by scaffolds and perimeters established a priori, while keeping very clear what the context made available to him, including the constraints which he was in any case highly skilled at circumventing (never underestimating them but riding them in order to subvert them in the project; after all, *sparigliare le carte* [to reshuffle the cards], that is, to change the rules of the game, create disruption, or sow confusion, was among his declared ambitions) and the system's topics of interest, which he was well disposed to pick up and embrace. The very ends of the institutional project were shaped step by step, revisited and adapted to the context's resources and needs, filtered through the lens of a mode of thinking that was always political, never innocent. A *modus operandi* that very sharply captures his *forma mentis* when faced with the complexities of design.

As we stated in the Introduction to this text: «The disruptive force of Alberto Seassaro's action lies precisely in taking what the system has at its disposal, in terms of human resources, knowledge, instrumentation, spaces, organizational customs, and, through painstaking work of adaptation, micro-transformations, and tactics, designing a strategic action of unimaginable scope [...]».

È il meglio che abbiamo; Sono i migliori che abbiamo [This is the best we have; They're the best we've got], he would say to colleagues and collaborators whenever, faced with specific needs, one could respond in human and material terms only with *soluzioni arrangiate* [makeshift solutions] (another expression he used frequently). And in that *they're the best we've got* there echoes *il migliore dei mondi possibili* [the best of all possible worlds] from Voltaire's *Candide* – a reading he loved and

had raised to a life philosophy – together with a critique of easy optimism, according to which *everything is fine in the best of all possible worlds*. (Voltaire, 1950) His strength, instead, lay in everyday commitment, in reckoning with the concreteness and limits of reality.

From the very beginning it was clear to him – and it was his guiding spirit – that patience and time would help to fine-tune contents and means more *acconci* [fitting] (another term he used frequently). After all, as Sennett reminds us (2009, p. 19), in the *artigiano-demiurgo* [artisan-demiurge] [see the Introduction in this text], «the use of imperfect or partial tools stimulates the imagination to develop the capacity to repair, to improvise». In the same way, the lack of resources perfectly suited to the ends forced one to come to terms with them – not by reducing them, but by adapting, adjusting, and reorienting them.

Particularly noteworthy here is the concept of *contingency*, which the epistemologist Tagliagambe (1997, p. 48) interprets as an incentive to change one's current situation through transformative explorations typical of creative activity. It is a form of creativity, the one generated by contingency, that knows how to choose alternatives that are not only conceivable but also concretely achievable.

De Certeau speaks in this regard of *minute techniques* (2001, p. 9), an inventiveness governed precisely by the art of making do that leads to recombining heterogeneous elements and knowledges on the basis of a practical intelligence that, astutely, invents procedures, adapts schemes (ibidem, p. 96), transfers and reuses subjects and knowledges by exploiting the multiple potentialities implicit in each, while at the same time following the principle that many elements/people are replaceable with others. These are forms of design that draw on whatever the context makes available to produce results that do not claim to be replicable or to become a model, but simply to resolve *contingencies*. They are processes that evolutionary approaches to innovation have described precisely as practices of *bricolage* (Levi-Strauss, 1966; Ceruti, 1995): ingenious practices triggered by necessity, supported by an intuitive, hands-on sense, able to set in motion our intrinsic ability to repurpose what is available for performances different from those for which things were designed, recombining them, or recombining some of their parts or elements, and at times yielding original outcomes (Joyce & Craig, 2011). Results that, though deriving from

the fortuitousness of the available elements that dictate the logic of their assembly, once realized seem to be «the most obvious thing» one could have done (Freeman, 2007). The action of the *bricoleur* is in fact characterized by the use of materials and components that are imperfect, suboptimal with respect to the intended outcome, and in this way the very purpose, partly shaped by what is available for use, is itself resolved in an approximate yet effective manner. (Lévi-Strauss, 1966)

This stepwise proceeding through successive adaptations, with ends that narrow in scope and transform over time while nonetheless producing effects of great impact, has much to do, as we noted above, with contemporary modes of design, where grand narratives give way to local and transitory elaborations of meaning. (Penati, 2006)

From many quarters, this trait has been discussed, with the claim that in Seassaro it stemmed from his anarchic spirit.

I believe that, despite his readings of Proudhon, Bakunin, Kropotkin, and the theoretical writings on anarchy that nourished his youth, and despite what was said about him, Seassaro was not anarchist, especially if one thinks of anarchy in its cultural sense. I think that Alberto Seassaro's way of thinking and designing, both in projects of more limited scope and in the major projects he brought to maturity, drew more from a Dadaist way of doing and thinking.

His Dadaist bent is evident in his habitual use of modes – of thinking, making, and comportment – that, by analogy with the logic underlying collage practices, lead him to generate innovative meanings, selecting and assembling, in a randomness only apparent, source materials that acquire significance solely in the final project.

And this way of being also emerges in his frequent use of the Dadaist idiom *il pensiero mi si forma in bocca* [my thought forms in my mouth], which he had elevated to a mode of observation, reflection, and judgment, indicating a thought not pre-constituted but taking shape in speech, in argumentation. In argumentation it seeks the grounds of its own credibility.

Dadaist, then, in the way of organizing thought as well as in narrative style: why have a fixed lesson in its contents and telling? The outline is enough, and then the contents are improvised, as in jazz scores; why organize a talk, a presentation according to a sequence of slides? The succession of slides conditions thought, whereas among con-

cepts one can invent endless links and sequences. This is why those who followed his lectures for years maintain they never heard one identical to the previous. This is why, in shaping the teaching framework – even when the results had proved gratifying both in the themes proposed and in the groups of instructors included in the Study Manifesto, he never tried to crystallize the educational offering; on the contrary, his motto remained: *Every year we change!; Create unique, unrepeatable realities; Never propose the same topic again, never place the instructor in the same slot. Routine kills design pedagogy; What kind of instructors are those who, in 2000, teach using acetates from 1965, while outside these walls everything has changed!?*

The teaching work groups were likewise composed by often selecting personalities, experiences, and project visions at opposite poles on the plane of theoretical-critical reflection. Or, if dissimilar personalities were not placed in the same group, they were brought to meet students in successive teaching experiences, so much did he abhor the idea of a single way of thinking, of the *scuola di pensiero* [school of thought]. He never shared absolute, dogmatic visions. He cultivated the idea of the anti-model so that each student could be formed while being contaminated by diverse poetics and cultures of design.

But let us linger a moment longer on *collage and photomontage* as ways to construct reality, to rectify it, to reinvent it. Collage provides unconventional means of inventing new realities by making their different facets perceptible, as was typical of the Cubists, but it also offers unusual ways of representing reality by juxtaposing different materials and techniques, introducing defamiliarizing inserts into given contexts, or rendering certain elements dystopian through their juxtaposition.

And for Seassaro, collage was also a true instrument of representation. Here a fundamental role was played by his immersion in artistic culture and his deep knowledge, not only theoretical but practiced during his years of study in Brera, of pictorial techniques, from the most traditional to those of the avant-gardes.

His penchant for collage was always and inevitably accompanied by a mania for cutting things out: removing from their original context any article, cartoon, or magazine cover that caught his interest, so as to make them available for new contexts of use. This ran from his youth to his very last days. Hence containers filled with meticulously ordered

clippings: from the covers of *Alfabeta* and *La gola* (by Pedrazzini) to those of *Il Male* (by Liberatore), *Frigidaire* (by Pazienza, Scòzzari, and others), up to Altan's satirical cartoons, as well as Umberto Eco's *Bus-tine di Minerva*, Umberto Galimberti's essays in *il Venerdì di Repubblica*, and so on. Cutting out is an act that, in itself, already summons infinite possibilities of reuse.

A device used to facilitate a thought that is never improvised, yet susceptible to those modifications and deepenings that can emerge from time to time when reflecting on the structure and on the ways of articulating the unfolding of the project, and that may require integrations, inserts, or even a revisiting of the order and sequence of topics. A way of thinking and representing thought that is already born hyper-textual, with cross-referencing marks, off-page additions, corrections, erasures, and displayed shifts of position. In Seassaro's many writings, contemporary and friend of Isgrò, it is immediately evident that erasures, too, are a text, one that lets us intuit the leaps and transitions of thought.

A device accompanied by a kit of narrative marks, figures and symbols placed on the page to meet the need to communicate mental processes and paths more effectively, including the possibility of going back and putting everything back where it started. A writing made not only of words, but of spaces and directions that are themselves already a visual text, and then signs, drawings, diagrams, tables. The cosmos boxed in and ordered with tailorly precision across pages crowded with thoughts that, despite their apparent visual disorder, are born already expressed in an utterly finished form.

There is at least one further path that must be followed through to the end to grasp the qualities of his way of thinking by designing: it is total immersion in artistic languages and, more broadly, in visual languages, in writing through images, and among these, in particular, that of comics, which shapes his design style. Comics provide him with the visual-culture tools that fuel his distinctive way of explaining and accompanying the processual phases of the project, through script-graphic narratives made of drawings, tables, and illustrations to support or make written texts more immediate, or, conversely, to contaminate project pages with written notations. His attraction to forms of visual text also came from his earliest, rudimentary learning

tools: above all the illustrated pages of the *Enciclopedia dei ragazzi* [Children's Encyclopedia], which, by his own account, he had avidly absorbed and from which he said he learned all the essentials at a time when the encyclopedia still had the power to encompass and catalogue all available knowledge, offering it through the richness of images derived from an important tradition, that of didactic illustration. A great comfort for a generation whose schoolbooks were almost devoid of images. He would recount that children's books, too, lacked them, and when illustrated pages did appear, imaginative worlds opened up for him beyond the text. And indeed, his vast historical, geographical, and artistic knowledge was highly vivid, and he always sought, even in oral storytelling, to render it visually.

The panoptic urge to fix complex systems with pen in hand by translating them into visual syntheses is remembered by everyone who worked with him and who had the arduous task of digitizing what he had produced by hand. His tables, his procedural and schematizing drawings did not merely represent what existed; they were already configurations and prefigurations capable of giving a precise relational order to the various elements. In other words, they were always acts of design that contemplated multiple alternatives.

These schemas could range from the Study Manifesto, for which he defined a format still in use today, a visually codified world of complex information that set out the educational programming framework for each degree program, all the way to more complex schemas (such as those that related upper-secondary studies to university courses, to Master's programs, *Corsi professionalizzanti* [professionalizing courses], *Corsi d'alta specializzazione* [advanced specialization courses], PhD programs, etc.). Schemas conceived, for example, so that a student could grasp at a glance, without reading pages and pages of the Student Guide, the Faculty's entire educational offering, with the many options available to them in their university and post-university path.

In producing the schema, he had in mind, already from the first stroke, the entire *canovaccio* [framework], the proportion, and the placement of the various parts in the page space, by virtue of their interactions. Collage intervened as a *remedium* where some element had to be integrated because it had not been foreseen or had emerged in the course of the project. We all remember the famous

A.S. 26/4/

VIAIO IN GRAN GARABAGUA

(dalla raccolta intitolata *Ampe*
(EZZOU 1988))

di Henry MICHAUX e di SEASSARO

pittrice infornuata
scrittrice di chiami di viaggio veri (Equador 1923)
o immaginari Viaggio in Gran Garabagua (1912)
Nel paese della magia
Qui Paddeu

Scrive e dipinge in viaggio
o in "trip"
sotto effetto dell'acido (LSD)

Preziosa il senso della quotidianità
nelle sue descrizioni non c'è storia - né tempo
né grandi eventi

è sempre il particolare
il personale
che determina un senso inusuale
del generale
del politico

M. è un antropologo dell'immaginario.
descrive sé stesso nelle infinite possibilità del suo 10.

l'10 diventa mondo, Universo, totalità

"IO è fatto di tutto. Una flessione in una frase, si tratta forse di un altro io che cerca di apparire? Se il sì è mio il no è di un secondo io? Io non è che provvisorio (sembra faccia davanti a qualcuno, lo ad ammire che si cambia in un'altra lingua, in un'altra parte) e gonfio di un nuovo personaggio, che un accidente, una emozione, un colpo sulla testa libererà per l'esclusione del precedente, e con stupore generale, spesso formato istantaneamente. Era dunque già del tutto continuo. Forse non si è fatti per un solo io. Si ha tutto a volerci attendere. Pregiudizio dell'unità. In una doppia, tripla, quadrupla vita, ci si sentirebbe maggiormente a proprio agio, meno così e paralizzanti dal subconscio ostile al cosmo (ostilità degli altri io spogliati). La più grande fatica di una giornata e di una vita potrebbe proprio essere dovuta allo sforzo, alla tensione necessaria per conservare uno stesso io attraverso le tentazioni continue di cambiare".

M. si identifica con tutti gli oo diversi 10 possibili.

Il suo 10 si espone, e assume (involontariamente?) aspetti e comportamenti di altre forme di 10 esistenti.

La dinamica degli 10, inattesa per non dover soffrire la realtà, al tempo stesso la rivela.

(Lo stesso procedimento che c'è in *Quattro*)

Il vero 10, è sempre la morte: presente sempre.

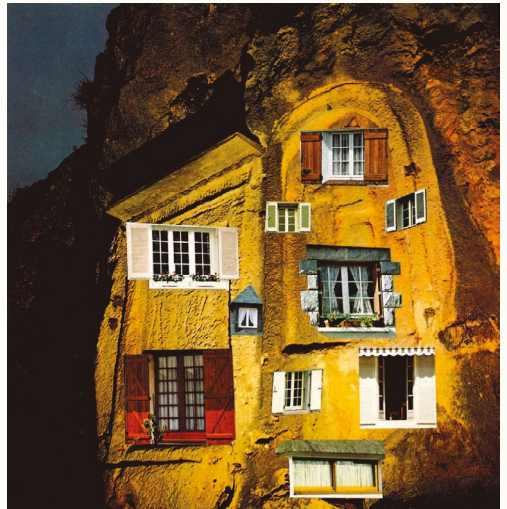




Figure 3.
Visual translations of Michaux's text *Voyage to the Great Garabagne* created using the collage technique by Alberto Seassaro and used as teaching material for Architecture students.

giunte [add-on joints] of multiple sheets, or intersections of sheets within sheets.

Alberto Seassaro's verbal language was anything but banal, both in written prose and in speech. A language of warm, empathetic humanity, trained by his readings of François Rabelais, among his favorite authors. Characterized also by great lexical richness, with the use of concrete, colloquial, popular, and even dialectal terms: a collage here as well. In this he bore the imprint of writers like Gadda, whose work he was introduced to by Bruna Bianchi, a fine linguist and translator, his companion for many years.

He grasped in Gadda the plurality of linguistic registers – from scientific and philosophical terms to archaic usages and even dialect – that he especially flaunted in his writings. Some of his recurring words – *alfine* [at last], *vieppiù* [all the more], *verboso* [verbose], *imperituro* [undying], *acconcio* [fitting], *cimento* [trial], *tenzone* [contest], *scalchignato* [battered], *macché* [no way], *sgorbagna* [colloquial: a mess/kludge], *cippirimerlo* [zilch; sweet nothing], *ciau pep* [colloquial interjection: *so long!*] – and some of his sayings – *El püsse san el g'ha la rognà* [the healthiest one has the mange; i.e., even the perfect have flaws] – testify to a repertoire ranging from slang to high register to dialect. And, on this last front, one cannot overlook the influence exerted by his unbridled love for Jannacci's texts – to whom he would have awarded the Nobel Prize in Literature.

He was also quick to coin neologisms: *abluire* [to blue-highlight], for example, a term he used to indicate the act of highlighting text on a computer (which, as is known, turns bluish); *ignatico* [enig-stagnant], a midpoint between *enigmatico* [enigmatic] and *stagnante* [stagnant] (as in *qui la situazione si fa ignatica* to say a situation is complex and knotted), where the onomatopoetic *gn* digraph perhaps owes something to Gadda's neologism «*gnommero*» [snarl; tangle]. Or *museabile* [museum-worthy; museable], as Eleonora Lupo and Raffaella Trocchianesi remind us in their chapter.

To close, two notes on Seassaro's thought. The first describes Alberto Seassaro's way of working with fellow colleagues.

Alberto Seassaro belonged to a generation that Andrea Branzi, speaking of Joe Colombo, a few years younger than Seassaro and in some respects his inspiration, baptizes as *the jazz generation* (Branzi, 2011, p. 5).

A generation that «knew [...] how to sense that the era of great harmonies, of great symphonies, was coming to an end and, in their place, an anarchic social creativity was taking the stage» (Branzi, 2011, p. 5), with the magic of chorality, with deft improvisation outside given scores, with solo performances yet effects in unison. Having worked with Alberto Seassaro for a very long time, I cannot recall a single project conceived without, at its base, the inclination to form a group, to let each person play their part, introducing individual creativity and interpretation held together by an adaptive score; to accept *off-program – off-score*, precisely – as something to be valued; to build ironclad design processes in which, however, the flexibility of collective intelligence made room for improvisation; to welcome the combination of different rhythms and sensibilities; to make working together light and engaging. In this task, he put in the swing himself! Among the stories drawn from his musical past, jazz emerges as a metaphor for a certain way of understanding creative interaction among people and for the necessity of yielding something personal so the group can prevail. That is how his first youthful jazz-band project was born: Alberto Seassaro, a proud trumpet player, realizing there were too many trumpets in the group, said, *evabbé io suonerò il banjo altrimenti la band non si fa* [fine, I'll play the banjo, otherwise the band won't happen]. With all due respect to Charlie Parker! Controlled jazz anarchy is a fitting image for twenty years of working together.

The second concerns Alberto Seassaro's relationship with making and the relationship between his making and time.

Procrastination was the watchword. Wasting time was a conquest of life. Alberto Seassaro's success is undoubtedly the product of his brilliant, visionary ideas, of his bold ruptures and his battles to achieve the impossible, but above all of continuous, intense, almost obsessive work. Intensity is a hallmark that aptly characterizes both his being and his doing, and it attests to his passion.

And yet that *continuum* consisted, at once, of an attention that never shifted from the objective and of working in fits and starts: meditative pauses in a wandering without apparent destinations. In those moments he was elusive.

No sooner did his eyes light up at a new goal to chase, and no sooner had he unleashed his stalwarts on projects whose ultimate meaning

only he mastered, than, after stirring up half the world, creating expectations, setting deadlines, the running after things would diabolically turn into being chased by things. The things to be done became an obsession; the things to be done constrained him, distressed him. Keeping him from being ensnared became everyone's job.

These pauses, these intervals, were a necessity: as a deadline approached, urgency made him razor-sharp, productive, focused: there he was, writing in one sweep, almost without hesitation or second thoughts, and mapping out cluster-projects that touched teaching, research, and design simultaneously.

Wasting time as an art. He loved rewatching Fellini's interview on the loss of time elevated to a lifestyle, indeed, to a true life goal. But not the wasted time of *I vitelloni*, idle time in pursuit of vainglorious aims (another term belonging to Seassaro's vocabulary, which he had duly underlined in his reading of Flaubert's *Madame Bovary*), rather time spent seeking the *intervallo perduto* [lost interval], distraction, detachment, separation, the zones of passage between one thing and another, the voids that must be cultivated because there, precisely there, unexpected experiences can occur. Wasting time as the art of the pause that adds knowledge.

When he put his head down to work, even then intense labor never coincided with optimizing time and energy. On the contrary, if he could, he lingered *wasting time* even during work time. *Never optimize! Optimization was an annoyance, a mortal sin of the contemporary age! In design, economies of scale, the pared-down approach, don't pay; you must always do more, overflow.* Why do little when you can do a lot? Why work by day if you can work at night? Why work on weekdays if you can work on Sunday! To the complainers he'd reply: *you're bound to petty-bourgeois rules!* Then, though, he'd make himself forgiven by bringing you something he knew you adored, for example *caldarroste* [roasted chestnuts] kept warm in his *blu marin* [navy blue] sweater, to quote Jannacci's *Musical*. Perhaps it is the sum of these traits as «the breezy tone even on the most important occasions [...] while at the same time maintaining a subtle sense of institutions combined with the ability not to lose sight of every small detail of the world around him in order to inscribe it within the design he has in mind», as Luciano Crespi recounts in his chapter in this volume. Or the union of «a

firm determination and a vision that might have seemed impracticable, with the gifts of a fine strategist, concealed by irony and by a *dégagé* attitude that neither intimidated the world of architects nor alerted them to his real intentions», as Cristina Tonelli instead relates here, or, again, his deftness in the «microphysics of building», as Flaviano Celaschi reminds us in his chapter, that led Alberto Seassaro to *depistare* [throw off the scent], to use again a term that appears in Luciano Crespi's chapter, an entire system marked by decades of inertia, proceeding step by step, collage by collage, inexorably toward the goal. A goal that he himself had neither foreseen nor perhaps fully wanted, so great was his desire for a free life. From the day after his retirement, Alberto Seassaro no longer concerned himself with anything relating to Politecnico di Milano. To those who asked him for news of the Politecnico he would reply: *Politecnico? It was my job, I loved it and it gave me much, but it wasn't my life. My life is elsewhere.*

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15. Design *Momentum*. Genesis and Development of a School

Paola Bertola

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15.1 *Of Design*. All the Forms of Design that Exist and All Those Yet to Come

The Faculty of Design was established at a moment when favourable cultural and institutional transformations converged, and in a context where certain leading figures at Politecnico di Milano were opening up unprecedented spaces for change. It was in this phase that Alberto Seassaro was able to weave the relationships needed to materialise the project for a new school which, like many others he developed over the course of his career, was an expression of his ability to seize opportunities rapidly as they arose, leveraging available resources and motivating action through visions that were at once bold and clear-sighted. The Faculty of Design thus began to take shape starting from the very name that Alberto Seassaro gave it, starting from that *del design* [of design], which in condensed form encapsulates its most distinctive identifying trait. Following the experience of the degree programme in *Industrial Design* in 1993, the spring of 2000 saw the establishment at

Politecnico di Milano, by Ministerial Decree and in line with the government measure for the *Decongestionamento degli Atenei* [decongestion of universities], of the *III Facoltà di Architettura* [Third Faculty of Architecture]. This name, still tethered to architecture, makes it possible to slip an essentially unprecedented project into the opportunity offered by the law, while at the same time accommodating a certain conservative caution within Politecnico di Milano itself, which tends to draw what is new back inside a familiar identity perimeter.

From this moment on, Alberto Seassaro set in motion a fine-grained and insistent rhetorical work, made up of epistolary exchanges and lengthy debates ¹, aiming from the outset, with stubborn precision, at that *of design* which many, including some of the closest and most sympathetic to the project, are far from convinced by. This resistance does not stem so much from the use of the English word *design* instead of *disegno industriale* [industrial design]. The latter expression was already culturally codified and already used at the university to indicate the new Faculty. Yet the potential of the term *design*, understood in the sense of *progetto* [design as project], compared with *disegno* [drawing], whose meanings are more limited, is widely recognised, as are the constraints that the qualifier *industriale* [industrial] could introduce into the understanding of the multifaceted nature of the discipline and of its domains of application.

The whole debate in fact hinges on that *del* [of], which



1. Alberto Seassaro, *Lettera Denominazione della nuova Facoltà di Architettura dedicata alla tematica del Disegno Industriale*. [Document →](#)



POLITECNICO DI MILANO FACOLTÀ DI ARCHITETTURA
Corso di Laurea in Disegno Industriale

Milano, 22 maggio 2000

Al Rettore
Prof. Adriano De Maio

Al Preside della Facoltà di Architettura
Leonardo Prof. Cesare Stevan

Al Senato Accademico

Agli uffici competenti

Oggetto: denominazione della nuova Facoltà di Architettura dedicata alla tematica del Disegno Industriale

Caro Adriano,

la presente per fare il punto sulla questione terminologica – questione apparentemente secondaria ma importante –, al fine di adottare un criterio di denominazione riconoscibile, certo, concordato e rispondente alle diverse esigenze di comunicazione, che sia utilizzabile in questa fase transitoria, in attesa di un definitivo, prossimo, consolidato assetto statutario basato sul principio delle Facoltà Tematiche.

Le denominazioni fino ad oggi utilizzate sono state varie e non univoche:

- Nel primissimo documento con cui era stata avanzata al Ministero la proposta di costituire una nuova Facoltà ai fini del decongestionamento degli Atenei, è scritto "Facoltà di Architettura – Design";
- Nella prima comunicazione pubblica ufficiale, all'inaugurazione a Como dell'Anno Accademico 1999/2000, il Rettore comunica: "Facoltà di Architettura – Disegno Industriale";
- Il decreto ministeriale istituisce la "III Facoltà di Architettura – Bovisa";
- La relazione del Preside della Facoltà di Architettura Leonardo, con cui si indice il bando di afferenza alla nuova Facoltà illustra in modo documentato la sua denominazione, approvata dal Senato Accademico e indica:

Via Durando 38/A, 20158 Milano – Tel. 02/2399.5961 – Fax 02/2399.5977

Alberto Seassaro defends with such determination that in the end everyone, even those still unconvinced, is forced to give way. A minimal detail, and yet a significant semantic leap, produced by the shift from a simple preposition to an articulated one: a crucial nuance for expressing the identity of the school that Seassaro has in mind. The sceptics immediately read that definite article as a form of intellectual arrogance, a will to present the school as the custodian of *il design* [the design], the only design, and thus as the bearer of the only possible disciplinary vision of design. In short, not a school *of* design like the others, but simply *the* School of Design, par excellence.

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I remember the exhausting debates in which Seassaro, whom we called *Sea*, laboured to explain that *del* [of] design, drawing on all the dialectical skill at his disposal and making generous use of metaphors, a rhetorical device which, as a true exegete of Marcel Proust, he regarded as one of his most effective expressive tools. Here are some recollections of that linguistic dispute, which Sea eventually won, like so many others. That *del design* is closer to the Latin idea of *de* [de] (design): it designates a place where all knowledge about design is gathered, where the foundations of every present and future way of designing find, and will find, a definition. Or again, it is akin to the sense we give the articulated preposition when we name places such as, for example, *La casa del-la chiave* [literally, the house of the key], understood as the place where every possible key can be made because everything is known about keys, and everything about keys continues to be learned.

This is how the school of *all the designs* that exist and all those yet to come begins to take shape, ready to embody the intellectual anarchism that inspired Alberto Seassaro's vision.

15.2 Poli-Téchne. A Cognitive Infrastructure for Design

Alberto Seassaro's trajectory is closely bound up with Politecnico di Milano, with its history and its identity, and it is also for this reason that it does not develop within *Progettazione architettonica* [Architectural

Design] but rather in the context of *Tecnologia dell'architettura* [Architectural Technology].

Politecnico di Milano belongs to that group of universities established in Europe and North America in the second half of the nineteenth century. After the flowering of theological, philosophical and, more generally, humanistic disciplines in the first phase of academic development, beginning in the Middle Ages, the advent of the First Industrial Revolution gave a first impulse to the development of scientific studies. Universities were reorganised, with a sharper demarcation of the domains of knowledge and a particular emphasis assigned to these disciplinary areas. Their importance grew further with the onset of the Second Industrial Revolution, thanks to the increasing application of scientific discoveries in the technological and engineering fields (Cohen, 1994). It was precisely in this phase that all the main Western countries committed to the creation of universities with a strong scientific and technical orientation, with the aim of forging a more direct relationship between research, technological development and industrial development, closely interconnected with local production systems, which were often involved in their foundation and financing (Deti & Gozzini, 2009). This transformation underlies the creation of the principal polytechnic universities in Europe, such as Lausanne, Zurich, Munich, Delft and, indeed, Milan. But it also led to North American institutions such as the Massachusetts Institute of Technology in Boston and Stanford University in San Francisco (Baker, 2014).

This scientific and technological trajectory does not stop there; it gradually extends to other disciplinary domains, as happens in particular in the schools of architecture that emerge within these institutions, and as happens at Politecnico di Milano. Here the *Architectural Technology* component grows stronger over time and offers Alberto Seassaro an ideal ground on which to develop his vision of design. The *Laboratorio di Sperimentazione di sistemi e componenti per l'architettura* [Laboratory for the Experimentation of Systems and Components for Architecture], which he coordinated as a lecturer for many years, anticipates that vision, at once instrumental and experimental, of the scientific and technological dimension that would become a distinctive feature of the cultural project of the Faculty of Design. Chemistry, physics, mathematics, computer science and their mechanical and

engineering applications are all incorporated into the Faculty's educational project, but on the condition that they can be flexibly placed at the service of design. Virtually all the Engineering Departments are called on to collaborate, and all are pushed to develop new contents, new modes and new tools for teaching, not always managing, however, to break down the entrenched logics that often characterise scientific communities. In many cases, they respond with curiosity, by listening and by initiating interdisciplinary dialogues that still today nourish the educational project.

But the school's *cognitive* infrastructure needs much more: all those humanistic and artistic components that complete an idea of *sinestesia delle arti* [synesthesia of the arts], on which Alberto Seassaro had been working since his degree thesis. The academic community of *Architecture* proved unable to respond to these demands, folded in on itself around a debate that was overly abstract and ideological, too closely tied to visions far removed from the social, cultural and technological transformations then under way. The educational project therefore draws on other models and other contributions, in the conviction that the question of form must once again be placed at the centre of the education of designers and, in particular, design practitioners, and must be addressed in full in order to govern those *perceptual, symbolic, psychological, informational and communicative implications* that form carries with it (from Ugo La Pietra and Alberto Seassaro, *La ricerca morfologica* [Morphological research], 1966 – grey literature without page numbering. Alberto Seassaro Private Archive). In defining its features, a key point of reference is the teaching of industrial design in the Academies of Fine Art and the long preparatory work undertaken at Politecnico di Milano itself in the previous decade, on the initiative of Cesare Stevan, which drew on the contribution of Tomás Maldonado and on the experience he had gained as Director of the Ulm School (1957-1962). (Crespi, 1984). These insights flow into an articulated disciplinary framework that brings together *Aesthetics, Semiotics, Perception and colour, Ergonomics*, as well as more *exotic* teaching strands (for the polytechnic context of the time) such as *basic design*, alongside scientific and engineering contributions.

Together with technology and the arts, the cognitive infrastructure that must sustain the education of designers needs a final ingredient,

which takes shape as a synthesis between the experimental practice pursued by Seassaro in the artistic and architectural fields and the tradition of the *Werkstätten* [workshops], the Ulm-derived ateliers dedicated to exploring techniques and materials. In the highly intellectualised context of the Faculty of Architecture, which regarded this dimension with suspicion, reading it as an *Arts & Craft* approach (Cumming, 1991), Seassaro, through relentless persistence, progressively won square metres of space to be devoted to photography, woodworking and model-making techniques. The establishment of the Faculty of Design in 2000 and the project for the new Bovisa Campus offered an opportunity to fully articulate and structure this vision in the *Laboratori Sperimentali per il Design* [Experimental Laboratories for Design], inaugurated in 2002 on an area of over 6,000 square metres.

These laboratories were not, of course, created with the aim of training tailors, carpenters or model-makers capable of materially producing artefacts, but of building spaces in which future designers could develop, experiment with and *physically* test their knowledge of artefacts. The literature of the last two decades on *embodied cognition* now offers us a solid theoretical and methodological ground on which to validate this choice (Shapiro, 2011; Höök, 2018): cognitive processes pass through the body, and cognition arises from bodily interactions with the physical world [23 32](#).

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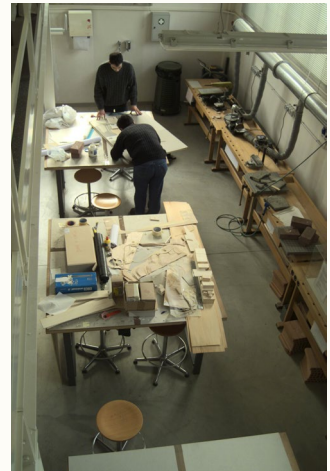
We had agreed to relocate to the Bovisa district in 1998, into a rented building on those frayed edges of Milan that at the time were hard to recognise as belonging to the category of city.



2. Panoramica degli
esterni del campus
Bovisa.
[Document →](#)



3. I laboratori strumentali
del Campus Bovisa.
[Document →](#)



The decision had been made on the promise that we would be the first to have a new premises. Over the following two years, Sea would remind this promise regularly and insistently both to us (to reassure us) and to the university leadership: *deported* and *hospitalised* (the reference was, of course, to the rather depressing aesthetics of the building) we had earned the new Campus. In August 2000, in the design and decision-making vacuum that August tends to produce in almost every workplace, we were there with him in Bovisa, working on the project for the *D.I. Lab*: the new system of Experimental Laboratories for Design.

15.3 Experiencing Knowledge. Laboratories for Making and Laboratories for Thinking

The learning model that organically structures the degree programmes is articulated into educational units of different kinds, which oversee the processes through which knowledge and skills are transmitted. The theoretical-critical dimensions are entrusted to single-subject courses, the interdisciplinary ones to integrated courses, and the instrumental and design dimensions to *Design studios*.

This latter teaching format (the design studios) borrowed from the tradition of the Faculty of Architecture, is undeniably the core of the new educational project and runs through it in its entirety.

The constructivist model (Piaget, 1970; Von Glasersfeld, 1995), which inspired its introduction in architectural studies, is translated into a range of studio types that feed the process of cognitive layering and *reconfiguration* accompanying students from the acquisition of specific skills functional to design, to the acquisition of the very ability to design.

The central idea of actively constructing knowledge takes shape in an educational structure which, on the one hand, leads to the accumulation of instrumental skills through dedicated studios, such as *Disegno e Comunicazione Visiva* [Drawing and Visual Communication]; and, on the other, complements these, already from the first year, with Design Studios of increasing complexity, culminating in the *Laboratorio di Sintesi Finale* [Final Synthesis Studio] in the final year.

Engaging students in design practice right from the outset, even when their knowledge and instrumental skills are still immature, is a central objective and rests on a number of specific theoretical foundations.

First and foremost is the conviction that *design knowledge*, by its very nature, cannot be entrusted to purely theoretical modes of transmission or to deductive learning. Design is learned through inductive processes, that is, through the repeated practice of designing and the self-reflection it generates (Schön, 1983, 1985). As many have argued, Nigel Cross first and foremost in his definition of *designerly ways of knowing* (1982, 2006), design implies specific modes of thinking that develop through the accumulation of cases, typical solutions and formal principles: in Piagetian terms, a progressive reorganisation of cognitive schemes. In design studios, students reread each new brief in the light of previous experiences (other projects, visual references, feedback received), thus exemplifying the constructivist idea of learning as the integration and restructuring of knowledge.

Yet for Alberto Seassaro, learning to design requires going beyond the inductive process and tapping into Peircean *abduction* (Duen, 2011). As the semiotician Massimo Bonfantini, who directly contributed to the educational project as a lecturer at Politecnico di Milano explains, abduction goes beyond and integrates both deduction, which builds knowledge through analysis, and induction, which generates knowledge through the exploration of concrete applied cases (Bonfantini, 1985). Designing is the «logical form of inventiveness», that is, of thinking that produces novelty, and is brought into relation with the three Peircean types of inference – deduction, induction and abduction – which Bonfantini associates with different cognitive operations: analysis, synthesis and abstraction. Abduction has a *destabilising nature*: it introduces hypotheses that call established schemata into question, opening up the possibility of new interpretations and new practices (Bonfantini, 2021). In essence, the teaching model is designed so that students learn to design in a way that creates the conditions for the new to emerge. Building on this vision, a completely original studio component was introduced, with no precedent either in the School of Architecture or in international schools: the *Laboratorio di Metaprogetto* [Metadesign Studio]. This studio is perhaps the most

tangible expression of the encounter between semiotics and design, and of the cultural debate that marked a certain phase in the development of the Faculty's educational project, a phase that involved not only internal lecturers at Politecnico, such as Bonfantini, but also external designers who developed a structured theoretical reflection on this theme, such as Andries Van Onck. The Metadesign Studio is conceived as a studio experience in which the object of design is the design process itself, especially in its early phases of research and hypothesis formation. The aim is to develop in students a capacity for *metacognition* with respect to the elaboration of their own design thinking, and thus the ability to *design the design process*, regulating and steering their cognitive processes towards that goal of *producing the new* which constitutes the School's cultural manifesto.

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Sea was firmly convinced that every idea, every choice, every occurrence had to be aired as widely and as repeatedly as possible, beyond the tight circle of colleagues and collaborators closest to him (fully aware that this generated in many a sense of impatience, at times outright irritation – which usually had the side-effect of stretching his disquisitions well beyond what was strictly necessary). Certain notions in particular were taken up and reiterated on every possible occasion, even with students, for whom he was always accessible. I remember many of these eccentric, surreal conversations with whichever student happened to be in front of him (and who had probably come with some fairly pragmatic grievance), leaving his office somewhat overwhelmed and confused, knowing they had not obtained what they had asked for, but far more aware of the importance of abduction in the education of designers.

15.4 *In fieri*. A School in Transformation

The cultural project of the Faculty of Design emerges as a clear expression of the multifaceted, non-elitist vision that Alberto Seassaro sought to embody. The School is meant to create space for all the expressive forms, and for the theoretical, linguistic and technical re-

search, that design is capable of generating within the rich and eclectic Italian landscape, while from the outset keeping an eye on the international context. The initial degree programme was first organised into *Indirizzi* [degree tracks] and later into autonomous degree programmes, adding to the core of *Progettazione del prodotto industriale* [Industrial Product Design] both *Design degli Interni* [Interior Design] and *Comunicazione visiva* [Visual Communication], to which *Moda* [Fashion Design] was soon added as well, overcoming a certain cultural snobbery still present in the worlds of architecture and design.

This educational structure is anything but monolithic; it is conceived as an open container, capable of making room for diversity and thematic exploration. Courses and studios can be freely characterised, engaging with emerging domains and bringing research and experimental work directly into the classroom. In other words, it welcomes, without ideological prejudice, the polyphony of voices that marks the many theoretical visions of design which have always shaped the Italian DNA, embodied within the teaching staff by figures often in strong dialectical tension with one another, such as Andrea Branzi, Francesco Trabucco and Ezio Manzini. Therefore, within the school, approaches coexist that range from the exploration of the poetic, expressive and reflective dimensions of design, to the solid core of industrial design, through to a drive towards *design activism* that pushes design beyond its most established boundaries.

Alberto Seassaro never sought to steer these tensions towards a single, unified vision; on the contrary, he capitalised on the growth of the School to make room for everyone, to experiment with emerging themes and, where promising, to develop new educational strands and new initiatives. *Legge 509/1999* [Law 509/1999], which introduced the two-tier structure of *Laurea* and *Laurea Magistrale* [Bachelor's and Master's degrees], was interpreted from the outset as an opportunity to flank the established tracks with new pathways that would explore the potential of design vertically, through new thematic foci, and horizontally, in its interdisciplinary relations. On one front, specialised programmes are created in key sectors for the Italian economy, as in the case of the opening of the Como campus at the heart of the textile-furnishing production districts; or in the case of the nautical sector (initially as a master's programme and later as a Master's degree),

for which an adventurous triangulation between Milan, La Spezia and Pescara is set up, in order to valorise specialist competences that integrate design, mechanical engineering and naval engineering.

The second degree level is, in fact, the ideal terrain on which to develop more fully the idea of multidisciplinary underpinning the cultural project, by forging alliances with other Departments, Faculties and universities. This is the case, for example, of the degree programme in *Design & Engineering*, which involves the Departments of Mechanical Engineering and Materials Engineering, or of the track in *Design & Management of Fashion*, developed in collaboration with Università Bicconi. Within this trajectory, Seassaro gave space to the drive towards new applied and speculative territories, showing a marked ability to anticipate phenomena that are now firmly established at international level. In this way, a genuine school of thought took shape, one that no longer regarded design solely as the *executive* function of giving form to artefacts, but as a *cognitive process* capable of fostering innovation at a systemic level. Within this transformation, figures that are sometimes very different from one another find space, such as Francesco Mauri and Ezio Manzini, soon joined by researchers and PhD candidates including Giulio Ceppi, Elena Pacenti, Stefano Maffei, Anna Meroni, Francesco Zurlo, Roberto Verganti and many others thereafter.

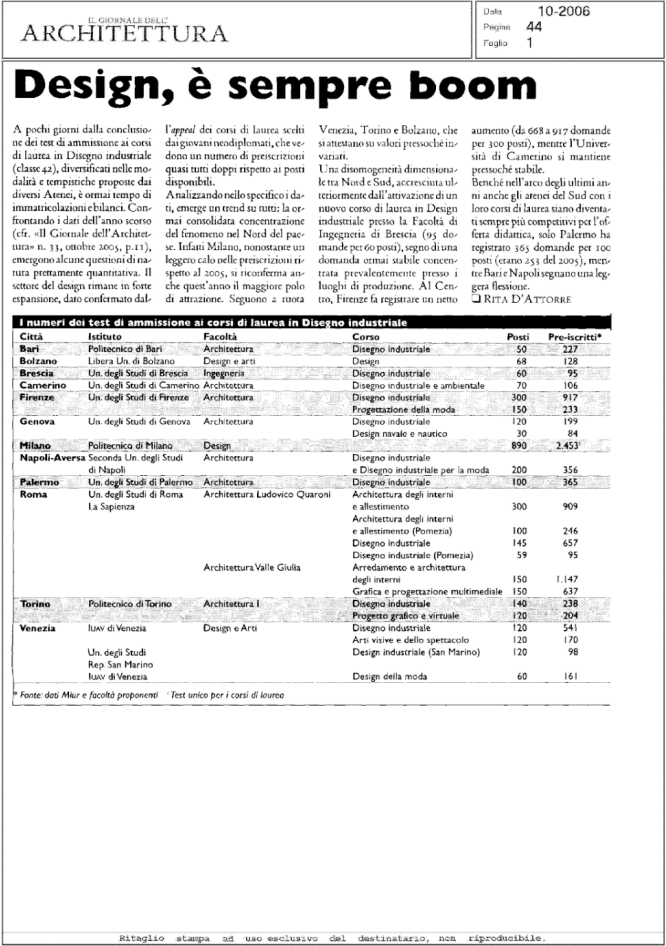
The domains of design expand to encompass product-service systems, services, strategies, experiences, organisations and society: the vision becomes pervasive, it permeates courses and studios, translates into master's programmes and then flows into the first English-language Master's degree at Politecnico di Milano, in *Product-Service-System Design*, launched in 2005. It was a bold choice, the expression of a highly dynamic community open to innovation, singularly led by a Dean who was anything but familiar with the English language (which, incidentally, would only many years later, in 2014, be officially adopted for all Master's degree programmes at Politecnico di Milano).

The consolidation of the School also passes through what might be described as a strategy of *cultural occupation*, which Alberto Seassaro pursues on several fronts. First of all, numbers: he opposes by every means the position of those who see only advantages in creating a kind of *boutique school* of design, like many at international level, with low student numbers (a solution that the other Faculties of the uni-

versity are, moreover, quite willing to endorse in order to curb the expansionist drive of *Design*). The annual deadline for setting enrolment targets often turns, for Seassaro, into a battle over every single additional student, driving a process, accompanied by heated confrontations, that aims to create the largest Design School in the world. His underlying vision is rooted in a firm belief in the social role of education that a public institution such as Politecnico di Milano must be able to interpret.

It is also strategic, because the aim is to accelerate the legitimization of the initiative by bringing a designer in ogni impresa [a designer in every firm] and, not by chance, design programmes were the first within the entire university to introduce a compulsory internship; but also by bringing companies and professional designers into the School, insisting that the teaching staff should never be more than 50% academics, in the conviction that its embeddedness in the economy, in society and in culture must never be relinquished. The Faculty of Design, now the School of Design, still bears many traces of that trajectory, but it has also changed significantly, continuing to display an ability to interpret and capture the spirit of the times. A project that is constantly *in fieri*, a School born and developed by seizing a *moment* of opportunity, but also capable of acquiring *moment* in the sense that physics gives to this term: a School in continuous motion.

Figure 1.
Design, è sempre boom [Design, always booming]. In *Il Giornale dell'Architettura*, October 2006.



It is not easy to recall all the experiments undertaken, the thematic lines opened and then discontinued, all the projects and transformations carried out. And I believe that *Sea's* most important legacy lies precisely in his intellectual curiosity, in his readiness to look at what is new without prejudice, accepting a certain familiarity with error and failure and always finding the tenacity to look ahead, to transform, to change.

I remember a remark of his, made in response to my delight at having wrapped up yet another project with an impossible deadline: «I'm glad you enjoy finishing things». Since then, I have nurtured the seed of doubt, which by now has become a certainty, about the real importance of outcomes and milestones; and I know that meaning, motivation and gratification lie not so much in the results themselves, but in the process of bringing them about, and even more in the project of conceiving them.

Alberto Seassaro believed in the salvific power of design, the only means we have to navigate that boundary between the unfathomable depth of knowledge and the most vital expressions of the world.

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16. Teaching, According to Alberto Seassaro

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I was not a student of Alberto Seassaro in the Faculty of Architecture, but I had the good fortune to work for and with him starting in the years of my doctoral studies, thus having the chance to observe his ways of thinking, designing, and implementing systems, models, and approaches to design pedagogy.

Teaching stood at the center of his concerns, never marginal as it often is for academics more inclined toward research.

As the first President of the Degree Course in *Industrial Design* and, subsequently, the first Dean of the Faculty of Design – Third Faculty of Architecture (later the School of Design) – he enjoyed the privilege – a rarity in the Italian academic landscape – of launching a set of new entities, engaging with and valorizing the legacy of the past while seeking to minimize preexisting constraints and conventions.

It was a privilege by no means fortuitous, but rather stubbornly and tirelessly pursued by creating the political, technical, and economic conditions that would allow these *new beginnings* to take place. One

1. Design System.
Timeline →



need only scan the timeline of *Design Philology* [1x](#) to read their dense succession: among them, for example, the first Degree

Course in *Industrial Design* (1993) within the Faculty of Architecture and its subsequent numerous offshoots and spinouts; the creation of the POLI.design Consortium and its many master's and specialization programs (1999); the establishment of the Faculty of Design – Third Faculty of Architecture (2000); the launch of two external hubs, in Como (2000) and La Spezia (2005).

All of this was made possible by his tireless, all-absorbing work in commitment and dedication: suffice it to recall holidays, weekends, and nights spent at the university; the gates climbed because the campus was already closed; and, finally, the crowning of a dream, the unofficial possession of the keys so he could enter his office freely, without time limits.

Alberto Seassaro was not a solitary figure, but faced these many challenges with his group of young collaborators, of which I was proud to feel a part: in turn (obviously often without notice) we would find ourselves drawn into meetings whose duration was always unpredictable (or rather, predictably long); at other times we took part in broader gatherings that might then take on the shape of a dinner or a collective trip.

Each of us had clearly defined tasks and responsibilities, and Alberto Seassaro coordinated this team with drive and firmness.

Under his guidance, restricting attention to institutional teaching alone, a significant number of new degree programs, specializations, tracks, and concentrations were launched over the span of two decades. Alberto Seassaro approached this work as a designer, seeking quality and innovation even in the face of perpetually limited resources and procedural and regulatory constraints that were often too stringent. In giving form to this significant ensemble of educational pathways, he moved with agility from the overall vision to the detail, sketching the cultural and meta-project framework underpinning the entire educational offer, and then forging the distinctiveness of the individual degree programmes.

The starting point for any line of reasoning, at both macro and micro scales, was the rigorously large blank sheet on which began to trace schemas ever broader yet ever deeper, in a continual process of *zoom in* and *zoom out*, of enlarging the system and defining its various elements. He designed curricula with an approach that recalled the technological culture of design, identifying the different components

and the ways in which they could be combined to generate a rich, articulated, and coherent whole.

16.1 Components of the Educational System

Alberto Seassaro's *Lego bricks* of teaching were varied, and many of them are still present in the School of Design's educational offer (hence the use of the present tense in their description, except for modules no longer active today).

The *Corsi Monodisciplinari* [Single-Discipline Courses] constitute the basic teaching units, pertaining to a single subject, generally preparatory to project-based activity; examples include *Drawing, Mathematics, Marketing, Technical Physics*, and *Materials*.

The *Corsi Integrati* [Integrated Courses] are modules constituted as single-discipline courses, «but lectures are delivered in coordinated modules of at least 25 hours each and taught by two, or at most three, full professors, who will serve on the examination committee. Integration may concern the same disciplinary area or different disciplinary areas» (AA.VV., 1995, p. 14). The aim is to foster a dialogue, by no means easy, between professors of different disciplines (design and management, design and chemistry, design and ICT, and so on), as well as of different backgrounds, for example academics with practitioners or industry managers.

Some of these courses are part of the core curriculum, others are *electives*: the student may select them from a substantial number of alternatives in both the humanities and the technological domain.

The *Laboratories* represent the component inherited from the Faculty of Architecture, though suitably revised so as to fit into this polyphonic educational framework: «are multidisciplinary teaching structures which, under the responsibility of a tenured professor, are intended to carry out theoretical-practical activities» (ibidem, p. 14). Among the elements of novelty one should note the multidisciplinary, the possibility of addressing theoretical as well as practical activities in laboratory mode, and, indirectly, the involvement of adjunct faculty, appropriately coordinated and guided by the tenured professor.

Laboratori di Sintesi Finale [Final Synthesis Laboratories] are an *expanded* version of the laboratories, with a theme identified in advance, clearly delineated, broad, and experimental in nature; a significant number of professors (appropriately combined in terms of disciplines and *background*); a maximum number of participants *limited at 50*; and a greater number of hours (and credits) so as to accompany students toward the preparation of the final thesis project. «The purpose of the final synthesis laboratory is to guide the student, through multidisciplinary contributions, to the mature and complete preparation of a thesis in the field of industrial design» (ibidem, p. 14). The laboratory therefore does not conclude with a grade, but with admission to the degree examination.

With the exception of the single-discipline courses, this list of basic teaching units reveals an interest in implementing, in an extensive and systematic way, integrated forms of knowledge, made possible by the sharing of teaching responsibility among professors drawn from different disciplines and professional trajectories.

The integration (and not the mere juxtaposition) of different bodies of knowledge or viewpoints is pursued, encouraged, in some cases even compelled, through the final examination, which is necessarily designed and administered jointly.

It is through this constraint that Alberto Seassaro sought to avoid the traditional mode of university teaching, in which each professor manages their own hours and the concluding examination autonomously, without engaging with other colleagues, other forms of knowledge, and other perspectives.

Workshops, by contrast, were and still are teaching structures characterized by a more authorial approach. They are intensive, one-week, full-time modules led by strictly external professors, design professionals invited to lead the class in keeping with their own conception of the profession. The workshops provided a way to involve the *great masters* of Italian and international design in teaching, and to foster our growth, then *young* researchers, by serving as their assistants. Thanks to the workshops, over the years students were able to experience the irascible, gruff temperament of Enzo Mari (who gave a grade of 18 to the entire class); as well as the childlike spirit of Alessandro Mendini; Angelo Mangiarotti's attention to detail (who set as the

brief the design of a joint); or the Spanish humor of Perry King and the British humor of Santiago Miranda.

Of a different nature, by contrast, are the workshops conducted in collaboration with companies: besides financially supporting the teaching, they set a project brief, share their history and aspirations with students, and prompt them to develop projects close to how the profession actually operates.

The *Open Lectures* were series of design lectures open to the city, promoted by the *Final Synthesis Laboratories*. They were held in venues deliberately outside the campus of Politecnico di Milano, in *unconventional sites* of cultural production across the city (such as museums, showrooms, commercial, theatrical, and ex-industrial spaces, as well as public spaces of various kinds), with the goal of making

2. *Milano Design Open Lectures 2002*. Lezioni di design aperte alla città, promosse dai Laboratori di Laurea della Facoltà del Design.
[Event→](#)



the School's work known to the city and of fueling debate on design [23](#).

It is written in the past tense because today this way of teaching is more occasional, both owing to the complexity and effort these initiatives required and, perhaps, because the mission of making Politecnico di Milano's design known to the city was, after some years, brought to completion. *Internships* consist of a set of activities totaling at least 250 compulsory hours for admission to the degree examination. From the outset these activities could be carried out outside the university, in the form of *Stage* [internship] at companies and professional studios, or inside, by attending internship courses arranged with the ADI association and focused on professional practice and the study of corporate case studies.

This tableau of elements was further enriched by other components, for example study-abroad exchanges, instructional exhibitions, and additional extra-curricular activities.

Among the latter were the integrative courses, taught by masters such as Guy Bonsiepe, Ernesto Gismondi, Marco Zanuso, and Achille Castiglioni, and the seminar cycle *Cultura del disegno industriale* [Culture of industrial design], curated by Tomás Maldonado and coordinated by Raimonda Riccini.

Each student was, finally, asked to gather progressively their curricular and extracurricular experiences into a paper portfolio, which, in the fourth year, led to a course expressly dedicated to developing a

digital portfolio, with the aim of teaching students to collect, systematize, and communicate their work and, at the same time, to prepare to enter the world of work.

The annual instructional exhibition of all courses, not only of thesis projects as in the Anglo-Saxon tradition, as well as the students' portfolios, constituted different ways to create occasions for exchange and dialogue among different courses and laboratories, to offer an overall view of the quality of teaching on offer and, at the same time, to attempt to gather and let what had been done settle.

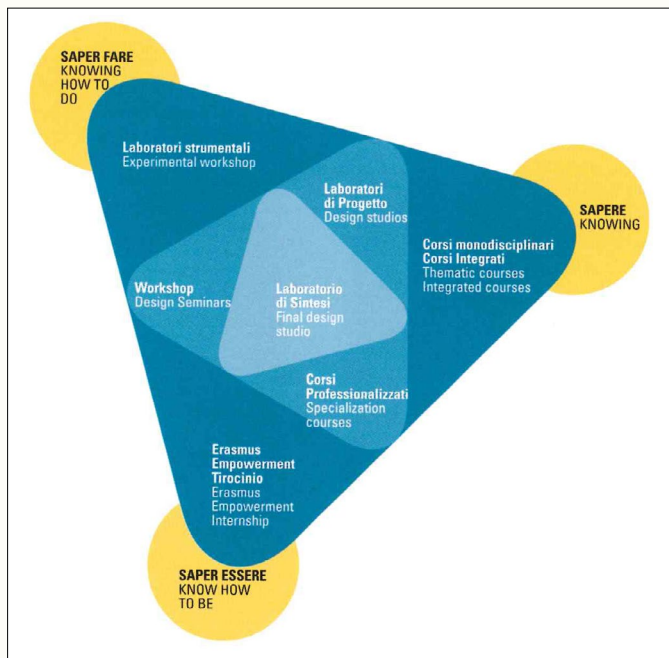
16.2 The Systemic Vision

The systems-and-components approach entails defining how to give coherence to the ensemble of modules (in some cases themselves articulated into didactic sub-units), so as to offer an organic, consistent pathway rather than a mere *patchwork* or an open shelf to dip into. Hence the many sets, subsets, connecting lines, asterisks, and cross-references in Alberto Seassaro's diagrams, which made his overall vision explicit while at the same time recalling rules, compositional models, and modes of implementation.

Some of these diagrams were supporting tools for lines of thought destined to disappear; others were fortunate enough to be taken up again, redrawn, and published.

Among the latter was, for example, an image repeatedly published in the *Guida dello studente* [Student Guide] that framed the role of the different components in the educational project for designers, showing with great clarity the distinct contributions offered by *il sapere* [knowledge], *il saper fare* [know-how], and *il saper essere* [knowing how to be] of future graduates. The founding principle was to stimulate students' multiple intelligences, from the one linked to theoretical knowledge to the practical one, of the hands, and finally the personal one of a behavioral and social kind: a manifold whole, reconfigurable with different facets and balances, yet in any case necessary to place graduates in a position to operate and integrate effectively into the world of work. Starting from this high, broad vision, Alberto Seassaro progressively moved into the detail of the various components, their

Figure 1.
Diagram first published in the
Guida della studente [Student
Guide] for academic year
2003-2004.



modes of composition, and the related rules of combination and aggregation. Among these I recall a few main ones.

The system rested on *modularity*, that is, the adoption of minimum instructional units of 25 hours, corresponding – subsequently – to 2.5 credits. This was – of course – a design-specific *ad hoc* module, different from that adopted by other Faculties and Degree programmes (30 hours/3 credits). Over a semester, a single-discipline course amounted to 50 hours, an integrated course to 25+25 hours, a project laboratory to at least 150 hours, and so on, composing a highly *efficient* timetabling *tetris*, with activities of 4 or 8 hours per day, which made

the most of students' time by avoiding both overlaps and dead time, and enabled intensive use of classroom spaces, always too scant for the School's needs.

Belonging to this *outlook of timetable clarity* was the choice to dedicate entire cross-programme days to elective courses, so as to allow all enrolled students to attend them. One day per week was, finally, always free for students, to enable them to carry out their exercises and laboratory work autonomously, availing themselves, if needed, of the technical laboratories, conceived from the outset to support them. This set-up, which today appears consolidated, stood out in contrast to other contexts characterized by timetables *full of holes* and/or overlapping schedules.

The composition of the various teaching units across the academic year was, by contrast, marked by a *variable cadence*, designed to stimulate students and train them to face reflective phases of inquiry and in-depth study alternating with accelerations toward project finaliza-

tion; extended periods devoted to the *Final Synthesis Laboratories* and shorter periods for the Workshops, generally scheduled mid-year precisely to break the rhythm of daily routine.

The time span of the Study Plan up to 2000, five years in length, was, by contrast, divided into *three distinct instructional cycles*: an initial, preparatory cycle common to all students; a central, themed cycle, chosen by the student; and, finally, a concluding cycle tied to the *Final Synthesis Laboratories*, again chosen by the student and not necessarily in continuity with the preceding one.

The propedeutic cycle had been designed on the basis of a *Gestalt-theorie* [Theory of Form] rooted in the tradition of the Bauhaus and the Ulm School, yet at the same time suited to contemporary needs, not limiting itself to the psychology of form but encompassing, for example, the physical-mathematical sciences and the historical sciences:

From the various syllabi there emerge, in fact, the foundations of perception (visual and haptic), of color, of ergonomics, of design methodology, of operative morphology and processes of morphogenesis, of semiology, as well as subjects providing knowledge of the history of modern and contemporary art, and of design, and, on the other hand, subjects providing knowledge of operative instruments. (AA.VV., 1995, p. 48)

Beyond these subjects, aimed at developing students' historical and theoretical-critical awareness, the First Cycle envisaged laboratories intended, among other things, to help students *grasp their own limits*:

It is as if the terminal aspect of studies were brought to the beginning, through the critical integration of immediate experience, theoretical concepts, and motivations. [...] It is also evident that the practical aim is to liberate their (of the students) creative, expressive, and imaginative potential (moreover avoiding recourse to substitutes or lures fashioned from extemporaneous empiricism, from mannerisms and fashions, from parroting and merely craft-like procedures) through solid critical foundations and practical experiences enlightened by theoretical and scientific contributions. (Ibidem, p. 48)

The Second Cycle was devoted to technical-scientific-professional training intended to enable the student «to arrive at executive design syntheses in the fields of industrial design, controlling, also through the making of prototypes, the technical procedures of production» (AA.VV., 1994, p. 15), whereas the Third Cycle was dedicated to specific thematic and disciplinary in-depth studies (centred on the Final Synthesis Laboratory and the internship) and to the degree examination.

From the standpoint of *disciplinary articulation*, the educational pathway was divided by Alberto Seassaro – always in dialogue with the full faculty board – into ten disciplinary areas (subsequently streamlined to seven), identified as follows: *Cultura del progetto* [Culture of design], *Storia e critica artistica* [Art history and criticism], *Disegno industriale e ambientale* [Industrial and environmental design], *Tecnologia dei materiali e controllo di qualità dei prodotti* [Materials technology and product quality control], *Produzione e pianificazione del prodotto di serie* [Production and planning of serial products], *Disegno e rappresentazione* [Drawing and representation], *Scienza dei materiali* [Materials science], *Scienze matematiche e scienze dell'informazione* [Mathematical sciences and information sciences], *Scienze statistiche, sociali ed economiche* [Statistical, social, and economic sciences], and *Scienze fisiche e fisiche applicate* [Physics and applied physics].

Each area was appropriately delimited and described «in light of current cultural orientations and without prejudice to the developmental dynamics of the disciplines pertaining to the Areas» (AA.VV., 1995, pp. 17-18), and was quantified in terms of total hours, making evident the weight of each within the overall educational pathway (a total of 3,600 hours), in pursuit of the proper balance among scientific disciplines, the humanities, and design.

From a cultural and organisational standpoint, each Area was chaired by a coordinator (selected from among *trusted colleagues of his*), tasked with coordinating the relevant professors, who generally came not only from design but also from other disciplinary sectors. As with collegial examinations, these organisational units were intended to promote dialogue among different disciplines, seeking to orient disciplinary teaching toward the project dimension and to make it organic to the overall educational project.

The intersection between the various didactic units organised in cycles and the disciplinary Areas gave rise to a matrix that may have made students shudder at its complexity, but which, to a more experienced eye, still appears clear, detailed, and sophisticated.

This meta-structure of the Degree Course presents itself as a kind of *periodic table of design*, capable of synthesising the composition of Alberto Seassaro's *recipe* for educating a contemporary industrial designer.

The various didactic components ultimately aggregated within instructional pathways articulated in terms of cultural and professional profiles, taking – depending on the case – the designation of tracks, pathways, and thematic strands. These configurations are the most time-variable part of the entire *Seassaro system*: each year they were defined, articulated, adapted, and modified so as to respond to the cultural evolution of the discipline in relation to ongoing social, economic, and productive changes, but also to shifts in the academic context at the scale of the university and in the national regulatory framework.

To reconstruct the evolution of the tracks, pathways, and thematic strands, memory does not suffice: it is necessary to analyse the sequences of Manifesti di Corsi di Studio [Study Program Prospectuses], stored at the Teaching Office of the School, as well as the various editions of the Student Guide.

Figure 2.
The matrix of the distribution of total hours, first published in the *Guida dello Studente* [Student Guide] for the academic year 1994-95, p. 17.

Ripartizione del monte ore

Ciclo	Monte ore complessivo	Corso di Laurea in Design Industriale		AREE DISCIPLINARI										Monte ore annuo		
		TABELLA "C"	Attribuzione attività	Totale	I Cultura del Progetto	II Storia e Cultura Industriale	III Disegno industriale e Progettazione	IV Tecnologie del Materiale e Processi di Produzione	V Produzione e Progettazione del Prodotto e del Sistema	VI Disegno e Rappresentazione	VII Storia del Design	VIII Tecniche Informatiche e Multimediale	IX Tecniche Industriali e Ambientali	X Gestione Aziendale e Progettazione		
I	800	Cultura del Progetto	500	500	150	150			100				50		50	4.400 ore 2.200 ore di studio
		Disegno Industriale	100	50			100									
		Produzione e Progettazione del Prodotto e del Sistema	100	50						100						
		Tecniche del Materiale e Processi di Produzione	100	50							100					
II	2100	Cultura del Progetto	1900	2200	100	300	100		250	150	250	100	100	50		12.000 ore 6.000 ore di studio
		Disegno Industriale	100	50			100									
		Produzione e Progettazione del Prodotto e del Sistema	100	50												
		Tecniche del Materiale e Processi di Produzione	100	50			100									
III	750	Cultura del Progetto	100	50	150	100										3.600 ore 1.800 ore di studio
		Disegno Industriale	100	50												
		Produzione e Progettazione del Prodotto e del Sistema	100	50												
		Tecniche del Materiale e Processi di Produzione	100	50			100									
		Gestione Aziendale e Progettazione	100	50				100								
3600			2500	1100	3600	300	300	500	300	200	300	250	150	100	100	28

16.3 The Main Variations Over Time

Each year, with the Student Guide, Alberto Seassaro released a newly updated version of his reflections on the discipline and on his educational model, subjecting it to the test of practice and then, accordingly,

changing, refining, and implementing it on the basis of the experience gained. If, at the outset, the Student Guide was a simple stapled booklet summarising the essential contents of the courses on offer, it progressively took on the features of a genuine publication, in which operational contents aimed at students grappling with their study plan were integrated with texts, schemas, and in-depth discussions concerning the underlying cultural project and its modes of implementation.

Many of the texts were authored by Alberto Seassaro, while all of them were coordinated and validated by him. The evolution of the Student Guide makes manifest, year by year, the development of Seassaro's thinking on the teaching of design and, at the same time, the principal mutations and challenges faced in those years: from the more gradual ones, such as internationalisation (with a progressive publication of texts also in English starting in 1997) and digitalisation with the transfer of course contents from print to the university website, to the more disruptive ones, such as the introduction of the *Riforma per l'autonomia universitaria* [Reform for university autonomy] and the adoption of the 3+2 system, as per DM 509/1999 (from 2000), and the adoption of *legge 270/2004* [Law 270/2004] (from 2009-2010).

Seeking to synthesise an evolution as ramified and complex as this, a few phases can be identified.

The first five years of the Bachelor's Degree in *Industrial Design* were intentionally experimental, as permitted by the then-applicable university regulations, which allowed facilitations in the creation of the teaching staff and greater flexibility in terms of exceptions and variations to the *Ordinamento* [degree regulations] and the related *Statuto* [statute] for a number of years equal to the duration of the study program.

In 1998-1999, after the first five-year period of experimentation, a *Nuovo Ordinamento* [New Degree Regulations] came into force: orientations were consolidated, tracks were structured and diversified, and, in parallel, the disciplinary areas were *streamlined* and merged, reducing them from X to VII.

The system seemed close to finding a point of equilibrium, but with the signing in June 1999 of the *Dichiarazione di Bologna* [Bologna Declaration], the intergovernmental agreement on cooperation in the field of higher education, and Ministerial Decree *DM 509 Regolamento recante norme concernenti l'autonomia didattica degli atenei* [Minis-

terial Decree 509: Regulations on university teaching autonomy] of November 1999, conventionally called *Riforma per l'autonomia universitaria (RAU)* [University Autonomy Reform], the complex process of redesigning the university system began, leading to a *Nuovissimo ordinamento* [Newest Degree Regulations]. Alberto Seassaro also reacted promptly to this tsunami, anticipating the launch of the 3+2 structure already in 2000-2001, and then shaping the new system by articulating it into distinct degree programs starting from AY 2003-2004, with five separate first-cycle degrees (Industrial Design; Communication Design; Fashion Design; and Interior Architecture in Milan; and Industrial Design in Como) and five analogous second-cycle degrees (since 2010 termed *Magistrali* [Master's Degrees]).

With the consolidation of the 3+2 system, new reflections and opportunities emerged regarding the possibility of establishing new pathways in discontinuity with the foundational three-year cycle, including in collaboration with other universities. Building on these hypotheses, in 2005 new Master Degree Programs were launched in *Design & Engineering*; in *Product-Service System Design* (originally *Design del Sistema Prodotto-Servizio*, later *Product Service System Design*); and in *Naval and Nautical Design* (in collaboration with the University of Genoa), together with the creation of the new Hub in La Spezia.

The last challenge faced by Alberto Seassaro as Dean was represented by *Law 270/2004*, implemented starting in AY 2009-10 for the *Lauree triennali* [three-year Bachelor's degrees] and in AY 2010-11 for the *Lauree magistrali* [Master's degrees].

16.4 Changes in Cultural Profiles and the Themes of Educational and Research Exploration

The Degree program in *Industrial Design* preceded the establishment of the entire organizational system of design at Politecnico di Milano, which includes, alongside the Faculty/School (founded in 2000), the POLI.design Consortium (established in 1999) and the Department of Design (founded in 2001).

From this derives the fundamental role played by the Degree program in exploring the applied domains of design, including experimental and frontier areas, in order to understand their potential and the interest they aroused among institutions and within the entrepreneurial fabric.

Alberto Seassaro firmly believed in the connection and complementarity between research and teaching (both institutional and post-degree), and in the need to encourage the faculty community to venture down new, even little-known, paths. Consequently, after the propaedeutic cycle, flexible thematic emphases were introduced, modifiable year by year in terms of offerings and freely selectable each year, even discontinuously, by students.

These took different forms and names over time, progressively coming to identify not only cultural and professional profiles but also possible domains for design exploration.

Initially they were termed «*percorsi didattici coerenti*» [coherent educational pathways] (AA.VV., 1995, p. 15), corresponding to the themed tracks present in the second cycle and the orientations of the third cycle, and consisted of: *Progettazione delle strategie di prodotto* [Product Strategy Design], *Progettazione degli ambienti* [Environment Design], *Progettazione delle comunicazioni visive e multimediali* [Visual and Multimedia Communication Design].

In AY 1997-1998 these *programmatic lines of didactic coordination* were supplemented with two further tracks: *Progettazione della luce* [Lighting Design], an area very dear to Alberto Seassaro, and *Disegno visuale e progettazione delle interfacce* [Visual Design and Interface Design], prompted by Giovanni Anceschi and Alessandro Polistina. The track on environmental design, supported by Maurizio Vogliazzo, was refined under the name *Progettazione industriale degli ambienti* [Industrial Design of Environments], perhaps to underline a cultural approach different from that of our architect *cousins*.

In AY 1998-1999 the *Nuovo Ordinamento* [New Degree Regulations] came into force, providing for the consolidation of the tracks, understood as characterizations of the study pathway across the full five-year program, into *Product* and *Communication*, to which, starting from the following academic year, *Interiors* and *Fashion* were added (and with them the increase from 500 to 650 enrollments per year).

Starting in AY 1999-2000, the sub-articulations of the *Orientamenti* into *Indirizzi* [sub-tracks] were extended in temporal scope and took the name *progetti didattici triennali* [three-year educational projects]. These were broad thematic containers, developable across multiple levels of complexity over the three years (from year 2 to year 4), which included, for example, *Sport Design*, *Naval Design*, *Light & Lighting*, *Expo Design*, *Vendere e comprare nell'era dell'accesso e della sostenibilità* [Selling and buying in the age of access and sustainability], *Medical Design*, *Transportation Design*, *Interaction Design*, and *Design and Management of Cultural Heritage*.

Like the *Indirizzi* and *Orientamenti*, these three-year educational projects did not constitute rigid pathways but rather simple ways of organizing a cultural offering within which students were free to explore and move from one domain to another. The joint work across multiple years and levels of training enabled the faculty to construct, aggregate, and sediment bodies of shared knowledge and reflection that subsequently led to new developments, including degree pathways, professionalizing university master's programs, or stable research areas within the future Department.

In AY 2000-2001 and 2001-2002, following the establishment of the Faculty and the new Como campus, three additional tracks were added to the Bachelor's Degree: *Product/Ergonomics* (in Milan), *Product/Furniture* (in Como), and *Textiles/Fashion-Furniture* (in Como), increasing and redistributing incoming student numbers to 600 for Milan and 150 for Como.

In AY 2003-04 the *Laurea specialistica in Disegno industriale* [Specialist Degree in Industrial Design] was articulated into two *indirizzi* [tracks], *Prodotto* [Product] and *Servizi* [Services]. The introduction of *Design dei servizi* [Service Design] responded to the then-emerging transformations in the social, economic, and production contexts of Western countries, anticipating early vectors of innovation.

The establishment of *Design dei servizi* [Service Design] in 2003 anticipated by years what would later be proposed by numerous other universities in Italy and abroad, once again demonstrating the ability of the educational system at Politecnico di Milano to read the emerging signals of ongoing change – social, economic, and production-related – and to provide timely and appropriate responses.

Service Design remained a track until AY 2009-10. With the further change of degree regulations, due to *Law 270/2004*, implemented starting in AY 2010-11, all *lauree specialistiche* [second-cycle degrees] took the name *lauree magistrali* [Master's degrees], and all *indirizzi* [tracks] were necessarily deactivated, closing twenty years of experimentation.

16.5 Change as a Choice

Some components, such as the tracks and the Final Synthesis Studios, were intentionally conceived from the outset as transitional modules, easily activated and deactivated by the governing bodies of the Degree program and the Faculty/School.

While university teaching requires stability, so as to avoid transient pathways from one system to another, Alberto Seassaro strongly believed in continuous change: to fuel his project-making and ongoing pursuit of improvement; to identify new domains in which design could play a role and promote innovation; and to prompt faculty to update their teaching and not put down roots in a specific *comfort zone*. Thus, each year, by design, the *thematic emphases* changed, the offering of the Final Synthesis Studios was redesigned, the studios' professors rotated and, with them, the placements of instructors in other courses; faculty teams, course titles, and the objectives to be pursued were modified. All this aimed at continuous improvement, but also at dismantling certain academic habits that Alberto Seassaro always tolerated poorly, from the notion that full professors should not teach in the early years to their limited inclination to explore and to engage, year after year, with new colleagues, new courses, and new content.

These continual modifications were driven not only by cultural or institutional reasons, but also by more prosaic economic necessities, dictated by changing rules for distributing the teaching budget across different degree programs and Faculties/Schools. After the glorious early years of paying faculty *a piè di lista* [line-by-line, as itemized], the University – understandably – introduced the allocation of an advance budget. Alberto Seassaro's yearly exercise was therefore to identify, ahead of time, the incentive mechanisms introduced by the *Ateneo*

and to modify the didactic framework accordingly to maximize available funds: terminological adjustments, increases in integrated courses and practicum modules, changes to mix didactic mixes, and other measures were all expedients aimed at ensuring teaching quality while securing the necessary financial coverage.

16.6 Experimentation to and Beyond the Limit

Alberto Seassaro knew how to do politics and, consequently, defended his ideas with conviction and tenacity; he built consensus around his projects, developed them, consolidated and strengthened them, constructing dialogues, alliances, convergences, organizational systems, and safeguards. An anarchist by temperament, Seassaro knew in depth the normative and regulatory framework in which he operated, so as to understand its limits, gaps, and openings and to extend the room for maneuver of his projects.

Moreover, as noted earlier, he was tireless; he lived (and at times slept) at Politecnico di Milano and was not intimidated by relentless rhythms and tight deadlines. In this context many ideas and initiatives were born: some never saw the light of day, others had a brief yet luminous life, and others – the majority – are still active today. Among the second category, I would like to recall two episodes that, in my view, were courageous.

Following discussions among Alberto Seassaro, Severino Salvemini, and Stefano Podestà – both professors at Bocconi University – in AY 2000-2001 a Degree track in *Design e management della moda* [Fashion Design and Management] was launched. The idea of this inter-campus program was to combine design and managerial competencies, offering an integrated course of study with classes at both universities. Unfortunately, the collaboration with Bocconi University ended after only four years.

The second episode was, shortly thereafter, the activation of the Bachelor's and Master's Degree programs in *Architettura degli interni* [Interior Architecture], launched for a single academic year in 2003. It was a small gem of educational design that envisaged a

curriculum belonging to two different degree classes – *Design* and *Architecture* – no easy feat, given the need to integrate in a single degree program the dual constraints and regulatory requirements. Those who enrolled that year in the Degree Program in *Architettura degli interni* had the privilege of being at once graduates in Design and in Architecture, with access also to the *Ordine degli Architetti* [Professional Order of Architects]. In both cases, these were ambitious and certainly audacious projects, perhaps too pioneering for the context in which they came to light, that sought to challenge, even if only for a few months, rigid disciplinary boundaries.

16.7 The Relationship with the City

A note on the relationship with the context in which the Degree Program, later the Faculty/School of Design, operated could not be missing from this exploration: the city of Milan.

Alberto Seassaro was aware of the cultural richness offered by Milan in the field of design and, consequently, drew extensively on these resources:

The creation of this Degree program was made possible [...] thanks also to the rich and important local concentration of scholars, freelancers, and business leaders who work professionally in design in the broad sense – human resources and competencies that have made Italian design famous throughout the world. (Seassaro, 1999, p. 5)

A high proportion of teaching, especially design studios and workshops, has always been delivered predominantly by professional designers seconded to teaching, often paired with academic figures, frequently young.

The former guaranteed experience, practice, and the ability to think through and about the project, while the latter shared theoretical and methodological reflections, design tools, and the organization of teaching. It was a virtuous balance that has consistently offered abundant stimuli for students and mutual enrichment for the faculty.

A great many designers were involved as adjunct instructors, all chosen for their design capabilities regardless of their signature languages; many had been friends of Alberto Seassaro for a lifetime, while others were contacted specifically. Beyond the names already mentioned in relation to the workshops, the faculty included figures such as Piero Castiglioni, Pierluigi Cerri, Angelo Cortesi, Jonathan De Pas, Donato D'Urbino, A.G. Fronzoni, Stefano Giovannoni, Makio Hasuike, Isao Hosoe, Giancarlo Iliprandi, Ugo La Pietra, Claudio La Viola, Paolo Lomazzi, Antonio Macchi Cassia, Alberto Meda, Bob Noorda, Franco Origoni, Roberto Pieraccini, Umberto Riva, Paolo Rizzatto, Italo Rota, Marc Sadler, Claudio Silvestrin, Denis Santachiara, Anna Steiner, Andries Van Onck, Max Vignelli, as well as Aldo Cibic, Paola Navone, Nanni Strada, and Clino Trini Castelli, together with younger generations of designers such as Fabio Bortolani, Giulio Iacchetti, James Irvine, Matteo Ragni, Paolo Rosa, and Paolo Ullian, to give only a sense of the breadth and heterogeneity of those involved.

Some among them, not listed here, later embarked on academic careers as well, thanks to Alberto Seassaro's ability to involve people in the educational project and to accompany them in their growth.

16.8 Conclusions

Over more than two decades of dedication to the educational project of design, Alberto Seassaro continuously reflected, experimented, modified, and adapted his complex didactic model.

In tracing this brief history of teaching, I found myself wandering through many meanders and intersections between the main narrative and secondary stories that I did not wish to leave out. What has emerged, I realize, is a text that is somewhat fragmented and not always fully organic, one that is difficult to conclude except by highlighting what this intellectual and operational legacy means for us today. Following, in fact, a reverse process, I can say that the didactic units developed by Alberto Seassaro still form the basis of the educational model of the School of Design. They are the alphabet from which the current degree programs are composed. The modes of aggregation, thematization, and organization are partly legible in filigree even

though they have been, in part, necessarily simplified and, in part, institutionalized (or perhaps, to be institutionalized, they necessarily had to be simplified), and thus taken up and metabolized by the organizational system of the University.

What emerges, overall, is a farsighted educational project and, precisely thanks to the systems-and-components approach, a flexible and pliable one, capable of being modeled and adapted as time evolves: an open system in continuous dialogue with its cultural, social, economic, and production context; a resilient system (an admittedly overused term), endowed with antibodies, able to withstand adversity and to equip itself with safeguards against possible *competitors*. It is a precious and living legacy that surfaces, evolves, and interacts with the daily work of all of us, faculty and students, of the School of Design at Politecnico di Milano.

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17. Mnestic Traces. Documents and Testimonies of an Institutional Revolution

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17.1 Reading History through the Words that Wrote It

The birth of the Design System at Politecnico di Milano and in Italian universities is Alberto Seassaro's best-known project. Also the most celebrated one. A selection of his writings marks, here, some of the key stages in this story. Anecdotal accounts would tend to slip into epic tones. By contrast, institutional documents, minutes and working communications allow us to glimpse, in filigree, the complex weave of a vision that unfolds step by step in day-to-day practice, ultimately leading to a radical and profound renewal of an entire institution. In his writings one senses his anxieties about an institutional system that needs to be accompanied and persuaded to welcome a new structure with innovative organisational forms; he traces the network of relationships, inside and outside Politecnico di Milano, to which he turns in order to secure material, political and cultural support; one clearly feels the strains of this work of construction and the enormous effort

required to materialise a political-cultural decision into knowledge infrastructures adequate to the training of a cultural and professional figure that presents itself with novel features and needs, different from those of the traditional profiles of the architect and the engineer.

This, in turn, entails the renewal of teaching models. In these documents we find the hallmarks of Alberto Seassaro's institutional commitment: his tenacity, his indomitable temperament, but also a tone of amused cordiality and lively irony.

In this chapter, we have chosen to let him speak directly, using his own words, drawn from documentary materials such as letters, minutes, institutionally oriented writings, texts addressed to students, etc. A brief introductory note outlines the main stages in the birth and evolution of the Design System at Politecnico di Milano and in Italy.

17.2 Brief History of the Birth of a New Institution

The establishment of the Degree programme in *Design* was owed to the determination and political work of Cesare Stevan, then Dean of the Faculty of Architecture, supported by Tomás Maldonado, in creating at Politecnico di Milano a university structure on a par with the historic international Schools of Design. However, it is to Alberto Seassaro that we must attribute the cultural and institutional vision capable, over the span of two decades, of giving concrete form to the Design System of Politecnico di Milano and to the *Sistema Design Italia (SDI)* [Italian Design System], of which he was the promoter and builder.

Throughout the 1990s, his efforts were directed towards securing the political and material conditions for the creation of the institutional structures of the Politecnico Design System, which would come to fruition in the following decade with a campus at the Bovisa site devoted to them: the Dipartimento IN.D.A.CO. – *Dipartimento di Industrial Design delle arti e della comunicazione* [IN.D.A.CO. Department – Department of Industrial Design, the Arts and Communication] – now *Dipartimento di Design* [Department of Design], the locus of research; the *Facoltà del Design* [Faculty of Design] – now *Scuola del Design* [School of Design], the seat of institutional teaching; and the *Con-*

sorzio POLI.Design [Poli.design Consortium], devoted to the cultural promotion of design and home to master programmes and post-graduate teaching activities. These were years of intense activity in which – through research and teaching – a dense web of connections was built between design and the system of Italian small and medium-sized enterprises; between design and local production systems; between design and industrial districts. The aims that had driven Alberto Seassaro, from the very beginning of his academic career, to connect the contents of research and those of teaching find their full realisation here. Indeed, the relationship between research and teaching constitutes the true fulcrum of his cultural policy, articulated on several occasions not only as a transfer of knowledge from research to teaching but also as a flow of new knowledge which, from the design experimentation taking place in teaching, returns to nourish research.

The design of teaching activities is conceived so as to leave room for the various research groups in the Department, enabling them to bring up-to-date content into the educational programmes.

As Chair of the degree programme and later as Dean of the Faculty, he sought to foster the continual renewal of themes for design reflection, particularly in the *Laboratori di Sintesi Finale* [Final Synthesis Studios] – studios devoted to accompanying students in the *Tesi di Laurea* [degree thesis]. Emerging also from this research-teaching nexus, the perimeter of design intervention was redrawn, extending its scope beyond the traditional sphere of industrial products to include immaterial artefacts such as communicative artefacts; interactive and relational systems; domestic interiors, urban exteriors and complex objects such as territories, events and cultural heritage assets.

It is again this research-teaching nexus that, within a few years, made it possible to conceptualise and define the systemic nature of design and of its related ecosystem, consisting of cultural infrastructures (sector associations, publishing, training and research bodies, events, etc.) and professional ones (the complex world of support activities such as photography, model-making, etc.), and the strategic dimension of design intervention, which was then translated into curricular training paths, university master programmes, research activities, etc. At the same time, within Politecnico di Milano, Seassaro promoted all the actions needed to create the conditions for the *De-*

sign area to break away from the Faculty of Architecture and to develop so as to give rise to autonomous teaching structures, which would be fully realised from 2000 onwards. In this sense we should read the project for offices and support infrastructures for the educational project: the *ufficio Dida* (*Didattica per il Disegno industriale*) [Dida Office – Teaching for Industrial Design], supporting innovative institutional educational projects (degree and specialist degree programmes, including inter-faculty and inter-university ones) and experimental initiatives (master programmes, *corsi IFTS* [Higher Technical Education and Training courses], continuing education courses, etc.); the *ufficio Relè* (*Relazioni estere*) [Relè Office – International Relations], devoted to cultivating exchange relationships with the network of international schools operating in the field of *Design*; the *ufficio Rap* (*Rapporto aziende-professioni*) [Rap Office – Companies – Professions Relations], for the activation of curricular internships, the building of stable relationships with the system of enterprises and the professional world, and the monitoring of educational profiles in relation to the needs and transformations of the labour market; and the *ufficio Set* [Set Office], dedicated to enhancing educational activities through exhibitions and events, and the core for the development of the project to establish instrumental laboratories (*Laboratorio di Fotografia e Movie* [Photography and Movie Laboratory]; *Laboratorio di Modellazione fisica e virtuale* [Physical and Virtual Modelling Laboratory]; *Laboratorio di Allestimenti* [Exhibition Design Laboratory]; *Laboratorio di Luce e colore* [Light and Colour Laboratory]; *Laboratorio di Moda e maglieria* [Fashion and Knitwear Laboratory]; *Laboratorio di Reverse modeling e virtual prototyping* [Reverse Modelling and Virtual Prototyping Laboratory], etc.). At the same time, his ability to weave institutional relationships laid the foundations for the construction of the Italian university network of design, with the creation at various universities (Bolzano, Venice, Turin, Genoa, Florence, Pescara, Rome, Naples, Bari and Palermo, to which Salerno, San Marino, Alghero, Brescia and Ferrara would be added in the following decade) of degree programmes, faculties and departments of *Design*, and with the launch of a research activity that brought together all the university sites active in the field of design around research topics whose contribution would prove crucial to re-defining the role of design in the Italian economic-productive system.

At the end of the 1990s, he promoted the establishment of the *Coordinamento Nazionale dei docenti e ricercatori del Settore Scientifico Disciplinare H09C (poi ICAR/13) Disegno industriale* [National Coordination of Lecturers and Researchers in the Scientific-Disciplinary Sector H09C (later ICAR/13) Industrial Design], which in 2005 took on the institutional form of the *Associazione dei docenti e ricercatori in Disegno Industriale – Società Italiana di Design* [Association of Lecturers and Researchers in Industrial Design – Italian Design Society] (initially *AUDI – Associazione Universitaria Disegno Industriale* [AUDI – University Association for Industrial Design] and later *SI.Design – Società Italiana del Design* [SI.Design – Italian Design Society]), of which he became President. In those same years he also set up the *Conferenza Nazionale dei Presidi e dei Presidenti di Corso di laurea di Disegno industriale (CPD)* [National Conference of Deans and Chairs of Degree Programmes in Industrial Design], of which he would remain President until 2010.

In this capacity, he worked to ensure that, alongside generalist education, each site would introduce, within its research and teaching activities, educational paths with a design vocation specifically oriented towards the needs of its territory. Local production systems, as well as contextual cultures, received renewed attention, which in turn fed into the editorial output of those years.

With this aim in view, we can read the strategy pursued to create a unified research network and a strong relationship with the surrounding cultural and productive context, within which the *Ricerca MURST Il ruolo del disegno industriale per l'innovazione di prodotto. Sviluppo delle risorse progettuali del Sistema Italia tra risorse locali e mercati globali* [MURST research project *The role of industrial design for product innovation. Development of Italy's design resources between local resources and global markets*], later abbreviated as *SDI, Sistema Design Italia* [Italian Design System], played the role of an incubator. It opened up an important reflection on the very nature of design research as a promoter of innovation and as a competitive lever for Italy in global markets. In 2001, the *Compasso d'oro* award assigned to the SDI research marked the consolidation of the process of building the network of university researchers in *Design*. In the motivation text, the research is described as «Precious and fundamental tool for understanding and disseminating the phenomenon of Italian design, use-

ful both for specialists and for a wider audience, whose simplicity and structural organisation make it easier to approach knowledge, thus rendering a major service to the culture of the field» [19](#).



Note 1.

[Link→](#)

The first decade of the 2000s was, for Alberto Seassaro, the decade in which the Design System of Politecnico di Milano took shape. It was the decade in which his institutional, cultural and scientific commitment was directed towards consolidating what we can now describe as one of the most important university realities for mass education and research in the field of design. It was also the decade in which the Italian university community of design developed and became firmly established.

Within Politecnico, these were the years in which the departmental structure (IN.DA.CO. Department) and the Faculty of *Design* took shape, bringing the teaching system to completion and maturity through the articulation of the single degree programme in *Industrial Design* into the bachelor's and specialist degree programmes in *Design della Comunicazione* [Communication Design], *Design del Prodotto* [Product Design], *Design degli Interni* [Interior Design] and *Design della Moda* [Fashion Design].

The latter programme was established in 2000 thanks to an agreement, actively sought and promoted by Seassaro, between Politecnico di Milano and Università Bocconi, which led to the creation of the *Indirizzo in Design&Management della moda* [degree track in Fashion Design & Management], later transformed into a joint Master's degree programme between the two universities. From this project there subsequently also emerged the establishment of an inter-university consortium in which, in the field of education and research in the fashion sector, Politecnico di Milano, Università Bocconi and Università Cattolica would all be active. In these same years, the Master's degree programmes in *Product Service System Design* – the first university programme taught entirely in English – in *Design&Engineering* – a joint programme run with the Faculties of Industrial Engineering and Industrial Process Engineering – and in *Naval and Nautical Design* – a joint inter-university programme with the University of Genoa – were also established, together with the creation of the degree programme in *Furniture and Textile Design* at the Como campus. In his role as Dean of the Faculty, he launched a series of pilot initiatives, some of which

would later be replicated in other parts of the university: internship activities as a way to test how far the educational profile matched the needs of the professional world, but also as an opportunity to build a relationship of trust with the business world; guidance activities for both enrolled students and prospective students, including exhibitions at the beginning of the academic year, thesis presentations at the *Triennale* [Triennale design museum] as a way of opening up the university world to the city, the *Design Open Lectures* [1](#) – design lec-

1. *Milano Design Open Lectures*. Lezioni di design aperte alla città, promosse dai Laboratori di Laurea della Facoltà del Design.
[Document →](#)



2. ADI Index 2002 – Il primo sito della Facoltà del Design.
[Document →](#)



tures held in places that are significant for the culture of design in the city of Milan; the annual appointment at the *Salone del Mobile* furniture fair called *Designing designer*, an international seminar on emerging themes in the field of design; the *Caselli POLI-Tecno* project [POLI-Tecno Gatehouses project], for the reuse of the Porta Garibaldi gatehouses as a venue for presenting the outcomes of research and experimentation arising from academic activity; the creation of the Faculty website [2](#) and of all those communication tools needed to connect the university world with the outside world; and the completion of the instrumental laboratories supporting teaching – the largest system of laboratories for design, capable of supporting the educational experimentation of a mass Faculty.

With the aim of consolidating research, he also renewed doctoral activity with a reformist spirit. A first step in this policy of reorganisation was the promotion of a connection between the PhD programme in *Design* and the doctoral programmes of other departments.

This led to the creation of the *Dottorato in Metodi e tecniche del disegno e sviluppo prodotto* [PhD programme in Methods and Techniques of Design and Product Development] in connection with the Department of Mechanics; the *Dottorato di Tecnologie e design per i Beni Culturali* [PhD programme in Technologies and Design for Cultural Heritage] in connection with the BEST Department [Building Environment Science and Technology]; and the *Dottorato di Architettura degli interni* [PhD programme in Interior Architecture] in connection with the *Dipartimento di Progettazione* [Department of Planning]. Subsequently – once the system had reached maturity – there followed the reconvergence of the various articulations of design into a single PhD programme in Design within the IN.DA.CO. Department.

On the research side, these were also the years in which departmental life was consolidated and support was given to the formation of *Unità di Ricerca e Didattica (UdR)* [Research and Teaching Units] focused on both new and already mature themes.

On a personal level, he focused his research interests, on the one hand, on the role of design in the valorisation of cultural heritage and, on the other, on light design. On the first front, he founded and coordinated the *Design for Cultural Heritage* Research Unit, while on the second he took on scientific responsibility for the *Laboratorio di Percettologia, fotometria, colorimetria, illuminotecnica* [Laboratory of Perceptology, Photometry, Colorimetry and Lighting Technology].

At national level, in his capacity as President of the Conference of Deans and as President of the Association of Design Lecturers, he brought the national university network of design to consolidation, engaged in promoting and defending the discipline and its specific scientific and cultural features through the institutional forms and instruments necessary for its development. Among these, we may recall: the definition of the *Classi di Laurea* and *Laurea Magistrale* [bachelor's and master's degree classes]; the redefinition of the description of the *Settore Scientifico Disciplinare ICAR/13* [Scientific-Disciplinary Sector ICAR/13] in order to adapt it to the new reality of design; the promotion and construction of the SDI research network, which constituted one of the most important outcomes of the MIUR research project Italian Design System; the many concerted actions undertaken among the various universities to define a system of criteria for evaluating scientific activities capable of recognising the specific nature of the output typical of the design areas; the promotion of research projects (CNR, MPI, PRIN, etc.) aimed at defining *Design* and its potential within the economy of our country; the promotion of the national coordination of PhD programmes in design; etc.

In the following paragraphs, we retrace the history of this institutional innovation through a selection from the very extensive body of documents and texts that accompanied it, testimonies of a daily commitment that was not only administrative but also political and cultural.

Alberto Seassaro wrote, a great deal, and he revised, with that capacity for verbo-visual notation clearly outlined by Giovanni Baule in chapter 19 of this volume. For this reason, the original reading of those

texts is essential in order to grasp the spirit of the words and, above all, of the subsequent actions that were carried out.

17.3 The Beginnings: Documents

Describing the First Degree Programme in *Industrial Design*

The birth of the degree programme in *Industrial Design* in 1993 was preceded by a long period of incubation, which saw the introduction of courses specifically devoted to this discipline, the appointment to the Faculty of Architecture of lecturers such as Achille Castiglioni, and, in 1984, the establishment of the degree track in *Industrial Design*.

These steps can be retraced at the following link, in the paper presented by Raffaella Crespi at the seminar *Contributi alla formazione dell'Indirizzo di Laurea in Disegno industriale e arredamento* [Contributions to the establishment of the degree track in Industrial Design and Furnishing], held at the Faculty of Architecture at Politecnico di Milano (Crespi, 1984) [!\[\]\(3d8c13c92b853674f749aac6fa869926_img.jpg\) 32](#). Raffaella Crespi introduces the seminar by tracing the history of the academic teaching of design, underlining the cultural value that the discipline represents for the Faculty of Architecture.

3. *Contributi
alla formazione
dell'Indirizzo di Laurea
in Disegno industriale e
arredamento.
Document→*

[...] At the end of the 1950s, the course *Progettazione artistica per l'industria* [Artistic Design for Industry] was introduced into the curriculum of the Faculties of Architecture, and a *libera docenza* [post-doctoral teaching qualification] was granted in this subject [...]. What did it mean to introduce an academic competition dedicated to this discipline? It meant recognising, on the part of the academic authorities, the legitimacy, in certain respects, of an activity that until then had been regarded solely as a professional activity and therefore entirely internal to the logic of industrial production. It is in the late 1950s and early 1960s that a debate and a cultural contribution developed which reconnected the problems of industrial design with the more general issues of the design of the built environment, and it was in 1970 that, through

a conference held in Milan and sponsored by ADI, the hypothesis emerged of teaching industrial design at university level. [...] We might also reflect on the opportunity for design culture to become a contribution for the whole Faculty [...] very often students ask us what the school can do; the school, this school at least, is not in a position to provide operational tools of a strictly professional kind, but it can provide all the cultural tools which, in some respects, are themselves operational tools. (Crespi, 1984)

The degree programme in Industrial Design was therefore launched in the academic year 1993–94. An Advisory Commission, chaired by Alberto Seassaro, oversaw the necessary activities for organising teaching. The final meeting of this Commission, on 16 February 1995, concluded with the definition of the timetable for the establishment of the governing bodies of the new degree programme in Industrial Design and for the election of its President [45](#).

The first Student Guide was published for the academic year 1993–94 as a supplement to the *Guida della Facoltà di Architettura* [Guide of the Faculty of Architecture]: a few stapled sheets, with an iconic yellow cover, presenting the list of lecturers and the syllabi of the courses and studios activated in the first year [55](#) [65](#).

Alberto Seassaro would begin working on the cultural project of the degree programme the following year and, until it was replaced by the online digital version, the Student Guide would serve as a sort of planning document, through the annual publication of the founding document and the explicit statement of the teaching contents of the courses.



4. Verbale della
Commissione Consigliare
del D.I. del 16/02/1995.
[Document →](#)

17.4 Conceiving the Cultural Project: the Faculty of Design at Politecnico di Milano

The degree programme was, from the outset, articulated into *Indirizzi* [degree tracks] which would in turn become degree programmes in their own right. Shortly thereafter, the first *Facoltà del Design* in Italy [Faculty of *Design*] would emerge, with an innovative educational project that hybridised engineering disciplines and design cultures of ar-



chitectural matrix, nourished by the sensitivities of humanistic knowledge. A Faculty devoted to training designers capable of managing the complexity of the contemporary environment and anticipating its developments [7](#).



7. Rivista *Politecnico*, n.4.
[Document →](#)

In the text by Alberto Seassaro published in Politecnico's magazine devoted to the newly established Faculty of Design, the fundamental steps of «intense years of *hard* experimentation of the degree programme in Industrial Design, within which – year after year – the political-institutional identity of the educational cultural project gradually grew» (Seassaro, 2001, p. 17) are retraced. After an extensive reconstruction of the main protagonists in the history of the Faculty, from those who laid the necessary groundwork, such as Tomás Maldonado, Cesare Stevan or Adriano De Maio, to all those who translated that vision into operative reality – the lecturers and the staff of the support structures – the text goes on to place the events at Politecnico di Milano within the broader framework of Italian university reform, arguing for the local innovation as an experimental model that can be replicated:

The path we have taken can help to reform and, more generally, renew studies oriented towards design and the management of innovation at Politecnico di Milano, by constructing an innovative model that positions itself between Engineering and Architecture as a *third force*, in order to give concrete form to that idea of poly-technicality which, up to now, has been interpreted and practised in a sectoral and oppositional way by two lines of thought – creativity and culture on the one hand, technology and science on the other – without achieving a genuine interdisciplinarity, which only the methodical practice of comparison in the terrain of design can make possible. (Seassaro, 2001, p. 19)

Retracing the documents and epistolary exchanges, the features and efforts of these *intense years of hard experimentation* (Ibidem) clearly emerge. One of the strategic knots for Seassaro is the claim, on behalf of the Faculty of *Design*, to the role of third actor within the established engineering-architecture pairing at Politecnico di Milano, precisely at the moment when the university is developing the territorial network



model, with an impact on the configuration of its education-
al programmes. In 1997, writing to the Dean of the Faculty of
Architecture, Cesare Stevan, he highlights the role of design as both
innovator and mediator between the two traditional cultural souls of
Politecnico di Milano [8](#)↗:

Dear Dean, [...] The discussion that has developed within the uni-
versity on the content and forms of the reorganisation of its cur-
rent structures [...] has brought to the fore proposals that derive
from the combined effects of two criteria: that of 'territorial artic-
ulation' – which enhances the 'network-based' Politecnico model
through the establishment of new decentralised Faculties – and
that of 'articulation of educational programmes'. [...] It is possible
that the emerging trend can only be that of confirming the tradi-
tional 'binary' structure of the university, albeit in a more articul-
ated and decentralised form – given the very way in which the debate
has been conducted, separately within the two Faculties of Engi-
neering and Architecture, according to logics internal to these two
different realities. Within this logic of predictable continuity, the
degree programme in *Industrial Design* could constitute a poten-
tially innovative factor. Indeed, the degree programme in Industrial
Design – in these four years of its existence – has first highlighted,
then consolidated and subsequently strengthened its own nature,
which is distinct from and intermediate between the two cultures
of engineering and architecture present in the university (the sum
of which has not yet produced that 'Polytechnic' culture which
everyone invokes and claims), building its identity and vocation
on the specificity of design, understood as the 'progettazione del
prodotto industriale' [design of the industrial product]. [...] Per-
haps because of this nature, equidistant between the two cultures
of engineering and architecture and therefore able to draw on
methods and techniques of different origins, or perhaps because
of the intrinsically innovative character of the object of knowl-
edge to which it is applied, but certainly thanks to the conditions
of strong experimental freedom from which it has benefited, the
degree programme in Industrial Design has been able to develop
highly innovative content, both in scientific and methodological

terms and in terms of its overall educational structure, which may also become defining elements in the configuration of a new Faculty. [...] (Seassaro, 1997)

The document presented to Rector Adriano De Maio and to the Academic Senate of Politecnico di Milano in May 1997 by the group promoting the project for the new Faculty of *Design* already sets out, in fully developed form, many of the proposals that would be implemented in the following years, indicating that the overall design was already entirely prefigured in the initial project. The full document is available on the Design Philology platform at the following link [99](#):



9. Proposta di istituzione
di una Facoltà del Design.
[Document →](#)

[...] the degree programme in *Industrial Design* submits to the Academic Senate and the Rector a proposal intended to help evolve the university's traditional structures and to help reconnect its historic division between Engineering and Architecture [...]. In light of the experience gained, the cultural-policy motivations that led to the establishment of the degree programme appear to be fully confirmed; design has at last found its place within the Italian university system, in which Politecnico di Milano is the only presence at national level; the industrial world has responded to the initiative with numerous associations, institutions and companies involved in teaching [...]. The underlying idea of the programme – to integrate competences originating in the Faculty of Engineering with those traditionally offered by the Faculty of Architecture, opening itself in all its breadth to the complexity of polytechnical culture – has been met with a response that has exceeded expectations [...]. The proposal submitted to the Academic Senate is as follows: to establish a new Faculty of *Industrial Design* which would be configured as a joint expression of the Faculties of Engineering and Architecture [...]. The overall educational project of the new Faculty of *Industrial Design* could therefore take on the following configuration [...]: at bachelor's level [...]: degree programme in *Industrial product design*; degree programme in *Industrial communication design*; European degree programme in *Industrial design*; an educational profile oriented towards architecture, with the degree programme in Corso di Laurea in *Progettazione*

industriale degli ambienti [Industrial design of environments]; a new professional profile to be experimented as *Ingegnere del disegno industriale* [Industrial Design Engineer] [...]. At diploma level [...]: *Disegno industriale della luce* [industrial design of light] [...]; *Ergonomia* [ergonomics] [...]; *Disegno industriale del mobile e dell'arredamento* [industrial design of furniture and interior decoration] [...]; *Disegno industriale della moda* [industrial design of fashion] [...] (Seassaro, 1997). At post-graduate level [...]: Specialisation Schools in *Design management*; *Yacht design*; *Car design* [...]. Master's and advanced training courses, cycles of professional updating, EEC training courses, Summer Schools [...] (Seassaro, 1997). Alberto Seassaro, Emilio Bartezzaghi, Pietro Pedefferri, Antonio Scoccimarro, Sergio Sirtori. (Seassaro, A. *et al.*, 1997)

In October 1997, a commission of the Academic Senate of Politecnico di Milano was set up to examine the issues relating to the educational projects in *Industrial Design*, chaired by Alberto Seassaro. In the document drafted and sent to the Academic Senate on 12 June 1998, beyond the completeness of the articulation of the educational offer, beyond the assertion of the innovative nature of the teaching formats, and beyond the clear intention to initiate relationships useful to teaching and research with the production and territorial system outside

10. Commissione di
Senato per il Disegno
Industriale. Nota al
Senato Accademico, in
risposta alla Rettoria del
15 Gennaio 1998.
[Document →](#)



Politecnico, the aim of assigning to Milan a leading role (which Politecnico di Milano would in fact later come to play) in the nationwide dissemination of the educational experience of the Degree programme in *Industrial Design* is already evident. The full document is available on the *Design Philology platform* at the following link [10](#) ↘:

[...] the Commission unanimously agreed [...] that the founding mandate conferred by the Senate – and the planning objectives to be adopted – must explicitly be understood as follows: Commission per la istituzione di una nuova Facoltà del Design (o del Disegno industriale) [for the establishment of a new Faculty of Design (or of Industrial Design)] as a ‘strong’ response to the socio-economic demand expressed by the production system of ‘Milanese design’ and Italian design, and as a development of the project to integrate the architectural and engineering components

within the framework of the *Ateneo-rete* [network-based university model]. Starting from this programmatic objective, the Commission has [...] produced operational proposals [...]. With regard to point A [assessment of the scientific and cultural feasibility of the project for the new Faculty], the Commission [...] reached the following conclusions:

- formulation of the fundamentally design-oriented character of the profile [...] of the graduate in *Industrial Design* [...];
- definition of the inductive nature of the educational process towards design practice [...];
- analysis of the international configurations of university-level teaching in Industrial Design, and reconfirmation of the historically consolidated presence of a strong *polytechnic* approach [...];
- analysis of the role of the degree programme in *Industrial Design* at Politecnico di Milano as the only degree programme activated in Italy, compared with the numerous *D.U.* [university diplomas] and the many private schools present at national level [...];
- assessment of employment opportunities [...] verified by: the positive results of the market analysis [...] on small and medium-sized industrial enterprises in Lombardy [...] which showed an offer of positions that was significantly greater than the demand expressed by the programme.

With regard to point B [proposal for the structural configuration of the new Faculty of *Design* (or of Industrial Design)]:

- articulation of the educational pathway [...] across the different levels of university study (university diploma, degree diplomas, specialisation schools, PhD programmes, continuing education) [...];
- consolidation, at the level of differentiated degree programmes, of the two 'tracks' in *Product Design* and *Communication design*, already activated for the a.y. 1998-99, and future activation (planned for the a.y. 1999-2000) of a degree programme dedicated to fashion design;
- establishment of the *Scuola di specializzazione in Disegno industriale* [Specialisation School in Industrial Design] for

architecture graduates [...] and development of differentiated Specialisation Schools in Industrial Design [...];

- strengthening of the training offer for PhD graduates [...] by establishing new interdisciplinary doctoral programmes [...];
- territorial articulation [...] – in accordance with the *Ateneo-rete* [...]. For example, at the Faculty of Engineering in Como with *D.U. del tessile* [university diploma in textiles] and *D.U. del mobile in legno* [university diploma in wooden furniture], or at the *Consorzio Bassa Brianza* [Bassa Brianza Consortium] with *Furniture Design*, or at the Piacenza campus for *Design del componente edilizio* [Design of the building component], etc.

With regard to point C [proposal for the disciplinary and educational reorganisation of the degree programme in *Industrial Design*] [...]

- reformulation of the educational-disciplinary areas [...] aimed at integrating the scientific-disciplinary sectors of industrial design with those sectors (or individual subjects) in engineering that display design connotations, in order to foster opportunities for project-based cooperation; [...]
- strengthening, in all the design experiences within the programme, of relationships with the industrial world, in close connection with the *Tirocinio ordinamentale* [curricular internship].

The body of analytical and propositional materials gathered by the Commission therefore constitutes a substantial innovative corpus that could be entirely suited to the project of establishing a new Faculty. [...] (Seassaro, 1998)

The February 1999 document, *Linee programmatiche generali per l'adozione del decreto d'area del Politecnico di Milano per il settore Architettura e Ingegneria* [General programme guidelines for the adoption of the area decree at Politecnico di Milano for the Architecture and Engineering sector] (Seassaro, 1999a), together with its annexes, constitutes the set of institutional steps required to achieve the reform of the educational offer in *Industrial Design* at Politecnico di Milano, following the proposal already advanced for the establishment of the Faculty of *Design*. The excerpt presented here concerns the fundamental principles underpinning the educational design of the cours-

es. This is also the moment when the project for the instrumental laboratories supporting teaching begins to take shape, still today the largest system of laboratories for *Design* at international level [11](#).



11. Linee programmatiche generali per l'adozione del *Decreto d'area* del Politecnico per il settore Architettura e Ingegneria.
[Document →](#)

[...] The educational model of the programme has, as its distinctive and original features, an 'inductive approach' to design, whereby the student's methodological and technical knowledge progressively increases through an educational excursus 'from practice to theory' [...]. Another distinctive feature of the programme is the progressive interweaving of teaching and research, so that in the more advanced years of study educational activities intersect with research activities [...]. Another distinctive feature of the programme's educational methodology [...] is the intensive use of the *Laboratori strumentali di supporto didattico* [instrumental laboratories supporting teaching], which make it possible to exercise design practice [...]. Laboratories activated with an initial provision of spaces, resources and personnel include the *Laboratorio di Modellistica* [Modelling Laboratory], *Fotografia* [Photography], *Tecniche grafiche speciali* [Special Graphic Techniques], *Colore* [Colour], *Ergonomia* [Ergonomics], *Merceologia* [Merceology], *Requisiti ambientali del prodotto industriale* [Environmental Requirements of the Industrial Product], as well as the computerised laboratories: *Laboratorio di Media digitali e modelli virtuali* [Digital Media and Virtual Models Laboratory], *Prototipazione rapida* [Rapid Prototyping], *Fotografia digitale* [Digital Photography], *Tecnologie multimediali* [Multimedia Technologies]. [...] The *Laboratori di Illuminotecnica* [Lighting Technology Laboratories] [...] of *Tipografia* [Typography] [...], and of *Lavorazioni tecniche per la prototipazione* [Technical Processes for Prototyping], whose activation can no longer be postponed. For the project to establish the *Centro studi storici del design* [Centre for Historical Studies in Design], which connects the educational activities of the programme with the cultural instances present in the industrial world, the *Laboratorio Iconologico* [Iconological Laboratory] is, finally, at an advanced stage of planning: it will collect the design memory of the programme and of the production of Italian design products. (Seassaro, 1999a)

12. Linee
programmatiche generali
di riorganizzazione
dell'Offerta Formativa
a partire dall'A.A. 1999-
2000 nel settore Disegno
Industriale.
[Document →](#)



The document *Linee programmatiche generali di riorganizzazione dell'offerta formativa a partire dall'A.A. 1999/2000 nel settore del Disegno industriale* (Seassaro, 1999b) [General programme guidelines for the reorganisation of the educational offer from the academic year 1999-2000 in the field of Industrial Design] [12 ↘](#) is a strictly technical document. In it, the Faculty's educational offer is fully articulated and accompanied by all the mechanisms required to translate that offer into the system of educational credits. With this document there begins what would turn out to be a long and exhausting phase of requests to the university for teaching staff, spaces, equipment and funding for teaching, in order to be able to unfold the entire project for constructing the Design System. The letter by Alberto Seassaro entitled *Approvazione del Senato Accademico del progetto didattico SDI – Sistema Disegno industriale – Trasmissione nota di risposta* [Approval by the Academic Senate of the educational project

13. Alberto Seassaro,
Lettera Approvazione del
Senato Accademico del
progetto didattico SDI.
[Document →](#)



SDI – Industrial Design System – Transmission of reply note] (Seassaro, 1999c) [13 ↘](#) is a letter of thanks to the members of the Academic Senate for having unanimously approved the Industrial Design project, and it accompanies the subsequent

14. Note di
aggiornamento,
integrazione e
chiarimento al
documento Linee
programmatiche generali
di riorganizzazione
dell'offerta formativa
nel settore Disegno
industriale.
[Document →](#)



Note di aggiornamento, integrazione e chiarimento al documento Linee programmatiche generali di riorganizzazione dell'offerta formativa nel settore Disegno industriale [Update, integration and clarification notes to the document *General programme guidelines for the reorganisation of the educational offer in the field of Industrial Design*] (Seassaro, 1999d) [14 ↘](#), in which the information needed to implement the submitted project is supplemented and completed so as to make it compliant with the ministerial provisions of the *Decreto sulla autonomia universitaria – Decreto Ministeriale n. 509 del 3 novembre 1999* [Decree on university autonomy – Ministerial Decree no. 509 of 3 November 1999], which was still being drafted but whose guidelines were already available to universities. The document, presented in full on the *Design Philology* platform, shows Alberto Seassaro, at that time Chair of the degree programme, deftly navigating constraints of various kinds, anticipating those abilities that, as Dean, would become his hallmark. The excerpt included below, by contrast, bears witness to his strategic vision. While constructing the project for Politecnico di Milano, he was simultaneously initiating work with all

those responsible for design programmes in Italian universities, with a view to jointly defining the degree classes in Industrial Design.

[...] The new ministerial guidelines that have emerged (insofar as we are aware of them) after the drafting of Politecnico's *Decreto d'Area* [Area Decree] and the presentation of our educational project [...], have required further reflection on some of the criteria on which the project of educational reorganisation was founded, at least in three respects:

1. the first concerns the distribution of the number of educational credits across the different disciplinary typologies (foundational, core, etc.), which entails new constraints on their allocation [...];
2. the second relates to the fact that the indications contained in the Framework Decree require a more precise and carefully reasoned definition of the types of activities that characterise the educational areas;
3. the third point, which represents the real 'political' knot of the matter, concerns the number of credits in each degree class, that is: how many credits can be predetermined [...] and how many, instead, should be left to the discretion, and above all to the educational projects, of individual universities.

However, some important results have already been achieved:

- first of all, the *Assemblea Nazionale della Classe* [National Assembly of the Degree Class] has been established as the permanent body of the study programmes in *Industrial Design* activated at national level (7 university diplomas, 4 specialisation schools, 1 degree programme);
- secondly, Alberto Seassaro has been elected President of this body; [...].

The variables that remain open (the positions in Rome are extremely conservative and defensive, ours more open to experimentation) do not, however, appear such as to be able to modify the project already set out; they must nonetheless be defined in a definitive way so that we can arrive at a clear and final formulation of the credits, one that has already been verified at national level so as to allow mobility between sites (a point that is particularly

important for Milan, which is the site where graduates from other universities seek to enrol). (Seassaro, 1999d)

The year 2000 is when the major project of the Faculty of Design came to fruition. After years of political and managerial incubation, and after the word design had come to be synonymous within the university with disruptive innovation, the phase began of asserting equal standing with the historic Faculties of Engineering and Architecture.

The document *Costituzione della III Facoltà di Architettura* [Constitution of the Third Faculty of Architecture], dated 10 April 2000 (Seassaro, 2000a) [15](#), presents the fully developed evolution of the educational offer which, with the establishment of the Faculty, would see each Ordinamento [degree framework] articulated into an autonomous degree programme.

The achievement of the new Faculty's name is far from insignificant. Faced with the Academic Senate's decision to name the three Faculties that had split off from Architecture as *Architettura I*, *Architettura II*, *Architettura III* [Architecture I, II, III], in various communications to the Rector Alberto Seassaro requested the adoption of the wording *III Facoltà di Architettura – Bovisa* [Third Faculty of Architecture – Bovisa], but also *Facoltà di Architettura – Design* [Faculty of Architecture – Design], *Facoltà del Design (III Facoltà di Architettura)* [Faculty of Design (Third Faculty of Architecture)], and – «journalistically speaking – *Facoltà del Design del Politecnico di Milano* [Faculty of Design at Politecnico di Milano]» (Seassaro, 2000b). This would indeed be the

name by which it has been known ever since [16](#). With the establishment of the new Faculty, the Dean of that Faculty was elected, albeit for a two-year technical transition period (necessary to complete the process of the Autonomy Reform). The sole candidate was Alberto Seassaro who, in his electoral programme [17](#), retraced the key stages of the path followed up to that point, both within Politecnico and at national level: «Two 'Politecnico affairs' running in parallel, that of the adventurous growth of the study programme in *Design* within the Faculty of Architecture and that of the radical process of structural reforms launched at the university by the Rector, which converge and are integrated into the broader story of the epochal transformation of the university pro-

15. Progetto costitutivo della III Facoltà di Architettura. [Document →](#)



16. Alberto Seassaro, *Lettera Denominazione della nuova Facoltà di Architettura dedicata alla tematica del Disegno Industriale*. [Document →](#)



17. Alberto Seassaro, *Programma elettorale per l'elezione del Preside della Facoltà del Design del Politecnico di Milano (III Facoltà di Architettura – Bovisa), 2002-2006*. [Document →](#)



moted through the Autonomy Reform [...]» (Seassaro, 2000c). The ambition he declares is, as often, both clear-sighted and hyperbolic at the same time:

the achievement – to use a business term – of 'sector leadership'. Or, to use a more political and more ambitious term, of political-cultural hegemony among university schools of design and, indeed, among all Italian schools of design, so as at least to be able to compete on equal terms with the best schools in the world. [...] But also outside the school, and beyond universities and academies, the 'School of Design' of Politecnico di Milano can become a resource for research, for innovation and for advanced training, also for the productive and corporate world. And not only for those so-called 'design oriented' sectors with which this relationship has historically been developed, but for all those sectors that do not yet realise that the role of the 'design lever' is decisive in strategies of global competition. (Seassaro, 2000c)

The document *Piano di sviluppo della III Facoltà di Architettura-Design, anno 2001* [Development Plan of the Third Faculty of Architecture-Design, year 2001] (Seassaro, 2000d) [18 ↘](#) is the first autonomous act of overall planning issued by the Faculty after its establishment. It is an annual plan, to be followed by several others, aimed at requesting teaching staff, space, equipment and financial resources on the basis of the projects already launched or in the process of being launched. The document, of which we reproduce the cover here, is difficult to summarise. The sheer number of initiatives submitted to the Academic Senate, whether already under way or already scheduled, is such that the list alone recalls that sense of *vertigine della lista* [vertigo of the list] described by Umberto Eco. For the full text, see the link.

Among the further documents available on the platform that bear witness to the evolution of the Design System, we would like to introduce, as an excerpt from the mature phase of Seassaro's deanship, the opening of his bid for re-election as Dean in 2006 (Seassaro, 2006) [19 ↘](#). The text brings to the surface a thoroughly human, conflicted feeling between a



18. Piano di sviluppo della III Facoltà di Architettura - Design, anno 2001.
[Document →](#)





constant drive towards innovation and an *expectation of normality*, within an institution that is increasingly consolidated and supported by an ever broader community of actors.

Having held, from 1994 to today, without ever 'pauses or breaths', the 'effective and permanent' role of inspirer, originator, promoter, experimenter, implementer, manager, but also guardian, evaluator, maintainer and even, at times, demolisher of virtually all the political-cultural initiatives and their related 'institutional concretisations' of the 'adventure of design', first at Politecnico, then in the university system, conducted with daily personal and collective dedication, and recognising the profound human truth that 'the most widespread aspiration is to sit out a round', not so much out of tiredness, and even less out of weariness, as out of a claim to normality (without forgetting the democratic principle of alternation and the libertarian principle of rotation in office), I have seriously raised the question of verifying not so much the persistence of my own 'disposition of mind to remain available' as that of the availability of others – of the friends and colleagues with whom I have shared, day in, day out, this adventure for so many years – to work another four years with me, accepting me in the uncomfortable role of the one who pre-sides and presides over (precisely, the 'Dean'), with all the associated and cumbersome consequences of an activity that can only euphemistically be described as intense, and with all the inherent risks of that kind of responsibility which derives from the obligation to be authoritative. [...] In the more formally institutional conversations, it emerged unequivocally, almost peremptorily, that 'I could not shirk this renewed assumption of responsibility...' and that therefore 'I had to carry on'. [...] the strong policy of expansion of the teaching staff pursued by the Faculty in recent years – both in quantitative terms and in those that are more properly 'academic' – allows us to move closer to building a genuinely 'new ruling class', [...], made up of highly qualified individuals who have grown within the system and who will be able to interpret, keep alive and renew its contents even better than we have done so far. I can therefore put myself forward again for this office no longer as the system's sole representative

– in its ‘institutional solitude’ – but as the coordinator of a group that is growing. [...] (Seassaro, 2006)

17.5 Securing the Material Conditions for Survival. Or, Building the Home, the Durando Campus

The Durando Campus, the teaching classrooms, the computer classrooms, the instrumental laboratories, the Library, the facilities conceived and designed at a scale appropriate to a mass Faculty, constitutes a unicum in the landscape of European Schools of Design.

Every single step, from securing coat racks in the classrooms to winning spaces for teaching activities, was nevertheless the object of claims and negotiations, requiring mediation skills and dedication to the project.

It is only right to recall, among the many colleagues who, in their institutional roles, contributed to this *miracle*, Cristina Treu – *Prorettrice* [Vice-Rector]; Attilio Costa – *Presidente del Centro Informatico di Ateneo* [Chair of the University IT Centre]; Adriana Baglioni – *Pro-rettrice* [Vice-Rector]; and Vittorio Luise – head of logistics. And of course Adriano De Maio and Giulio Ballio, Rectors of Politecnico di Milano who, while curbing the design verve of Alberto Seassaro, nonetheless supported him so that the Design System could grow into what it is today. Now that everything is in place, it seems almost impossible to imagine how all that has been won was secured through unrelenting personal efforts [20](#). We recall, as just one example among many, the exhausting battles to secure classrooms equipped with *Mac* computers, as if what were at stake were an ideological confrontation between engineers and designers, rather than a basic technical requirement. Struggles of this kind, too, were necessary in order to free the methods of teaching design from those of engineering and architecture, and to build an autonomous cultural identity for the field.

The very few letters we have chosen to present on the platform bear witness to the day-to-day work of putting forward requests, first to make the initial situation liveable and then to obtain the resources



20. Alberto Seassaro,
Lettera al Preside della
Facoltà di Architettura
Cesare Stevan.
[Document →](#)

needed to implement the project for the new *Design* campus at Bovisa.

The letters are meant to exemplify Seassaro's distinctive style of dialogue with the university leadership, with whom he was always battling yet without ever losing a tone of amused cordiality in his relations (with Attilio Costa, Director of the University IT Centre: «I am following up on our laborious conversation – *clash? altercation? spat?* – or, as I prefer, simply a chat between two friends with a polemical disposition and quarrelsome character» (Seassaro, 1996) [21](#)); with Cristina Treu, Vice-Rector: «C(a)RA CRI [DE(a)R CRI]», used as the opening to

21. Alberto Seassaro,
Lettera al Centro
Informatico di Ateneo
(CIA).
[Document](#)→



23. Alberto Seassaro,
Lettera al Rettore
Prof.ssa Cristina Treu.
[Document](#)→



24. Alberto Seassaro,
Lettera al Prof.
Scoccimarro,
*Costituzione del nuovo
assetto del Dipartimento
in sezioni e Piano di
Sviluppo.*
[Document](#)→



a thorny letter full of requests, or again «I have tried to reach you many times (practically in an obsessive way)», «I need you with at least (plenty of) time available», or again «at this point I feel I have been left to simmer in a bain-marie and stranded midstream in deep water: should I turn back? Go forward and drown? I can swim, but the degree programme will go under like this» (Seassaro, 1997) [22](#) [23](#); with Antonio Scoccimarro, his close friend as well as colleague and then Director of the Di.Tec Department, signing off a politically very tough letter with *bacetti dal tuo amichetto Alberto* [little kisses from your little friend Alberto] (Seassaro, 2000e) [24](#). The photographs of the Campus are the most concrete evidence of how this exhausting round of petitioning finally bore fruit [25](#) [26](#).

17.6 Conclusions. From a Cultural Vision to a Cultural System Project

Over the years, the correspondence multiplied and the definitive shift to digital communication has made it precarious in terms of memory. Scientific and educational publications, catalogues, brochures, digital publications piled up alongside an endless quantity of grey literature produced on a daily basis by an increasingly complex and articulated structure. In the meantime, design, as a disciplinary domain with its own educational and research infrastructures, gradually made its way into the university world, acquiring an autonomous and recognised status. Alberto Seassaro continued to weave threads of texts that contributed decisively to creating and consolidating fruitful relation-

ships with the urban, social and economic-productive fabric of the city of Milan, but also with the national and international context [27](#).




27. Beyond the borders. [Narrative →](#)

From the outset, he grasped the vital importance of keeping together the various initiatives that, in the space of less than a decade, were emerging in many Italian universities, and he set about building associations for research and coordination in teaching.

This marks the birth of the *Sistema Design Italia (SDI)* [Italian Design System]. Already in 1995, as soon as he was elected Chair of the degree programme, he drew on his experience in building coordinated CNR research alliances and, as coordinator, involved Venice, Florence, Turin, Genoa, Rome and Naples in the project *Innovazione, qualità e ambiente nel disegno industriale* [Innovation, quality and environment in industrial design].

The following year, he relaunched a further research project, this time also involving the campuses in Chieti and Palermo. We might describe these as technical trials for the construction of the *Rete SDI (Sistema Design Italia)* [SDI Network – Italian Design System] which, through numerous initiatives, including the involvement, in the workshops of the degree programme in Milan, of all colleagues from Italian universities with active design courses, had already led, by 1996, to the establishment of the first national assembly of Italian Industrial Design. It was here that the groundwork was laid for the establishment of the *Società Italiana del Design* [Italian Design Society] and for the *Conferenza dei Presidi e dei Presidenti di Corso di Studi* [Conference of Deans and Chairs of Degree Programmes] [28](#). It is the beginning of a long collective history that is still being written today by those who continue to design and build it, and which continues to be nourished by the original and fertile insights contained in the dense correspondence of those who first conceived it.



POLITECNICO DI MILANO – FACOLTÀ DI ARCHITETTURA
CORSO DI LAUREA IN DESIGN INDUSTRIALE

c.a. Cristina Treu
fax. 2106

Ti faccio disturbare in commissione bilancio perché Luisa mi comunica che domani c'è una riunione spazi didattici per decidere le attribuzioni ai corsi di laurea e ai diplomi. Poiché a questa riunione io non ci sarò (non sono stato invitato, a differenza dell'anno scorso in cui avevo potuto dire la mia) voglio che sia tu a portare le nostre irrinunciabili esigenze.

Visto che il 7 luglio (non commento questa data che ovviamente giudico tardiva) mi è stata comunicata la filosofia "tutti gli architetti in Bonardi, tutti i designer in Bovisa fin da subito!" Sto verificando come d'accordo se gli spazi che mi sono stati promessi in quella riunione in presidenza sono adeguati.

Per ora abbiamo potuto verificare che:

- 1) per l'anno accademico 1998/99 ci serve l'edificio Crash, in cui ricavare quattro aule (cioè senza erigere i tavolati divisorii a progetto) da 100-110 tavoli da disegno, cioè ci serve tutto il piano aule del Crash
- 2) in forma definitiva (già a partire dal 98/99) ci serve la stecca dell'edificio M (vicino alla caffetteria) per le attività didattiche dei laboratori di supporto. Ho sentito da Luisa che la stecca M la vorrebbe anche Acuto, ti ricordo che me l'hai promessa, già dallo scorso anno, ripetute volte. Ti ricordo che è per noi indispensabile, e quindi irrinunciabile (concetto già espresso ma vero), se venisse fuori che la dai ad Acuto, credo che cambierei mestiere! Credo di aver dato mille volte testimonianza di spirito di adattamento, santa pazienza, umile rassegnazione... ma questa non l'accetterò!!! Io alle promesse ci credo e persino alle tue!
- 3) in forma definitiva (idem) ci serve il piano primo di via Cosca per portare almeno una parte delle aule informatizzate cioè per l'equivalente delle aule M1 e M2 di via Bonardi.


Delle aule proposte nell'edificio M e nell'edificio C, dobbiamo vedere se ci stiamo o se, viceversa, ci avanzano spazi. I tre punti sopra scritti sono veramente e totalmente irrinunciabili e non contrattabili: sono l'ultima spiaggia dopo tutte le rese che vi abbiamo offerte!

Ci sono poi i discorsi delle attrezzature e degli interventi di arredo, che bisognerà fare per rendere agibili le aule per l'inizio dell'anno, e dei pochi ma necessari interventi murari e impiantistici: ma di questo si vedrà.

Ricordandoti che le esigenze del corso sono state trasmesse già dal mese di maggio (te ne ho data copia il 7 luglio) vorrei poterti subito sentire, per verificare se le cose sono andate come necessario valdano.

Ciao Alberto

P.S. Sarebbe il caso che ci si sentisse stasera.



POLITECNICO DI MILANO – FACOLTÀ DI ARCHITETTURA
CORSO DI LAUREA IN DESIGN INDUSTRIALE

Milano, 19 febbraio 1996

- A tutti i docenti operanti ai diversi livelli e nelle diverse strutture didattiche nel campo della formazione universitaria per il DESIGN INDUSTRIALE
- Scuole di Specializzazione in Disegno industriale di Firenze e Napoli (e Venezia e Roma di prossima attivazione),
- Corsi di Dottorato in Disegno Industriale di Milano e Palermo,
- Corsi di Diploma in Disegno Industriale di Venezia, Genova, Roma (e Torino e Aversa di prossima attivazione),
- Indirizzo di Disegno Industriale e Arredamento del Corso di Laurea in Architettura V.O. di Milano,
- Corsi di insegnamento delle discipline del Settore scientifico-disciplinare H99C Disegno Industriale e dei Settori strumentali affini (H98 e H11X) presso il Corso di Laurea in Architettura V.O. e N.O. di Milano, Torino, Venezia, Genova, Firenze, Ferrara, Roma, Anzoli, Pescara, Napoli, Reggio Calabria, Palermo,
- altre iniziative in atto nel campo della formazione per il Disegno Industriale (Scuole Dirette a fini speciali, Corsi di perfezionamento, ecc.),
- (vedi elenco rappresentati di Sede convitati, con preghiera di diffusione ai docenti e ricercatori delle Facoltà e Dipartimenti interessati)
- Ai rappresentanti delle Associazioni professionali:
 - ADI
 - AIAP,

Oggetto: Riunione di Coordinamento del Settore DISEGNO INDUSTRIALE

In diversi incontri fra docenti universitari impegnati nella didattica del Disegno Industriale (in particolare nel seminario "Design e Società" tenuto ad Aversa il 5 ottobre 1995 e nella riunione svolta il 25 gennaio 1996 a Milano nell'ambito del Convegno Nazionale dell'Area Tecnologica) è emersa l'esigenza di efficaci forme di confronto e coordinamento tra le Sedì universitarie.

In questo spirito e per proseguire il lavoro avviato, viene convocata per il prossimo **lunedì 26 febbraio 1996, ore 17:00**, presso il Politecnico di Milano, nella Rsa una **riunione di coordinamento**, per la quale si chiede che venga garantita almeno una rappresentanza per ogni Sede.

L'Ordine del Giorno proposto è il seguente:

- Stato delle Scuole di Disegno Industriale in ambito universitario.


Iniziativa di coordinamento di Settore:

- Problemi di definizione e coerenza/strutturazione delle figure professionali relative ai diversi ordini di studio
- Consenso dei docenti di Settore e Settori affini coinvolti;
- Riflessione sui Concorsi per Associato dell'Area Tecnologica;
- Costituzione gruppo di studio per il tracciato professionale;

- Rapporti con le Associazioni professionali (ADI e AIAP);
- Ipotesi di iniziative culturali e associative nel settore (INDI);
- Iniziative di ricerca comuni:
 - MURIST 40%;
 - CNR-Progetto speciale D1;
- Varie ed eventuali


Diffidati solati.

Prof. Alberto Seassaro



22. Alberto Seassaro, Lettera al Prorettore Prof.ssa Cristina Treu in merito al Campus Bovisa.


[Document →](#)



28. Riunione di Coordinamento del Settore Disegno industriale.

[Document →](#)





25. Attività nei locali del Laboratorio di Allestimenti, Facoltà del Design, edificio N.

[Document →](#)





26. Campus Bovisa in costruzione.

[Document →](#)

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18. From *Merceologia* to Cathedral Thinking

Flaviano Celaschi

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I first grasped Alberto Seassaro's early insistence on the concept of *merceologia* (commodity science) at the end of the 1980s, when his research was strongly focused on building production cycles and on the processes of making the city and the territory, understood as a complex, integrated system between industry and culture.

Seassaro was probably realizing that the problem frame was shifting toward a decisive and profound integration of these worlds which, until then, had been studied by separate and non-communicating disciplines: the designer dealt with the definition of the product; industry concerned itself with how to make and distribute it. Two worlds structurally autonomous in thought and in practice.

The design-production sector's ignorance of every social, economic, processual, productive, and technological aspect was offset by the industrial system's complete cultural and economic autonomy, both in construction and in the production of consumer and capital goods.

With the advent of the post-industrial society these lines of reasoning also included the discourse on industrial systems and components for building (a discipline for which Seassaro held the chair,

while still an associate professor, at the Faculty of Architecture of Politecnico di Milano).

These were the early years of insistence on *merce* [merchandise]. It was difficult for me to grasp quickly the profoundly radical scope of the term *merchandise* and its derivatives within architectural studies and research. The use of the word *merchandise* in that context even struck me as almost sacrilegious. Certainly for me who, to pay for my studies, had spent every summer of my high-school years as a sales-clerk in a haberdashery in a mountain village.

Thus, for me, merchandise was a term probably even tinged with a thread of shame for the prosaic nature of a commercial concept, within a forum characterized by the encounter/clash of politics-society-technology-aesthetics-art-power in the production processes of inhabiting, in profound transformation, which at the time attracted my studies and my ambitions, also with respect to my own social mobility. I had not yet studied Marx, nor the many authors recommended by Alberto Seassaro who accompanied me in understanding its reach. I found it scarcely viable, and second-tier, to work on inhabiting as merchandise, and the industrialized building systems and components we were dealing with then seemed to me profoundly different from consumer goods, because they were characterized by B2B business models and thus by the dynamics typical of capital goods, of the construction site, far from canonized compositional morphology, yet authoritative because industrial.

Thinking back to those studies, one is brought to smile – or to weep – today, listening to reportage on contemporary Milanese urban planning in which it is entirely evident that architecture has become merchandise, and the building itself, endowed with an iconic-spectacular form, with a playful, endearing nickname, brought to market by international real-estate brands, permitted and fabricated just in time, moves on the stage of the market exactly like a cult object of luxury merchandise. Thus Seassaro, in that period, taught me to read the building market with the instruments of any other market: the instruments of merchandise, of use value and exchange value, of the society of the spectacle, and of the social and industrial liquidity of globalization.

The concept of *merce* [merchandise] – and, consequently, *merce-ologia* [commodity science] as a research context, still appealed to me

little, but fortunately it remained in the background of our group work until the mid-1990s. In that period we were already functioning as an articulated research group in which certain role stratifications had formed (always very informal and never imposed).

Note 1.

The sudden passing of Prof.

Giacomo Scarpini had a considerable emotional impact on Seassaro and on all of us who esteemed him. In the years that followed, the large group of his collaborators was gradually absorbed, and our working group doubled in size, making it seem, for the first time, unavoidable to attempt some awkward measures of organization and formalization. Two actions to which Seassaro's anarchic spirit was allergic, because any organization and formalization would have ended up freezing a form within a process whose greatest strength lay in its continual dynamism and elusiveness. I think that most of what was accomplished in those years within Politecnico di Milano was possible above all thanks to this corsair dynamic, which kept the numerous *contrari* from arriving in time to fire on the small flotilla of design, since, when the first slow but heavy broadsides of resistance came, our little vessels were already underway on another course. Thanks to Seassaro's instinct, for several years we managed to turn into guerrilla warfare a war of secession that today I would call aimed at preserving the academic status quo prior to the small revolution of design. Others will speak of Seassaro's innate capacity, and need, to institutionalize and give formal standing to everything that was the fruit of research and thought. The two things are not antithetical; if anything, they fuse into a single, surely rare, soul of an anti-organization institution-builder, in whom the long time of the institution and its sacrality rebelled against the short time of paralyzing organization.

There was a nucleus of professors, colleagues of Seassaro and very close to him, with whom it often happened that we overlapped or collaborated on research and events, teaching and projects (Scarpini, Farè, Levi, Baglioni, and others); a dense network of colleagues in the technological area within national academic networks; the group of *ope legis* researchers who had been working with Alberto Seassaro since the early 1980s (Macchia, Garaventa, Mauri).

These coordinated, day by day, the work of the third tier, represented by the group of doctoral candidates who had begun their path in the early 1990s (Celaschi, Conio, De Paoli, Penati, Collina, and others ¹⁹) and who in turn were the transmission belt toward a nucleus of *new entry* who, progressively – and sometimes temporarily – came on the scene (Ciuccarelli, Olivetti, Bertola, Deserti, and others).

A study on *Sheet Materials* in that period brought me much closer to the elements of *commodity science*; it was offered by Cesira Macchia and Adriana Baglioni for the publication of Zaffagnini's major *Manuale* on building materials and industrial technology. We reasoned about the supply chain which, from the chemically characterized substance, passed through the state of matter and then – with the introduction of the machine and of the technologies upstream of industrial production processes – was transformed into a form suited to become a component of the construction process; namely: the block, the wire, the tube, the sheet, the profile were the plastic exemplification of what I called «l'intelligenza della lastra» [the intelligence of the sheet] (Celaschi, 1997).

I was beginning to draw nearer to the concept of merchandise, in the sense in which it could be expressed at that time. Something (the material), enhanced with industrial design intelligence, became a flexible, interpretable component, as needed, within a value chain that passed through the in-depth

knowledge the designer needed to have in order to proceed along the chain that led to the final form. The designer of the final good, then, did not start from the material but from the form through which it was marketed as available intermediate merchandise. The designer was beginning to realize how important it was to deal with the material, the component, the *tertiarizable* portion, and how that project would affect the overall production system.

Thus there took shape a system integrating *use value* and *exchange value*, intimately bound up with grasping the various levels of *design intelligence* situated – more or less upstream – along the R2B–2B2C value chain, through to the recognition by the resident user of a functionality that is aestheticized and deployable, available to be purchased and experienced.

Precisely in that period, Seassaro began to insist on the need to conceptualize and structure (first culturally and theoretically, then methodologically and thus concretely) a Laboratory of *Merceologia* [commodity science] capable of gathering and managing massive bodies of information (at the time on paper, in the form of product catalogues) on the availability of the various stages of value generation for design steps, tiered and made available to the subsequent level of value generation.

The opportunity that allowed us to give this system concrete – also logistical – form, and to make it a place of research and teaching relations, was the megaproject *Sistema di Laboratori per il Design* [System of Laboratories for Design], which was negotiated and obtained thanks to the considerable efforts of Maria Cristina Treu (prorector vicaria to Adriano Di Maio ²³) and Alberto Seassaro, then still President of the Degree Course in Design. But before that there occurred what, together with Alessandro Deserti, the executive project mainstay of each of Seassaro's immaterial ideas, we jokingly dubbed *Operation Exodus*, which compelled us, in order to have room to operate as future design researchers, to move en masse from the historic *Città Studi* campus in Milan to the ill-reputed far periphery of Bovisa, outside the so-called *goccia degli ingegneri* [the engineers' drop], thereby in effect also consummating, physically as well, the separation from the

Note 2.

Adriano De Maio was Rector of Politecnico di Milano in the mid-1990s. Under his leadership, with the decisive contribution of Cesare Stevan, then Dean of the sole Faculty of Architecture, which housed the first courses in *Industrial Design*, the pioneering phase of design in Italy unfolded. Maria Cristina Treu's contribution was also decisive in seeking out and making available the development resources for the Bovisa Campus, within the funds earmarked for the decongestion of mega-universities and for the decentralization of Politecnico di Milano's network. Jokingly and in confidence, we called the yellow building of the design campus *PalaTreu*, because that was the period when, in Europe and in Milan, it was customary to give large sports and entertainment buildings the names of official sponsors.

building component of the technology area and generating the first real condition of autonomy, thanks to which the subsequent leaps of growth were made possible.

Note 3.

It is worth recalling that Politecnico di Milano's *Design System* has not always existed. To those who found it already in place, this pioneering reminder of the phase from Secession to Foundation may seem superfluous, but it is part of the reasoning that, in a publication like this, must be made; someone, sooner or later, had to make it. When things are done, one may applaud or criticize, but none of us, not even Alberto Seassaro, had ever before founded a university Department; none of us had ever even imagined that one could realize (also institutionally) an inter-university Consortium pursuant to art. 108 of the 1989 law on the Italian university system; none of us had ever built from nothing a Faculty with five thousand students. In this discussion, space matters greatly, because without space every thought remains theoretical and every person continues to live in their primitive everyday. To design a System like the one we are discussing meant, first of all, turning a set of spaces into a place (that is, a system of productive relations, conceived, inhabited, and lived). The space at no. 38/A in Via Durando, from the top of which (how beautiful the Milan sky is when it is beautiful), beyond the railway belt, on sunny days one could see the crown of the Alps, represented our West Coast of the American continent, a Risorgimento-like expanse of prairies to cultivate and in which to raise minds and produce energy. A wise guide, little fear in the face of the many opponents, including institutional ones, a great deal of desire and toil, and just as much recklessness, did the rest of this incredible adventure.

We might call that act the *second war of secession*, since the *first* had been fought by Lieutenant Seassaro, out of my sight, under the guidance of General Stevan, in the rooms of Commodore De Maio, where the possibility was being understood of a progressively autonomous development of design with respect to the soul of Engineering and of Architecture.

We therefore fitted out a former industrial building of two factory blocks with five floors each at no. 38/A in Via Durando ¹₂ ³₄ where, before us, pharmaceuticals had been manufactured, making it the home of the Design section of the Department of Technology (PPPE: Department of Programming, Production, and Building Design) ⁵₆. At the fourth floor of Staircase B of the complex, the first furnishings were installed for a library of information on commodities, and a chain of research activities oriented to individual productive sectors was set in motion. Together with Seassaro (with Paolo Ciuccarelli, who shortly thereafter became the first technician of the laboratory of *merceologia*, and with the constant support of Paola Bertola) we then signed the first volume of what was to become a series of studies intended to dismantle and explicate the process of value generation in complex, design-driven productive sectors, such as, for example, the characteristically Made in Italy eyewear district of Belluno and Treviso (Seassaro, Celaschi, Ciuccarelli, 1997).

The laboratory of *merceologia* of Politecnico di Milano was later transferred to the complex at Via Durando 10, disaggregating within what we might define as the explosion of value chains and of post-industrial, globalized, and progressively digitized production that came to be known as *intersectorality* ⁷₈.

Little by little (for me) the systemic study of production chains became progressively interesting, and I would even dare say attractive, and the Department offered me my first teaching assignment in Mantua in the a.y. 1994-1995, pre-



1. Campus Bovisa in costruzione.

[Document →](#)



2. Campus Bovisa in costruzione.

[Document →](#)



3. Campus Durando-Bovisa, fotografia degli interni.
[Document →](#)

cisely in the subject of *Systems and Components for Building*. This study had led me, under the guidance of Seassaro, to explore classical *commodity science*, which at that time was still a branch of economic studies dealing with tariffs and the buying and selling of goods which, in order to be qualified, had to possess standardized, normed performance characteristics. The major manuals of modern commodity science were divided into homogeneous sections: metallic materials, non-ferrous minerals, timbers, precious metals, and so on, up to agri-food products that fell within the so-called trade in raw or semi-processed materials. We were living, in a very tangible way, through a historical phase in which all this scientific customs-and-value apparatus was dissolving, and the real value impact that interested the industrial designer was shifting a couple of levels downstream: from the study of substances to the study of systems and components, with some drift toward materials which, in effect, as such, pertained increasingly to chemistry and engineering and less and less to design, which possessed neither the competences nor the time to set its action in motion from that level of interaction.

Globalization and the digitization of information were exploding in our hands and, more or less suddenly, within the space of five years we found ourselves no longer able to keep up with the masses of catalogues of materials and semi-finished goods, components and product parts that were reaching us from everywhere.

Meanwhile, it was increasingly clear that the contemporary designer was concerned predominantly with the design of the *commodity-form* [54](#), a term taken from an essay by Maldonado and used to gather into a systematic and substantial scientific effort the dismantling of the basic concepts that Seassaro had imparted to me for years and toward which I felt a classificatory debt: value, needs, exchanges became my bricks for defining a problem-field in which the difference between dealing with objects (things) and with commodities (goods) bought and sold on markets was clear. The difference between *use value* and *exchange value* was clear as well, and so was the centuries-old debate that had arisen between the by-then commonplace supporters of modern functionalism and of the future of modernity, and the nimble postmodern, Situation-

Note 4.

A very topical concept, that of intersectorality, which we had learned from the two sectors that are in Italy intersectoral par excellence, namely the automotive sector and the construction sector, which reaffirmed the idea that makes the issue of Trump's customs tariffs incomprehensible and unmanageable, because of the strong interconnection of systems and components, raw materials and materials that the key sectors of the contemporary economy manipulate.

Note 5.

In Celaschi (2000), an introductory essay by Alberto Seassaro retraces the pioneering phases of this research trajectory within *merceologia* at Politecnico di Milano.

ist *surfers* of exchange value, who held that function itself was one of the ways of adding exchange value to things so as to introduce them into a spectacular market circuit of exchange – even in the face of an immanent *happy degrowth*.

We were studying the articulated set of processes that, upstream, dealt with making available to the designer systems and components

Note 6.

See, for example, Simonelli (1997), Penati and Seassaro (1988), as well as the POLI.design series on the Brianza furniture district and the Como silk district, and many other essays that testify to the intense research carried out around innovation processes driven by production systems and by their reorganization.

4. Alberto Seassaro
(a cura di), *Ricerche tecnologiche coordinate*.
Facoltà di Architettura,
Istituto di Tecnologia,
Politecnico di Milano.
[Document →](#)



already endowed with embedded intelligence to orient their action. We were interested in the phenomenon whereby the designer concerned themselves with these, such as, for example, Sottsass designing Abet Laminati's laminates, or the steel-tube furniture district in the Lombardy region; the nineteenth-century manuals of Formenti or Valladier that informed building production on the basis of component formats, following and extending the construction process of Gothic cathedrals, just to name a few examples.

We were studying the articulated process of subcontracting and of the value-chain that drives innovation, rather than suffers it; we were studying *just in time* and its need always to start from an interdependent system of partner suppliers, not subordinate but strategic, for continuous provisioning.

And also for participation in the design and creative process. Meanwhile, the shelves of the commodity science laboratory were filling with catalogues and we with productive relations; the number of published essays was growing [65](#), and contacts with industry and with designers allowed us to add relationships both useful and indispensable to be able to send students for internships within production systems and not only in professional studios. In the meantime, out there, commodities were dematerializing and digitizing to the point of becoming consuming human bodies [45](#) [55](#) [65](#); servitization overtook the purchase of traditional goods; the nature of exchange, encrusted in market exchange, opened to the mix of anthropologi-

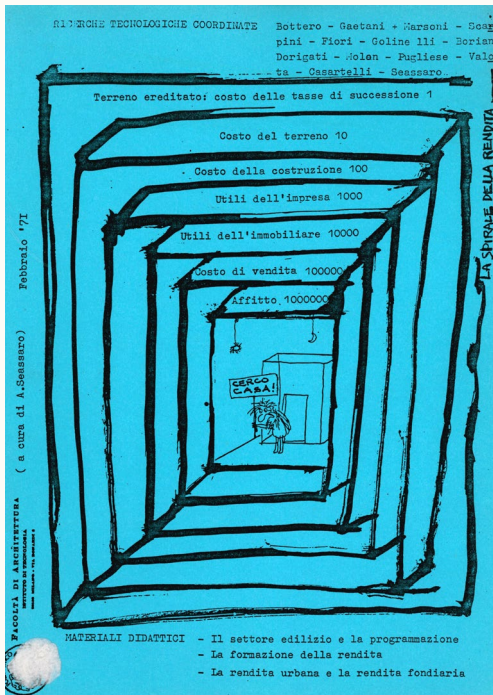




Figure 1.
Cover of the book *Il Design della forma merce* [The design of the commodity form], edited by Flaviano Celaschi (2000).

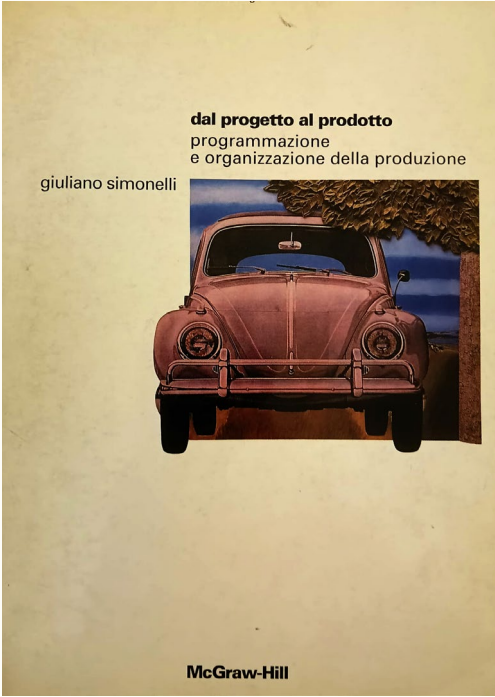


Figure 2.
Cover of the book *Dal Progetto al Prodotto* [From Design to Product], edited by Giuliano Simonelli (1997).



Figure 3.
Cover of the book *Progetto Processo Prodotto*, edited by Antonella Penati and Alberto Seassaro (1998).

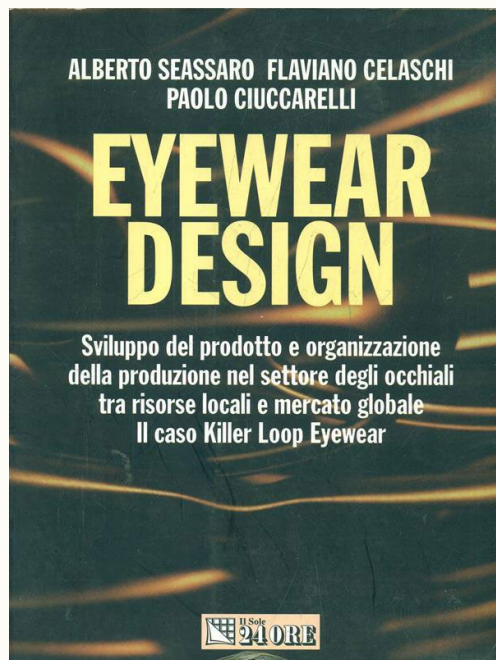


Figure 4.
 Cover of the book *Eyewear Design*, edited by Alberto Seassaro, Flaviano Celaschi and Paolo Ciuccarelli (1998).



5. Copertina del volume *Design e Metaprogetto*.
[Document →](#)



6. Milano Distretto del Design - Sistema Design Italia.
[Document →](#)

cal exchanges of self-production, barter, symbolic exchange, and all these forms in an integrated way.

Before our eyes the commodity was continually reshaping itself, and so the need to study it and to structure paths and tools of analysis was swelling, splintering into a thousand rivulets. And around what Seassaro had named the *Sistema Design Milano*, professions were evolving; trade fairs were exploding, overturning themselves into the metropolis; the places of real production were being pushed out; the logistics of goods and digital buying-and-selling systems were appearing; entire neighborhoods were being reactivated, populated with cranes and excavations; the flow of students was doubling with the dozens of design schools opening; fashion and design were cementing an alliance never before achieved; hospitality and dining were becoming experience; the service economy – which we called that of the *product-system* – was swelling, producing contradictions and new crises, hiding social fractures, expelling inhabitants, attracting others, and remodelling and resegmenting populations in a new, globalized, post-industrial urbanism. Impossible to keep up with the hundred new research stimuli that were born each season.

In parallel, Seassaro was entering a founding phase of the Politecnico di Milano's *Design System* and, upon this already considerable and substantial (I would say cyclopean) work of systemic construction, of organizations, institutions, structures, bodies, working groups, committees, councils, offices, there was shortly overlaid an equally gigantic labor of opening up problem-fields to be explored in design research as well as teaching: from light as a symbolic and functional form to the material sciences for design, from worker safety and prevention to automatic drawing and then to digital prototyping, until opening – and then staffing, each of these and a hundred other fields with researchers and experts, inside and outside Politecnico di Milano, bringing water to the small motionless pond that was becoming a catchment basin comparable to China's Three Gorges Dam.

A metaphor that helps me convey what it meant to find oneself, at just over thirty, at the center of a cyclopean construction site in which a dam never before attempted was being built, within which to filter bodies of knowledge that even a 140-year-old polytechnic could not by itself satisfy, and which gradually drew in the *Sistema Design Milano*,

the regional Design System, the Italian Design System, and then a system of international schools, to end by building a basin of collection and valorization now estimated as the largest by size and among the top five in the world for quality. But damming a river of such magnitude means diverting the waters and moving vast quantities of earth, excavating and covering, canalizing, motorizing, training workforces, provisioning systems of people. Above all, it means securing resources: when one speaks of doing research in Italy, especially in the humanistic knowledge domains, the problem of the need for continuous and substantial resources that a system of scientific production requires is always underestimated, and none of us had been prepared either to produce or to procure them. I recall only that between 1999 and 2001, with the birth of POLI.design and then of the IN.D.A.CO Department (Industrial Design, Arts, Communication and Fashion), and in parallel

Note 7.

In November 1995 I accompanied, as *portaborse* [aide], Seassaro to an appointment with Milan's newly elected mayor, Formentini. An encounter organized by Prof. Stevan, an old Socialist Party friend of Formentini's from his pre-Lega career. I remember a brief appointment, for the long cadences of Seassaro's prose, paced by the mayor's very packed schedule. In 20 minutes Formentini put a few schematic questions to Seassaro: *What is this design everyone is talking about? What does design have to do with Milan? What can we do, as an administration, to support this?* I do not know whether Seassaro had time to develop his thinking, nor do I know whether the Mayor truly listened. I know only that in 1995 the Mayor of Milan set himself the problem of understanding what design was, and in 2005, ten years later, there existed a *Sistema Design Milano* known and acclaimed throughout the world. This is, in my view, the measure, not only polytechnic, of the value and scope of the Seassaro project I witnessed.

with the continuous development of the Faculty, we found ourselves, within 24 months, having to provide the salaries of 64 *collaboratori coordinati continuativi* – the coordinated and continuous staff managing the administrative, organizational, and project machinery – not covered by the university's tenured personnel (excluding researchers and faculty among the tenured ranks, counting only those who worked on the organizational machinery), starting from a single room with two collaborators, a blue Underwood typewriter, and three occasional unpaid volunteer assistants.

We had built what, by European parameters, is called a small-medium enterprise. I did not sleep at night at the thought that the following semester we would need to find the resources to renew so many contracts.

Of that period I remember only, or above all, how much I missed being able to work, artisan-like, day by day on contents and on vertical research, on the writing of papers and publications, on the careful and meticulous preparation of lecture transparencies, or on the careful construction of international scientific relations, not yet aware that what we were helping to build every hour, every day, every single day, was a knowledge system precisely the fruit of the theories and studies we had practiced for years: *Design System* 71.

A cyclopean work, like the dam that was taking shape at full scale, as in the fabrication of a huge experimental Synchrotron for particle physics. Our particles were the thousands of students and the hundreds of young researchers, forgive the analogy, they were the bearers of that incredible energy that had to be recognized and extracted in order to be accumulated and distributed, and then channeled into project, profession, research, study.

Alberto Seassaro had imagined, and then realized, a system to transform knowledge into recognizable and transferable value. Little known were countless other incredible projects that no longer exist today, yet cost a heedless quantity of time and energy: the *Polo del Design di Como* [Como Design Hub], devoted entirely to the furniture and textile design districts that had represented the economy of those valleys; the *Casello del Design* at Porta Garibaldi tollhouse, where we won a national tender to manage a Center for the promotion of design in the metropolis of Milan in collaboration with the firm Tecno S.p.A.; the research center for the Design of Cultural Heritage at Palazzo Forti in Sabbioneta, with the design and realization of the first, and at the time only, European center for the digital valorization of historical heritage and of cultural design; up to the *Politecnico del Design*, a public-private company with the Cabassi Real-Estate Group for the joint creation of a recognized International School of higher education in design, a project in which a system-level solution was envisaged for student housing and their sustainable welcome, twenty years ahead of the current crisis of the habitability of Milan.

In 2004, when I left Politecnico di Milano for the first time, we realized that the Bovisa Campus had become, in the midst of Milan's full-on industrial divestment and tertiarization, the only real factory left, where manufacturing was done by transforming metals, paper, fabrics, wood into semi-finished goods and components and then assembling them into products, and by doing the same with the memes of every area of knowledge that could serve to produce project.

In the *Design System* of Politecnico di Milano, finally, everything was there: from the photogoniometric machine for measuring artificial light from designed light sources, to the tanks for simulating the pitching of sailing vessels; from the artistic-graphics laboratory with lathe and presses, to the third-millennium digital studios for movie design;

from the digital theatre for three-dimensional visualization, to the largest fashion-production atelier in Milan. Professional higher-education courses, international seminars, scientific symposia and congresses, competitive European research, global relations, doctoral programs, up to nearly five thousand students per year.

For every strand of knowledge useful to research and to education in design, the entire chain existed: from the extraction of meaning to the final showcase in the form of events, memorable those at the *Casello di Porta Garibaldi* [Porta Garibaldi Tollhouse], complete with DJ set under the incessant rain of the *Salone del Mobile*, from participatory design spaces and focus groups to the digital catalogue for remote fruition.

In *The Pillars of the Earth*, by Ken Follett, the handover from one generation to the next in the construction of a very large Gothic cathedral is recounted, drawing on the system of guild-based transfer of knowledge and the precursors of a proto-industrial system of prefabrication for systems and components. This model has given rise, in recent decades, to the concept of *Cathedral Thinking*, that is, the idea of

accepting to take part in a construction one knows one will not live to see completed, because the length of the fabrication process will outlast several generations, exactly as happened with the cathedrals. The concept of *Cathedral Thinking* lends itself to sustainable design, where there is in fact no end of works, every transformation we imagine will, in cascade, generate further ones and will trigger processes that, when they conclude, will immediately set in motion the phase of perpetual maintenance and cyclical readaptation [84](#).

What was already nascent then, alongside the cyclopean dimension, was the immaterial dimension of this System, what today would be called the *digital twin*. A *microphysics of building* (Foucault, 1977) [85](#) that we can today deconstruct and reassemble in order to adapt it to the accelerated and impetuous change of the present, recomposing new overall forms starting from stable components, from constitutive constants, so as to knot new ties between production and fruition of a knowledge system destined to endure over time. The challenge of the ensuing years was that, eluding the *ozi di Capua*

Note 8.

In Milan they say *lungo come la fabbrica del Duomo* [as long as the construction of the Duomo] to characterize a process that is by its nature without an end, in which each participant holds their role for a stretch of time and moves the project forward a few steps, leaving its legacy to others, as in a middle-distance relay. In Seassaro's work of building the *Cattedrale Politecnica del design* [Polytechnic Cathedral of design], I found a strong embrace of this philosophy.

Note 9.

Where structuralists have sought to observe and extract the founding mechanisms of civilizations, and in particular where Foucault has done so for modernity as political thought and as power, there are many ideas and terms that I learned from Alberto Seassaro to handle, theoretically and pragmatically.

[the idleness of Capua], to create the digital dimension of this System and to make it work on a global scale and continuously.

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19. Design for Cultural Heritage. A Visionary Trajectory

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19.1 Introduction

The aim of this essay is to present the theoretical and pragmatic framework developed by Alberto Seassaro for the emergent research area of *Design for cultural heritage*, with a view to its institutional recognition.

The birth and consolidation of the research area of design of cultural heritage (we will return later to the implications of this designation *of*) offer an emblematic example of how all the actions undertaken by Alberto Seassaro in those years served the steadfast construction of the design system, through an inseparable interplay between scientific-cultural thinking and political-institutional objectives.

To achieve this result, every small piece is, from Seassaro's point of view, not merely important but essential to defining the overall design. Much like an extremely detailed puzzle, Seassaro is able to see what still appears fragmented, and each small action, apparently unconnected, not immediately decisive, or even irrelevant, finds its exact place within his mental mosaic of design. In this excursus we will also try to reflect Alberto Seassaro's characteristic mode of reasoning: on the

one hand, leaps and far-reaching projections into the future, yet firmly anchored to concrete actions and operations meticulously aligned in preparation for the objective; on the other, circular movements – that is, digressions and seemingly secondary excursions – through which he inspires and, above all, substantiates his theses, bringing onto the main axis of the argument ever new substantive points (and even neologisms) that better articulate his concepts.

Accordingly, within a predominantly chronological narrative frame, we will seek to reconnect the antecedents from which his thought and practice arise, the analysis of his writings and their effects, and broaden the view to the contextual and peripheral elements that Seassaro lucidly identifies and mobilizes in support of his scientific and political aims. The essay is, in fact, structured in a *chronicle-like* manner: a first part offers a critical rereading of Alberto Seassaro's writings on cultural heritage, and a second examines the institutional episodes set in motion (thanks also to his efforts to mobilize colleagues across the design communities). A series of continual cross-references between the two parts makes evident the complex interdependencies and correlations (temporal and causal) between his theoretical elaborations and the institutional events, made possible as well by the maturation of the design system at Politecnico di Milano that was consolidating in those years.

19.2 Design for Cultural Heritage

The theme of design for cultural heritage emerges within the cultural debate on a *Museo del design* [design museum] for the city of Milan, where design itself is conceived as a cultural asset.

Slightly earlier came the establishment of *Sistema Design Italia* [Italy's Design System] (later developed through the SDI agency with various national branches SDI) [1](#) and a growing awareness of the district-based nature of Italian design. In Seassaro's strategic vision, the musealization of design implies that the valorization of *made in Italy* design also becomes an opportunity for the cultural legitimization of its disciplinary status, which at the time was far from assured. Within the impasse of the then-ongoing debate on a design



1. SDI (Sistema Design Italia) . Prima ricerca nazionale sul sistema design italiano. [Event→](#)

museum in Milan (which did not yet exist), his reflection already looks ahead: on the one hand, he argues that:

The design museum in Milan already exists, and it is constituted by the specifically Milanese concentration of repositories, collections, and assemblages of goods and products that are highly representative of the design phenomenon, as an aggregated cultural asset to be enjoyed and valorized thanks to the simultaneous presence of both quality and quantity of significant opportunities – to the point of speaking of a *distretto del design* [design district] and its related industries: in short, the project of a *Museo in rete per la rete dei musei* [Networked Museum for the Network of Museums]. (Seassaro, 2001, pp. 9-10)

On the other hand, he seizes the opportunity to legitimize and institutionalize this field of design research within the broader culture of design:

The innovation lies in having brought this theme to the dignity of a project, a particular kind of project, that of *design e management dei beni culturali* [design and management of cultural heritage], on which to engage the best academic resources [...] opening to designers the doors of a project-based thematic field of rare fascination, unexplored scope, urgent necessity, and intense economic value. (Seassaro, 2001, p. 10)

Within this convergence, Seassaro's strategic vision becomes particularly evident where he emphasizes the crucial role of the university – and of the then newly established *III Facoltà di Architettura – Design* [Third Faculty of Architecture – Design] at Politecnico di Milano [29](#) as a catalyst of this cultural process, particularly in dismantling the false opposition between the models then under discussion,

2. Progetto costitutivo
della III Facoltà di
Architettura.
[Document →](#)



[...] which sets in comparison, on the one hand, the historicist and museological requirements (and therefore the *museo del design* [design museum] formula), and, on the other, the political, pro-

ductive, and commercial requirements (and therefore the Design Center formula). [...]. The line expressed by the university is clear. There is no contradiction between these points of view, and one encompasses the other. (Seassaro, 2003, pp. 248-249)

For Seassaro, the Design Museum is not only a way to valorize historical industrial production, but an economic system, which must put what already exists into relation, creating a physical and virtual network of the entire city-region territorial system of elements and even diffuse events.

Significant, in this respect, are both the experiments within the *Corso di laurea in Disegno Industriale* [Undergraduate Program in Industrial Design] (a *Laboratorio di Sintesi Finale* [Final Synthesis Studio] dedicated to the *Museo del Design* [Design Museum] and 40 theses in the 2000-2001 academic year, (Seassaro, 2001, p. 10).), and the references to the *knowledge economy* and *knowledge management*, nourished by the project then under way, Designet, that is, a digital platform for the knowledge of design 3.

The research project *Il Museo Virtuale del Design* [The Virtual Museum of Design], which would be funded in 2009 by Regione Lombardia (for which Seassaro is responsible together with G. Guidi), inserts itself into this trajectory of far-reaching anticipation of the digital dimension of the valorization of cultural and design heritage.

But the strategic maturity of his thinking emerges above all when he calls for the need for a systemic design action «[...] to address, in terms of 'strategic design', the problem of the valorization of cultural heritage» (Seassaro, 2003, p. 246).

In approaching design as a cultural asset, Seassaro also defines design for cultural heritage as a strategic process of social and political importance, as well as its institutionalization within the university.

In those years, in fact, the University's *Centro per la Conservazione e Valorizzazione dei Beni Culturali* (CCVBC) [Center for the Conservation and Valorization of Cultural Heritage] was established which, under the direction of Prof. Maurizio Boriani, recognizes that

The issues of protection, conservation, and valorization involve a wide spectrum of disciplines and techniques, some specific, oth-



3. Sistemi conoscitivi per il design: una proposta metodologica. Il caso DesignNet. [Document →](#)

ers borrowed from other research sectors: indeed, the problems of knowledge (historical and material), diagnostics, monitoring of phenomena, and conservation techniques are involved, but also the more general themes of territorial and landscape planning, the economic programming of interventions, the dissemination and popularization of knowledge, and valorization. It can rightly be maintained that that of Cultural Heritage is a polytechnic subject par excellence and that therefore our university possesses the knowledge, the instrumentation, and the interdisciplinary relations required [4](#). (Boriani in *Rivista Politecnico*, 2004, p. 4)

4. *Rivista Politecnico*,
2004.
[Document →](#)



And Seassaro tirelessly undertakes to represent design as a privileged interlocutor within the scientific debate at Politecnico di Milano, including in the domain of the valorization of cultural heritage,

[...] employing all its possible disciplinary articulations, from communication design to event design to service design, which go to integrate the already consolidated project practices in the museographic field of interior design, exhibition design, graphic design, web design. [...] (Seassaro, 2003, pp. 246)

He defines, in an organic way for the first time in 2003, *design per la valorizzazione dei beni culturali* [design for the valorization of cultural heritage], or rather the contracted and more meaningful form of *design dei beni culturali* [design for cultural heritage] (his original definition), through all the disciplinary and even professional articulations it encompasses, insisting on the overall strategy that orients and governs them.

Designing a *bene culturale* [cultural asset] means carrying out a long series of operations – first creative and then technical – that render the asset first recognizable and then usable as a cultural asset. The classic example is that of a hidden asset – which at the beginning of the process may still be only 'matter' or 'material' – brought to light through phases of study, analysis, and historiographic and aesthetic critique, until it becomes identifiable as

an asset of historical-artistic-cultural value. And upon which, through a series of operations, one intervenes by design in order to bring out its characteristics, so that it may become an asset recognizable not only by scholars but by all potential users. (Seassaro, 2003, p. 242)

And again: «Designing cultural value is a precise design act. It is the process we call 'design for cultural heritage'» (Seassaro, 2003, p. 242). As Seassaro is keen to specify:

What is relatively new is that the condition for the enjoyment of a cultural asset presupposes – necessitates – the immediate perception on the part of the user (the user, the citizen) of being him or herself an active subject within a system of high cultural value. (Seassaro, 2003, pp. 240-241)

In this technical-creative process, the fundamental moment is enjoyment, and it also requires specific design competences, such as communication design, event design, and finally service design, «defining all the ways and procedures – but also the technologies – to establish the practicability of the relationship between the asset and its user» (Seassaro, 2003, p. 242).

This line of thought arises, on the one hand, in the context of a «growing inflection of the very concept of cultural asset, and thus a progressive multiplication of what are recognized as, so to speak, *museabili* [museum-eligible] assets» (Seassaro, 2003, p. 240) (a neologism), and, on the other hand, from the transformation of design which, according to Seassaro, as the science and technique of the project, encompasses an «infinite range of objects of design, conquering the territories of immateriality».

In 2001 the IN.DA.CO. Department – *Industrial Design, Arti, Comunicazione e Moda* [Industrial Design, Arts, Communication and Fashion] – was also established at Politecnico di Milano, the first department dedicated to design and its thematic articulations (today the Department of Design). In that context, the need to position the culture of design for cultural heritage within the Polytechnic matrix emerges as even more urgent. Seassaro notes the need, alongside the profiles of cul-

tural heritage managers and specialist consultants (of engineering and technological matrix), «of renewed and innovative competences capable of managing the communicative and fruition process, to which the academic experience of research and training for design can provide a response» (Seassaro, 2004, p. 12), and he concretely translates this need into the creation, within the newly established department, of thematic research groups (the *UdRD Unità di Ricerca e Didattica* [Research and Teaching Units]) and, within the Faculty, of educational curricula, for which a more extensive description will be given in the second part of the essay.

It is within this framework that my scientific interest as a designer and researcher of the processes of transformation and production of cultural assets found, in the INDACO Department at Politecnico di Milano, a group of colleague faculty members, researchers, doctoral candidates, and research fellows with whom I founded the *Unità di ricerca del Design per la valorizzazione dei beni culturali* [Research Unit of Design for the Valorization of Cultural Heritage], and which within the Faculty that I have the honor to chair has developed two lines of educational orientation expressed in the direction of *Design degli ambienti per i beni culturali* [Design of environments for cultural heritage] and *Design della comunicazione dei beni culturali* [Design of the communication of cultural heritage] 5 1. (Seassaro, 2004, pp. 14-15)

5. Brochure dell'unità di ricerca e didattica DeCH.
[Document →](#)



Note 1.
[Link →](#)



6. Seassaro A. *Per un contributo politecnico alla valorizzazione dei beni culturali*.
[Document →](#)



In the in-depth examination of the processes of valorization of *beni culturali* [cultural heritage], it also becomes strategic to map the competences of design for *beni culturali* within the Department (as will be seen below), and to illustrate the work of many colleagues who have addressed, in a strategic and collective manner, the project concerning *beni culturali* within the Department 6 1, but above all the need for the infrastructuring of the Department so that «disciplinary knowledge may interfere interdisciplinarily and become real supports for the industrial advancement of the country, including with respect to the production of value through cultural heritage» (Seassaro, 2004, pp. 14-15), as evidence that Seassaro's endeavor is, from the outset, grounded in a for-

ward-looking vision of strong anticipation of a mature culture of design for what he defines as «the cultural heritage industry» (Seassaro, 2004, pp. 13).

In the subsequent years, the research area progressively consolidated, becoming the subject of national research projects capable of accounting both for the *fenomenologia multiverso di design dei beni culturali* [multiverse phenomenology of design for cultural heritage] [7](#) (Parente, Lupo, 2009) and for the close interrelations with the virtual and interactive dimensions made possible by new digital technologies [8](#) (Irace, 2013); as well as various applied research projects (including the aforementioned *Museo Virtuale del Design* [Virtual Museum of Design]) and doctoral theses [9](#).

All these experiences contributed to a methodological re-definition, and to international promotion through conferences [10](#), the approach to design (and *meta-design*) for cultural heritage as a practice-based research:

Through a series of theoretical and applied experimentations, a scientific platform of *design per i beni culturali* [design for cultural heritage] has thus been built. [...] In these processes, the action of valorization by design is recognizable also in the *fase metaprogettuale* [meta-design phase], that is, preliminary to the project, at the moment when it identifies and characterizes a given asset as susceptible to subsequent practices of valorization [...]. Obviously, alongside this cross-cutting capacity to read the valorization process, which represents its overall direction, design substantiates its intervention through its operational competences and specializations, that is, that set of techniques, languages, and design tools that transform strategic choices into concrete actions [...]. It is necessary to have a direct and concrete experience of the matter of cultural heritage, which occurs only at the moment one designs: that is, one must operate as designers but with a strategic vision capable of conceiving aggregated competences in the form of replicable models and processes. (Lupo, 2009, pp. 10-11)



7. d.Cult: il design per la valorizzazione dei beni culturali. Strategie, strumenti e metodologie di progetto.

[Document →](#)



8. D&CH: Il design del patrimonio culturale fra storia memoria e conoscenza. L'immateriale, il virtuale, l'interattivo come materia di progetto nel tempo della crisi.

[Document →](#)



9. La valorizzazione dei beni culturali come processo di design: Casi, metodologie, strumenti.

[Document →](#)



10. Proceedings della Conferenza Cumulus 38°S 2009. Hemispheric Shifts Across Learning, Teaching and Research.

[Document →](#)

The institutional events described below further confirm the stages of consolidation of this scientific and cultural trajectory.

19.3 The Institutional Context

The relationship between design and cultural heritage began around 25 years ago, even before the establishment of the *Unità di Ricerca e Didattica* [Research and Teaching Unit] named *Design dei Beni Culturali* [design for cultural heritage], strongly advocated by Alberto Seassaro, coordinated first by Flaviano Celaschi, then by Seassaro himself, and finally by Fulvio Irace. In parallel with the reflection on the musealization of design that was developing in those same years, this working group sought to find tools and processes useful for the structured study of cultural heritage in its various forms and articulations, as well as to equip itself with new paradigms for understanding the dynamics of value construction within complex cultural systems (Celaschi, 2000). This activity continues to the present day in a renewed

team named *DeCH_Design for Cultural Heritage 2*.

It was precisely in the early 2000s that Alberto Seassaro – promoter of many intellectual and institutional innovations that fostered the growth of design as a university discipline in Italy – had the foresight to give space and identity to a partnership as fruitful and interesting as – at the time – unusual: as can be seen from his writings cited above, we are speaking of the union between design – understood as a discipline oriented toward innovation – and *cultural heritage* as a thematic field increasingly in need of new modes of valorization, communication, and fruition.

The trajectory began with the intuition to map the disciplines of design, of history and criticism, of representation, and of management relating to cultural heritage present, initially, in the IN.DA.CO. Department and then across the various departments of the University, with the aim of creating a true *Albo delle competenze politecniche* [Registry of polytechnic competences] (BBCC 2003–2004 [3](#)) to demonstrate the richness and articulation of this thematic field, as well as

Note 2.

[Link→](#)



Note 3.

Processi e metodi design based per la sistematizzazione, divulgazione e valorizzazione del patrimonio di esperienze, competenze, tecnologie, della cultura politecnica in materia di beni culturali: il progetto e lo sviluppo di eventi e prodotti informativi, formativi, di addestramento degli operatori [Design-based processes and methods for the systematization, dissemination, and valorization of the wealth of experiences, competences, and technologies of the polytechnic culture in the field of cultural heritage: the design and development of events and informational, educational, and operator-training products] 2003–2004. Research project curated by R. Trocchianesi (scientific supervisor A. Seassaro).

the potential of what the university could do – in terms of teaching, research, and design – for institutions, bodies, and actors across the entire system of the cultural industry.

Thanks above all to Seassaro's strategic approach, significant actions led to the positioning of this branch of design first within the Politecnico system (also considering the *CCVBC – University Center for the Conservation and Valorization of Cultural Heritage* mentioned earlier) and then within the national and international design system.

These actions concern both the project themes developed in the laboratories – especially in the *Laboratori di Sintesi finale* [Final Synthesis Studios], where the choice to address issues with wide social and, above all, cultural impact remains evident – and the establishment of curricular tracks he strongly promoted, such as *Comunicazione per la valorizzazione dei beni culturali* [Communication for the Valorization of Cultural Heritage] within the *Corso di Laurea di Design della Comunicazione* [Bachelor's Degree in Communication Design] (active from academic year 2003-2004 to 2006-2007) and *Allestimento e museografia per i beni culturali* [Exhibition and Museography for Cultural Heritage] within the *Corso di Laurea di Design degli Interni* [Bachelor's Degree in Interior Design] (active from academic year 2004-2005 to 2006-2007), in which attention to the valorization, through design, of material and intellectual cultural heritage became concrete. In particular, within the *Communication for the Valorization of Cultural Heritage* track there were design studios and theory courses aimed at addressing the specificities of the culture of graphic and visual communication design in physical and digital cultural contexts, museographic-exhibitory contexts, and territorial contexts.

Within the curricular pathway, among the specialized track courses, a course in *Sistema dei beni culturali e museologia* [System of Cultural Heritage and Museology] was introduced to underscore, on the one hand, the importance of a systemic approach to heritage and, on the other, the synergy toward interdisciplinarity with the fields of art, curatorship, and scientific-museum organization.

In addition to integrated systems of territorial and museum brand identity, the production of audiovisual and editorial artifacts for culture, the narrative approach, and new languages, space was given to a line of work focused on representing complexity through data visu-

alization and infographics, tackling design challenges arising from the visual representation of complex cultural phenomena. Digital archives and virtual museums constituted privileged contexts in which to explore new modes of fruition, narration, and communication of heritage, starting from the use of new technologies. The already mentioned *Designet* project fits precisely within this line of research.

Even more specific was the *Exhibition and Museography for Cultural Heritage* track, where critical-theoretical courses stood out, such as *Arte e Architettura* [Art and Architecture], which reflected on disciplinary boundaries and areas of interpolation between the artistic approach and design culture, and *Museografia* [Museography], where the museum was analyzed and addressed as a full-fledged cultural system from the architectural and spatial point of view, but also as an inhabited place for new modes of fruition, as a product of cultural marketing, as a sensitive organism ready to open up to innovative projects. Among the design courses, the *Laboratorio di allestimento* [Exhibition Design Studio] and the *Workshop di allestimento* [Exhibition Design Workshop] were established, both aimed at deepening an interior-application domain focused on wide-spectrum cultural contexts: museums, trade fairs, indoor and outdoor events.

It should be noted that exhibition design aims to give form to a three-dimensional narrative where – at an integrated level – the design dimension of interiors (spatial design and layout), of product (exhibition artifacts), and of communication (museum brand identity and wayfinding) are addressed. The lighting component also becomes central; for this reason a course in *Cultura e progetto della luce* [Culture and Design of Light] was introduced, for which Seassaro himself was the instructor and experimenter of didactic-design models focused on what was one of his main trajectories of innovation and inventive research.

In both tracks, a cycle of *Open lectures* was planned, special contributions by authoritative voices, mostly from outside academia, coming from the professional and corporate worlds.

In continuity with the curricular education and in collaboration with the Faculty of Architecture, 20 years ago a first-level master's program (still active) was also established in *Exhibition design – Architettura dell'esporre* [Exhibition Design – Architecture of Display] [114](#), delivered

at Politecnico di Milano (POLI.design) and IDEA (Italian Association of Exhibition Designers), where the architectural approach and the design approach intersected in relation to exhibition projects predominantly cultural and museographic in nature.



11. Master in *IDEA*:
Exhibition Design,
Architettura dell'Esposizione.
[Document →](#)

In those same years – in 2004 – an interdepartmental doctoral program was established (INDACO Department and BEST Department) that lasted until 2011, when it was decided to merge or otherwise reduce the number of doctoral programs. The program was titled *Design e tecnologie per la valorizzazione del patrimonio culturale* [Design and Technologies for the Valorization of Cultural Heritage], and thanks to the fruitful interdisciplinary collaboration and relational intelligence of three major polytechnic figures – Fabrizio Schiaffonati, Cesare Stevan, and Alberto Seassaro – the establishment of a doctoral program anchored at the Mantua campus (proposed and coordinated by Fabrizio Schiaffonati himself) became an opportunity to activate a geographical and cultural context in which the territory itself served as an experimental environment for developing projects of high cultural complexity.

In those years many doctoral researches applied to the territory helped consolidate the identity of the Mantua campus as the polytechnic site devoted to cultural heritage. Fruitful actions and collaborations were set up with local communities, companies, and institutions to explore and *implement* projects for the activation, valorization, and communication of the territory. The doctoral program played a central role in building an ecosystem of design for cultural heritage nourished by a circularity of actions that later proved virtuous and advantageous for the very territory involved. In this case, the triangulation among the disciplines of architecture, the technologies applied to systems of territorial governance, and a *design-driven* project culture oriented toward the innovation of cultural products and processes proved to be a winning synergy in the development of a branch of design that subsequently consolidated and expanded over time.

These are only some of the signs of the institution's strong sensitivity to the cultural dimension of design for cultural heritage.

Thanks also to the foresight and determination of such a visionary figure, there took shape – in those years – a multidisciplinary place of research, teaching, and design: a place devoted to observation, experimentation, and project work that equipped itself with new para-

digms for understanding the dynamics of value construction around tangible and intangible cultural heritage, from different viewpoints and toward new perspectives. As noted above, we could perhaps define it precisely as a *design for cultural heritage ecosystem*, that is, a system which still today is self-sustaining through the multiverse structures and opportunities of polytechnic research, teaching, and design, yet is also capable of absorbing, transforming, and channeling outward renewed forms of value.

Crucial were the research projects he envisioned and coordinated, both for the variety of scales of intervention (see the aforementioned *Museo Virtuale del Design* coordinated with G. Guidi, and *E.C.H.I Progetto di valorizzazione del patrimonio intangibile nel territorio alpino italo-svizzero* [E.C.H.I project for the valorization of intangible heritage in the Italian-Swiss Alpine area] coordinated with R. Trocchianesi) and for their strategic-systemic approach (see the aforementioned *PRIN* projects). It is undeniable to recognize that what took shape in that period was a kind of systematic survey of competences (humanistic and technical) and of the design potential related to cultural heritage, which today finds its place within the collective project to establish a national and international network for the application of design of cultural heritage.

In that initial phase, the research focus found synthesis in the idea that the contribution a *design driven* approach could offer to the development of design of cultural heritage was the urgency of repositioning the value of interdisciplinarity at the center of design culture.

19.4 Conclusions. Trajectories, Outcomes, and New Perspectives

The legacy that Seassaro has left for the research area of design for cultural heritage is substantial: it is not only scientific or institutional, but one of continuous, responsible research and innovation.

Much has happened: European research has set the horizon of reference; project opportunities and experiences have multiplied; the competences within the Department have expanded and become transversal, aligned with the strategic line of *Design per i sistemi della*

creatività e della cultura [Design for the Systems of Creativity and Culture], to valorize cultural production and fruition in a sustainable and inclusive way [12.9](#). Even today, as Seassaro himself indicates:



12. Il progetto Design per il cambiamento sistemico.
[Event→](#)

the strategic interest inherent in design of cultural heritage goes beyond its specific sectoral and disciplinary domain, distinguishing itself by a high level of interdisciplinarity that makes it transversal and complementary to that large part of contemporary culture that looks at design. (Seassaro, 2013, p. 40)

His position advocates a conscious design ethics that is nonetheless able to seize the opportunities of a model of valorization and knowledge production permeating the aesthetics and imaginaries of everyday life, within a *Heritage continuum* (Lupo, 2021) that is fluid and stratified between the real and the fictional, which seems to foreshadow (and also caution against) the most recent technological developments (metaverses, AI), yet still offers a horizon of design hope:

Celebration takes the place of 'vigilant memory', and the monument becomes the instrument that ossifies it into a symbol, turning it from living matter into dead matter, frozen in a single aspect, that of the rhetorical gesture. The project, therefore, if it does not save us, consoles us. And if it does not offer us eternal life, it stimulates us but also, technologically, enables us, through achronological and immaterial hyperreality, to have virtually everything but 'make-believe'. To aggregate all cultural assets into an endless panorama where, simultaneously, everything from every time, existing or imagined, can be grasped in perceptual fiction as in narrative fiction. Because everything is exhibitible, everything is displayable and communicable, in a total mythological spectacle. (Seassaro, 2013, p. 42)

This branch of design has become a choral endeavor: there are, in fact, several witnesses who have helped bring out the importance of cultural heritage as a design topic and – symmetrically – have firmly positioned design as an approach for cultural heritage itself. Twenty-five

years on, it is an increasingly consolidated discipline at national and international levels, sustained by partnerships with other universities, institutional actors, and corporate interlocutors, aimed at advancing

Note 4.
The reflection on these three research directions was *sparked* by a passage in the essay by Celaschi, Penati, and Trocchianesi (2016).

the path toward innovation and responding ever more knowingly to dedicated funding channels. A trajectory that marks the evolution of polytechnic design. A trajectory that unfolds along three main directions ⁴ still open today:

- the research for *new open questions for design* – a true common need of the scientific community – to explore and identify objectives toward which to direct study in the cultural sphere (also and above all in the face of technological, social, and economic transformations);
- research that investigates the *meanings* that the design *product* can represent within the complex, *multiscale* system of cultural heritage;
- research that investigates the *value* that the design *product* manifests within the processes of cultural production, activation, valorization, communication, and consumption.

Authorship

This contribution is the result of a joint reflection by the authors. Specifically: Eleonora Lupo is the author of *Introduction, Design for Cultural Heritage*, and co-author of the *Conclusions*; Raffaella Trocchianesi is the author of *The Institutional Context* and co-author of the *Conclusions*.

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20. Every Student Is, in Their Own Way, a Master

Paolo Tinelli

Architect

One of the things that always stimulated me and, consequently, bound me to Alberto Seassaro for nearly thirty years was his way of transmitting knowledge, in teaching, to students.

Over more than forty years, Alberto succeeded in bequeathing the deep sense of design as a project discipline that *enlists* countless other, ever-evolving disciplines.

His courses, first at the Faculty of Architecture and later at the Faculty of Design, were focused on the education and growth of each person, of each individual student, capturing and developing their personal essence, using methods rooted in theoretical tradition and, at the same time, experience-based methods, with frameworks and principles as a background score and, in the foreground, examples, wide-ranging culture, citations, and metaphors.

In his courses, literature, philosophy, anthropology, history, geography, the arts, and languages fostered the development of creative thought marked by the wisdom and quality of sound designing.

Nor was this aim pursued by relying solely on bibliographic references and exercises as ends in themselves. He asked of students a

critical maturity, and the book was a tool that, together with many others, was meant to raise the quality of the knowledge embedded in projects, whose unfolding had to excel in *concept* as much as in technical and executive quality.

His thinking on pedagogy evolved over the years yet retained certain lines that allow me, with complete ease, to call it the *Seassaro method for teaching design*. A way of teaching that, above all when I was a student, struck me deeply, finding it different from all the other courses I was taking in the Faculty of Architecture in the mid-1980s.

I cannot forget the seminar *Cultura e progetto della luce* [Culture and the Design of Light] within his course *Tecnica ed economia della produzione edilizia* [Technology and Economics of Building Production], which immediately revealed itself as a concentrate of multidisciplinary knowledge deemed the minimum necessary foundation for designing, and for realizing what had been designed, using that method of *learning by doing* that would become the central feature of the teaching in the Faculty of Design, where *learning by doing* consisted precisely of theoretical instruction and direct practical experience.

In the 1980s the *Industrial Design* courses within the Faculty of Architecture were very few, and those I had encountered were set up in a wholly different way. Some were conducted through simple didactic exercises of small-scale design, like those taught by Raffaella Crespi, who placed enormous emphasis on her own bibliography. By contrast, Marco Zanuso's were important, complex, and sophisticated. One became an excellent designer, skillfully prepared through non-trivial exercises in both architecture and design, but, as in certain courses in *Architectural Design and Composition*, you had to follow the *verb* and become a disciple of the instructor. Achille Castiglioni, with his non-authoritarian presence, absolutely simple and direct, was the professor of a *thousand secrets* of good designing, a figure of great experience with whom it was a pleasure to engage without any fear. Courses by important masters, yet which to me seemed aimed at training more or less expert *artisans of design*.

Before Alberto Seassaro's seminar I had not encountered a course endowed with the emotional sensitivity needed to make one perceive design as a discipline possessed of the *cultural depth* required to form designers with authentic character and personality, resilient and able

to face challenges with their own integrity and, above all, with the capacity to look beyond what exists, in search of new ideas and solutions, moving beyond the drawing and modelling of artefacts and products.

Alberto Seassaro's course addressed a fundamental element for both architecture and design, namely *lighting*, and, looking beyond the merely technical aspects, it brought to the fore the high symbolic and metaphorical contents it bears in the arts, in philosophy, and in theology, so as to construct a course of study on a theme only apparently *abstract*.

The course offered direct, cross-cutting experiences, using light to *speak about product* with Piero Castiglioni, and about his lamp Scintilla, released in 1972 by Fontana Arte and now an icon of minimalist design. It was presented at the seminar as a «lamp not to be looked at, blinding like sunlight», and here I leave one to infer the debate, the exchange, and the metaphors about light not to be looked at.

But light was also a way to discuss cutting-edge technology, thanks to contributions from the *Centro Elettrotecnico Sperimentale Italiano* (C.E.S.I.) in Milan on Via Rubattino, where the new technologies of fiber optics, then still experimental, could carry light from a distant source through tubes, *as if it were water*. And here too I leave it to the reader to imagine the debate generated by the encounter between the most technological questions and the metaphorical visions surrounding light. Light was also proposed as *environment*, as a *shaper of places*, through the experience of Gabriele Amadori, a committed scenographer who, together with Alberto Seassaro, introduced the term *synesthesia* as the capacity, more or less voluntary, to involve different senses in the perception of an event. A term new to us, on which Alberto Seassaro had already worked in the 1960s in his degree thesis, and one that proved absolutely disruptive for those embarking on design.

On this concept of synesthesia, Alberto Seassaro proposed designing and building a kaleidoscope as a machine for manipulating and shaping light. An extraordinary object for *design* pedagogy, capable of catalyzing visions and ideas and, if properly understood, of testing students through projects of broad cultural scope and thus drawing out the soul and personality of the person designing.

The second exercise was equally sophisticated. The student was asked to create a *luminous event* in time and space. If the time variable

could be freely defined, the space, by contrast, was given and had to take the form of a cube with a base module of one meter. Monumental works were presented, cubes over two meters on a side whose events bore learned metaphors and allusions, ranging from a UV-light interpretation of Bruno Munari's *drop* to the design and colors of the then-new Memphis, all the way to replicas of nature with reproductions of lightning and the aurora borealis.

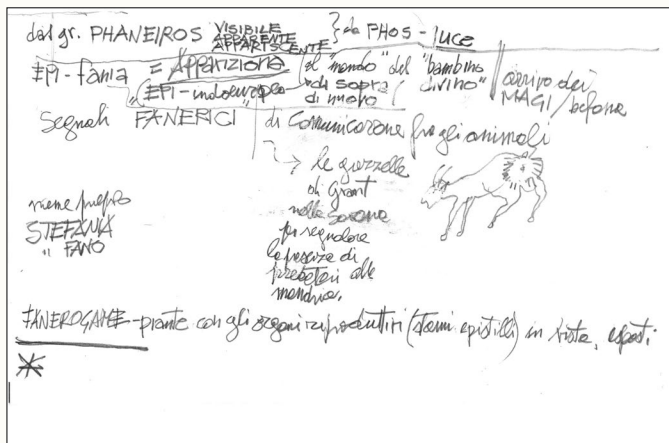
A splendid and *luminous* beginning for what became one of the most iconic courses in the *Industrial Design* track within the Degree Course in *Architecture* and, for a few years, within the Faculty of Design at Politecnico di Milano. It was an extraordinary success and a profound satisfaction that Alberto Seassaro, with the deepest values typical of a generation raised in debate and contestation, including political, savored fully.

A strongly multidisciplinary pedagogy, then, grown over time and aimed at equipping the student with the knowledge needed to provide a solid and autonomous cultural foundation and, above all, a critical mind of their own, not divorced from a design capacity that did not shy away from managing the technical dimension.

Learning by doing found in Alberto Seassaro's teaching a way to form designers with an identity of their own, yet also with the competencies suited to working in teams within a climate of continual exchange; a value that left students with the sense of having attained a maturity that went beyond the mere experience needed to pass an exam.

This pedagogical approach, which I experienced in 1987 as a student and subsequently saw evolve while for many years working alongside Alberto Seassaro as a teaching assistant, never changed its substance; it was instead the object of continual adjustment and integration, enriched by his research on light. One of the linchpins of this research was an etymological itinerary that probed ever more deeply the truest and most profound meaning of the word *light* and the constellation of terms that denote luminous phenomena, touching the scientific, cultural, and anthropological aspects of different human civilizations. Studies that Alberto Seassaro summarized and gathered into two beautiful tools which, together with Claudio Conio (my colleague through many long years of assisting), we iconically called *la piramide* [the pyramid] and *i papiri* [the papyri].

Figure 1.
Notes for the *Lighting design*
course.



1. Radici etimologiche
vocaboli della luce.
[Document →](#)



2. Radici etimologiche
vocaboli della luce.
[Document →](#)



La piramide is an extraordinary, geometric synthesis of all the knowledge that revolves around light, which Alberto Seassaro

distilled into a beautiful graphic work reproduced below. A small, synoptic chart, compact yet dense with marks and annotations, arranged in a logical circuit wholly descriptive of this energy that enables living beings to see.

The *papiri* [1x](#) [2x](#), study diagrams drawn on long strips of sheets glued together, on

which Alberto Seassaro, in a vast domino, lists meanings and the historical and anthropological considerations of various civilizations concerning light. Eight sheets of differing lengths that probably generated the *Piramide*.

A final thought on Alberto Seassaro, as instructor and as Dean. By steadfastly supporting the moral and educational growth of students, he also conveyed to them an understanding of the political dimensions that accompany the evolution of the university. Unforgettable was the class in which he explained the *3+2* university reform – introducing the first level of *Laurea triennale* [three-year first-cycle degree] and the second level of *Laurea specialistica o magistrale* [second-cycle master's degree], established by DM 509/99 and later amended by DM 270/04. Breaking off the lecture, he delivered an extended address that began from *Articolo 33* [Article 33] of the Constitution and carefully laid out the details of that reform for the students, showing deep respect and consideration for them, so that they might be aware, also on the political plane, of the transformations under way in the place where they were being formed and might become protagonists of those changes, to become, each in their own way, young Masters of design [3x](#).

Prefazione

Architetti si diventa per mezzo della formazione, dell'apprendimento e del ruolo significativo assunto dalla trasmissione dell'esperienza da parte di chi ha già ripercorso talune strade. Parimenti, esistono figure che nascono architetti, intendendo con tale espressione coloro che rispondono a entrambe le sfumature che il termine comporta.

Archí (ἀρχή) è il prefisso che indica la posizione di comando o superiorità, come *capo* o *primo*; *Téktōn* (τέκτων) individua il sostantivo che significa *costruttore*, *artigiano*, *artefice*, o colui che ha a che fare con l'azione o l'operatività.

Ciò che, tutti, riconoscono ad Alberto Seassaro, celata tra le eclettiche e articolate micro e macro-storie che caratterizzano la sua storia personale, è proprio la magia di aver saputo costruire un percorso mirato a disegnare l'autonomia disciplinare dell'area del design da quella portante e storicamente strutturante dell'architettura.

Un percorso giunto alla sua più elevata espressione per mezzo della fondazione della Facoltà del Design e, successivamente, della promozione e introduzione, nell'arduo magma dei dispositivi ministeriali, del Settore Scientifico Disciplinare del Design: un fenomeno dalle im-

ponenti ricadute sulle carriere universitarie e sul futuro di intere generazioni di designer nelle più contemporanee accezioni a cui il termine, attualmente, rimanda.

Alberto Seassaro, nel corso della sua carriera accademica, ha compiuto il gesto più significativo che un professore può compiere: mettere a disposizione della collettività la sua intelligenza, la sua indubbia lungimiranza, il suo infinito talento e intuito.

Se attualmente il baricentro della formazione e della ricerca nel mondo del design milanese, possiede una portata universale e riconosciuta in un'accezione non retorica e statica, bensì dinamica, fluida, nazionale, internazionale, lo dobbiamo in gran parte proprio a lui: intellettuale tra consenso e dissenso che, nel *guardare lontano*, ha riposto una filosofia di vita prodigandosi, proprio sulla base di ciò, a contribuire alla crescita, di riflesso, del Politecnico di Milano. I suoi interessi ampi e diversificati rivolti alla progettazione e sperimentazione, alla professione e ricerca, alla produzione edilizia, ma anche all'arte e all'artigianato, alle tecnologie del futuro, accompagnate da un'attrazione per la storia, hanno animato il suo operato nel corso dell'intera vita, indirizzandolo, alcuni anni dopo, verso nuovi orizzonti quelli, appunto, del design che, già a quel tempo, probabilmente iniziava a profilare.

A partire dai suoi interessi per la tecnologia e la produzione edilizia, per la prefabbricazione, l'arte, l'artigianato e la sperimentazione, passioni che lo hanno portato a realizzare opere di edilizia industrializzata e di architettura d'interni e, tra il 1962 e il 1969, a condurre ricerche teoriche e applicate nel campo della progettazione e sperimentazione della forma e nell'ambito delle arti visive, del disegno industriale e dell'architettura, il suo impegno si sposta progressivamente e con decisione verso l'ambito del disegno industriale.

In tale scenario ha rivestito numerosi ruoli istituzionali, tra i quali quello di presidente del Corso di Laurea quinquennale in *Disegno industriale* dal 1994 al 2003; di presidente del consorzio POLI.design dal 1999 al 2002; di Preside della Facoltà del Design dal 2000 al 2010, della prima Facoltà di Design in Italia, sia anagraficamente sia per dimensione. È proprio all'avvio di tale straordinario percorso di crescita – certamente raro ed eccezionale nel panorama universitario italiano – che i nostri percorsi, collocati a cavaliere tra la fine degli anni '80 e l'inizio degli anni '90, si sono incrociati.

Teatro di tale frequentazione: gli spazi del Dipartimento, di anima tecnologica, che allora portava l'indimenticabile nome di PPPE (acronimo impronunciabile ma facilmente memorizzabile che stava per Programmazione, Progettazione e Produzione Edilizia) per poi mutare titolazione, appunto, in Di.Tec (Disegno Industriale e Tecnologia dell'Architettura), finalizzato anche a fornire visibilità e spessore all'area del Design.

Un mondo che stava progressivamente assumendo un ruolo sempre più significativo, strategico, aperto all'interno dell'Ateneo e che figure, quali appunto Alberto, hanno contribuito a modellare giorno dopo giorno.

In quegli spazi ristretti, ma estremamente ricchi di persone, carte, appunti, documenti, idee e visioni nacque, grazie a lui, il primo Corso di Laurea in *Design* a livello nazionale. Primo seme e frammento di quello che oggi rappresenta il *Sistema Design* del Politecnico di Milano, un luogo di eccellenza didattico, di ricerca e di sperimentazione, un modello di riferimento a livello internazionale.

Proprio in un periodo, quello attuale, che evidenzia l'importanza dell'azione della contaminazione dei saperi e dell'evidente *status* eteronomo che il mondo dell'architettura e del design reclamano ed esibiscono, la figura di Alberto Seassaro assume ancor più i caratteri dell'attualità e della modernità d'azione.

La sua tesi di laurea, riferita al progetto della forma e inerente alla sinestesia delle arti, evidenzia il passo fuori dalle discipline più consuete della progettazione e della composizione, raccontando molto dei suoi interessi ai temi della interdisciplinarietà e della interrelazione tra le competenze.

Uno studente di architettura, Alberto, già proiettato verso il senso dell'istituzione e teso a intercettare la comprensione dei suoi problemi: in *primis*, l'interesse per i rapporti tra didattica e ricerca, tra Facoltà e Dipartimento – allora Istituto – tra ricerca per la didattica e ricerca professionale. Temi che risentono profondamente delle istanze alimentate dal movimento studentesco e che si ritroveranno, più tardi e con più ardore, nel suo essere docente e, ancor più, preside.

Parimenti, il Seassaro artista e professionista svela la sua principale qualità: la curiosità e la fame di sperimentazione: la sua formazione artistica a Brera, le frequentazioni con le avanguardie milanesi, l'attenzione al mondo della forma e al tema della luce, la militanza politica, proprio e anche, in qualità di artista.

Sul versante professionale, i suoi progetti si contraddistinguono per essere riusciti ad affrontare le articolate scale del progetto: dagli oggetti d'arredo, agli interni, alle architetture.

Nel cuore di tale quadro colorato, multidirezionato ed eccentrico, emerge il tema della genesi della disciplina del design presso il Politecnico di Milano: un embrione che, evolvendosi, si diffonderà in tutta Italia. Fondamentale, in tale contesto, il ruolo della componente propria della Tecnologia dell'Architettura svolto tra le mura dell'allora Facoltà di Architettura e alimentato dalla frequentazione di ambienti stimolanti e preposti all'innovazione e al cambiamento.

L'intera area tecnologica, le culture tecniche, il Dipartimento di Tecnologia hanno rivestito un ruolo di primaria rilevanza nella nascita della disciplina del design: senz'altro Alberto Seassaro è riuscito a cucire la sua esperienza artistica con l'esperienza professionale, condivisa con Giuseppe Ciribini, Marcello Grisotti, Raffaella Crespi, Giacomo Scarpini, stimolato, presso il Dipartimento di Programmazione, Progettazione e Produzione Edilizia del Politecnico di Milano, da figure centrali quali Marco Zanuso, Raffaella Crespi, Achille Castiglioni e, successivamente, Tomás Maldonado, Ezio Manzini, Francesco Trabucco portatori, tutti, di vivaci esperienze in tale settore.

Indimenticabile e strategico, per la riuscita del programma di vasta scala che aveva in mente, altresì, risulta essere l'apporto degli storici amici del Dipartimento che, per mezzo del dialogo e, spesso, della tenace e passionale discussione, contribuirono, direttamente e indirettamente, all'evoluzione e nascita di *una nuova disciplina*, frutto, appunto, della fusione dei saperi e delle competenze che ogni singola personalità metteva in campo.

Antonio Scoccimarro, allora direttore di Dipartimento, Guido Nardi, Bianca e Maria Bottero, Fabrizio Schiaffonati, Valerio Di Battista, Claudio Molinari: figure, tutte, centrali nel consentire che, appunto, il Dipartimento si aprisse a tale nuova esperienza e che Alberto fosse il portabandiera di tale crociata.

Specularmente, anche nelle altre Scuole Italiane di Architettura, sarà ancora la componente tecnologica ad alimentare le prime esperienze del design nella sfera universitaria, articolatesi lungo tutta la lunghezza dello stivale. Le tappe che Alberto Seassaro ha vissuto nel processo di ideazione e creazione delle multiformi piattaforme cul-

turali che lo hanno visto protagonista nel mondo della ricerca e della didattica, sono confluite nel suo essere preside di una Facoltà – oggi Scuola – che ancora oggi risente in forma incisiva dell'*imprinting* da lui formulato e disegnato.

Da tali sintetici tratti emerge un Seassaro demiurgo che fa della sperimentazione lo strumento operativo di lavoro, collocandosi a cavaliere tra progetti artistici, di interni e di design, e dove l'immaginazione dello spazio dell'abitare diviene sistema per mezzo, anche, di un conforme controllo sugli aspetti tecnologici dell'architettura.

L'attività di formazione e di ricerca interpretano, tramite uno specifico approccio, un ruolo civico e sociale, valorizzando la riconosciuta valenza di essere in grado di accogliere i contenuti innovativi dell'arte del progetto per tradurli in forma istituzionale. Per tale aspetto, e non solo per esso, in qualità di prorettore vicario, ma ancor più di architetto che ha avuto la fortuna di conoscerlo, sento l'esigenza di ringraziare Alberto Seassaro per quanto sia riuscito a ideare e realizzare per il Politenico di Milano e per la sua costante evoluzione e riconoscibilità internazionale nel campo del design e delle arti applicate.

Perciò, a nome del Rettorato e della sua anima progressista e istituzionale, percepisco il piacere e il dovere di rivolgere a lui, professore emerito e cultore della disciplina, un plauso per lo sforzo compiuto nell'aver saputo anticipare taluni temi, dinamiche, tempi, attualmente di indubbia attualità, che vedono nell'alchimia e fusione delle discipline l'arma per sconfiggere l'autoreferenzialità, spesso esibita, del mondo dell'architettura e del design medesimo, aprendo le porte a un concetto globale e universale di arti applicate che individua, nel design milanese, un vero e proprio pioniere mondiale tra innovazione, tradizione, nuovi orizzonti.

Emergono, in tale scenario, i tratti di un Alberto Seassaro intellettuale eteronomo, portatore di un'idea, collocata tra architettura e design: un sogno di allora, trasformatosi oggi in un ambito di estrema e vivace risonanza e attualità.

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Il mio incontro con Alberto Seassaro è coinciso con uno di quei momenti in cui l'energia e le capacità di un gruppo superano la somma delle sue parti. Ricordo una stanza fumosa, di quelle che ancora esistevano negli anni '90, nella quale un gruppetto di persone occupava il poco spazio lasciato libero da armadi e tavoli su cui erano accatastate pile di documenti, fogli con appunti, correzioni e schemi pieni di caselle, frecce e collegamenti. Prima ancora, ricordo un seminterrato altrettanto stipato nel quale, quando ero ancora studente, ho lavorato con lui alla realizzazione di una mostra che ha poi portato alla mia tesi di laurea, di cui Alberto Seassaro è stato relatore e che mi ha dato modo di iniziare a conoscerlo in un modo decisamente più intimo e profondo di quanto normalmente avvenga nel rapporto tra docente e laureandi. Forse il design italiano potrebbe avere una mitologia dello scantinato così come la Silicon Valley ha quella del garage, perché successivamente ricordo un altro seminterrato, in un condominio in via D'Ovidio che il Politecnico aveva affittato per far fronte alla carenza di spazi, che ha rappresentato la prima piccolissima espansione del progetto che successivamente abbiamo chiamato *Sistema Design* del Politecnico

di Milano: il Consorzio POLI.design, la Facoltà (ora Scuola) del Design e il Dipartimento di Design. Essendoci stato fin dall'inizio, sono certo che il disegno d'assieme non fosse preordinato e che abbiamo operato all'interno di un modello emergente, cogliendo tutte le opportunità e sfruttando tutte le risorse disponibili, piuttosto che formulando un piano strategico che prevedeva la costruzione di tutte le componenti del sistema. Tuttavia, quella che allora era la visione di Alberto Seassaro e un'intuizione da coltivare, oggi è una presenza solida, cresciuta fino a diventare una delle tre anime del Politecnico di Milano e riconosciuta a livello internazionale.

Questa crescita si è basata sulla direzione contagiosa di Alberto Seassaro, sulla sua capacità di tenere insieme persone con competenze e caratteri diversi e complementari, ma anche sulla fatica delle procedure, degli equilibri e dei confini da rinegoziare continuamente. Quando ripenso a quei primi anni, mi tornano in mente giornate infinite di lavoro, cui fino a un certo punto ho partecipato svolgendo contemporaneamente attività professionale e conducendo una doppia vita lavorativa che impegnava molti dei miei fine settimana e periodi di ferie. Ricordo, per esempio, le tante volte che abbiamo scavalcato i cancelli per entrare al Politecnico nel fine settimana, o un'estate passata con Flaviano Celaschi a elaborare un grande piano di sviluppo della didattica laboratoriale e delle infrastrutture di supporto che doveva essere consegnato all'inizio di settembre, che forse mi ha allenato alle scadenze dei progetti di ricerca europei che sarebbero arrivate anni dopo, sempre collocate all'inizio di settembre. Si tratta di un'esperienza che ha assunto una dimensione *eroica* nei ricordi di quasi tutti i componenti del gruppo, che forse oggi meriterebbe una rilettura critica alla luce di un necessario equilibrio tra vita professionale e privata.

Non si è trattato di un percorso lineare, privo di errori, ripensamenti, cadute e risalite. Quando Alberto Seassaro decise di lanciarsi nella sfida della costruzione dei percorsi formativi in design al Politecnico, le risorse erano limitatissime. Alberto Seassaro è stato capace di riconoscere e mettere insieme differenze e complementarità, aggregando colleghi, coinvolgendo diverse competenze e attitudini, aprendo dialoghi interni ed esterni, trovando le risorse necessarie ad allargare il gruppo, lavorando con tenacia alla costruzione e poi al consolidamento, anche formale, delle diverse componenti del sistema. In questo per-

corso, esaltante e accidentato come sono tutte le grandi sfide, Alberto Seassaro è stato capace di tenere insieme visioni e vincoli, immaginazione e regole, urgenza dell'innovazione e pazienza dell'istituzione.

Di lui mi ha sempre colpito la *poliedricità*. I suoi interessi, che i contributi di questo libro rappresentano nella loro varietà e complessità e che spaziavano dall'architettura al design della luce; dall'esplorazione della forma in bilico tra arte, architettura e design, alla tecnologia dei componenti edilizi; fino alla relazione tra industria delle costruzioni e indotti dell'edilizia, hanno funzionato come cerniere capaci di aprire dialoghi e creare connessioni. Questa attitudine alla trasversalità ha reso il *Sistema Design* intrinsecamente aperto e relazionale, alimentandone nel tempo la vitalità e saldando la poliedricità del suo fondatore alla politecnicità del progetto.

Il suo tratto distintivo, ciò che lo rendeva a mio avviso più interessante, erano le contraddizioni feconde. Alberto Seassaro è stato, allo stesso tempo, un anarchico, un visionario e un uomo delle istituzioni. L'anarchico che rifiuta cornici troppo strette e apre varchi; il visionario che riconosce le opportunità e le traiettorie per immaginare il nuovo e reimmaginare quanto già esiste; l'uomo delle istituzioni che accetta la responsabilità di dare forma stabile alle novità, perché possano durare oltre le persone e i cicli, senza tuttavia rinunciare alla tensione verso il nuovo. In questo senso, Alberto Seassaro è stato poliedrico ma anche profondamente *politecnico*: non solo figura di riferimento di un'istituzione, ma motore di un progetto che, forse per la prima volta, ha integrato davvero le diverse componenti del sapere che caratterizzano il Politecnico di Milano. Il *Sistema Design* è, in questa prospettiva, il risultato di una regia capace di tenere insieme elementi diversi con un principio di coerenza dinamica: formazione, ricerca, trasferimento tecnologico, relazioni con il tessuto produttivo e culturale, internazionalizzazione. La scommessa, tutt'altro che scontata, era che il design potesse essere coltivato come disciplina accademica senza perdere la sua vocazione progettuale e la sua capacità di stare nel mondo. Non so se ci siamo riusciti: il design è una disciplina giovane e la sfida richiede un'applicazione costante. Credo però che la migliore risposta, a distanza di trent'anni, sia quella che possiamo leggere nei numeri, nella reputazione, nei progetti, nelle persone che sono cresciute in questa comunità e che oggi ne fanno parte.

Questa pubblicazione, curata con sensibilità da Antonella Penati, Agnese Rebaglio e Paola Bertola, restituisce attraverso una pluralità di voci e di formati la figura di Alberto Seassaro nella sua ricchezza e complessità. Dai profili critici alla *quasi biografia*, dalle interviste ai camei, dai documenti alle ricostruzioni tematiche, propone un quadro coerente con la persona e il progetto che ha contribuito in modo determinante a costruire. Non si tratta di un racconto agiografico, e nemmeno della celebrazione di quanto fatto, ma piuttosto della rilettura critica di un percorso, nella quale riflettere sulle scelte compiute, sugli obiettivi raggiunti ma anche sulle criticità incontrate e sui modi in cui sono state affrontate, per guardare alle prospettive future con rinnovata energia e capacità di innovazione.

Le sezioni iniziali, dedicate all'*intellettuale eteronomo* e al rapporto fecondo tra architettura e design, inquadrano la sua postura culturale e colgono il nucleo di formazione ed evoluzione del suo pensiero. Le pagine su *dove tutto è cominciato* riportano il lettore al Politecnico della sperimentazione, con quella miscela di visione e pragmatismo che ha reso possibile raggiungere risultati inattesi. L'intervista a Ugo La Pietra e i camei, tra cui il ricordo di Giancarlo Consonni, Bianca Bottero, Luigi Bistagnino, aggiungono profondità emotiva e prospettive laterali.

La sezione dedicata alle sperimentazioni artistiche e progettuali di Alberto Seassaro dopo la laurea e prima della sua stagione accademica compiuta, con i contributi di Antonella Penati che esalta il fare artistico della sua formazione e di Giovanni Baule che trova nelle *notazioni visive* il modo di espressione più caratteristico di Alberto Seassaro, a cui si aggiungono contributi come *Fare tutto, fare ad arte* (C.vo) di Beppe Finessi e *Immaginare lo spazio dell'abitare tra sperimentazione e sistema* (C.vo) di Giampiero Bosoni, ben illumina la cifra del suo stare sui confini e nelle intersezioni. È un filo che ritroviamo poi, nelle pieghe della cultura tecnologica, nelle premesse alla nascita del *Sistema Design*: il ruolo sociale della formazione e della ricerca, la capacità di catalizzare energie e idee, come ricordano Fabrizio Schiaffonati e Luciano Crespi, e le immagini vivide del *pinguino* e dei *pipistrelli* di Cristina Tonelli che restituiscono la dimensione umana e la tenacia necessaria a gestire un cantiere istituzionale in divenire.

Edificare l'istituzione per far spazio a contenuti nascenti è forse il cuore del lascito di Alberto Seassaro. Costruire istituzioni è infatti un

progetto culturale: significa tradurre contenuti innovativi in forme condivise e durevoli, dare ai processi di apprendimento e di ricerca strutture che possano sostenere la complessità e gli sviluppi futuri. Nei contributi di questa sezione – dalla riflessione sulla didattica per il design ai documenti e testimonianze della trasformazione, fino agli affondi su notazioni visive, beni culturali e light design (*Ogni studente è a suo modo un Maestro*) – si riconosce un pensiero che vede nel *bricolage* la via per creare sistemi resilienti. Si tratta di un tema che ho poi, un po' per caso, riscontrato nella ricerca sull'innovazione sociale, dove il *bricolage* come approccio legato alla carenza strutturale di risorse è stato ampiamente indagato.

Guardando oggi al *Sistema Design* – alla sua dimensione internazionale, alla qualità della ricerca, all'ampiezza della proposta formativa, alla relazione forte con gli sviluppi sociali, economici e culturali – riconosco la capacità di guardare al futuro di Alberto Seassaro e il *cathedral thinking* che invita a immaginare opere più grandi del tempo di chi le avvia e che consente di produrre eccezioni, facendo in modo che i sistemi restino vivi, allenati al nuovo, capaci di apprendere e di evolversi.

Ringrazio, a nome della comunità che costituisce il *Sistema Design*, tutte e tutti coloro che hanno contribuito a questo volume. Il merito delle curatrici è stato quello di dare forma corale alla memoria, senza smussarne gli spigoli e restituendo anche le contraddizioni perché possa diventare eredità e non repertorio. A chi leggerà auguro quindi che queste pagine risultino non solo un omaggio a una figura fondamentale, ma anche una chiamata al fare: a progettare sapendo tenere insieme la visione che serve per immaginare il futuro e la tenacia che è necessaria per raggiungere risultati concreti. È, in fondo, ciò che Alberto Seassaro ci ha chiesto di continuare a fare.

Quasi una biografia

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Il Design al Politecnico di Milano

La realtà del design italiano e la storia del suo rapporto con l'industria costituiscono al contempo un'eccezione e un caso esemplare.

A differenza della maggior parte dei Paesi europei ingaggiati – nella ricostruzione del dopoguerra – ad alimentare una *scienza* del progetto che andasse incontro alle necessità di un'industria in espansione, in Italia la prima modernizzazione del Paese passa attraverso una *cultura* del progetto che segue la strada originale e tutt'altro che ingenua dell'invenzione di nuove tipologie che nascono già mature (Castellnuovo, 1989); del trasferimento tecnologico e di linguaggio tra settori merceologici differenti e addirittura distanti; dei travasi fecondi che dall'industria bellica arrivano sino a quella domestica dell'arredo. Una strada che non ha mai avuto nella certezza del metodo il suo centro gravitazionale ma piuttosto nell'intuizione colta, nello spontaneismo che non segue scuole di pensiero, nella sperimentazione autoriale, nella visione strategica che trascende l'oggetto. È lo stesso sistema industriale, costituito soprattutto da piccole e medie aziende, a costi-

tuire al contempo un'eccezione e un caso esemplare. Prive della rigidità delle strutture organizzative così caratteristica delle grandi aziende Americane e Europee (Chandler, 1994), le piccole e piccolissime imprese italiane attuano una politica flessibile di libera collaborazione con il sistema del design, mai integrato nelle logiche dell'impresa e dunque libero nell'espressione quasi-artistica di fare anche «crociate culturali» (A. Branzi, 2011a, p. 4) e di tracciare strade inedite sperimentando ipotesi destinate a lasciare il segno e a divenire, in molti casi, il manifesto di un modo di fare design.

Rispetto alle storiche esperienze del Bauhaus e di Ulm in Germania e degli istituti universitari e tecnici sviluppati in tutto il mondo, dapprima nei Paesi industrializzati europei e in Nord America e quindi nei Paesi emergenti e di più recente sviluppo, in Italia il design, malgrado il successo riscosso in tutto il mondo sin dagli anni '60 dai suoi progettisti e dai prodotti da essi disegnati, per lungo tempo non ha potuto contare su un sistema della formazione e della ricerca universitaria. Sino all'inizio degli anni '90 infatti, la formazione universitaria si alimentava di singoli corsi presenti all'interno delle Facoltà di Architettura mentre, al di fuori di essa, proliferavano istituzioni private che supplivano a questa carenza con un'offerta formativa mirata.

Come ci ricorda Andrea Branzi, «nel paesaggio del design italiano hanno sempre operato sia progettisti laureati in Architettura che figure di autodidatti come Bruno Munari, Enzo Mari, Denis Santachiara, Joe Colombo» (Branzi, 2011b, p.4) capaci di utilizzare il design «non per cambiare il mondo reale ma quello delle idee» (Branzi, 2011b, p. 5).

Quando, agli inizi degli anni '90, il Politecnico di Milano decide di riconoscere all'insegnamento del Design un suo percorso autonomo rispetto agli studi di Architettura, deve fare i conti con questa importante eredità culturale prodotta direttamente dalla manifattura e instillata nel progetto dei suoi prodotti, senza l'intermediazione di un sistema della formazione dedicato.

Della storia della edificazione di questo grande sistema della formazione e della ricerca di design, molto si deve ad Alberto Seassaro.

È di lui e di questa costruzione, che ha investito una comunità per quasi un ventennio, che qui ci accingiamo a scrivere mettendo al centro di questa storia l'indissolubile intreccio umano e culturale tra Alberto Seassaro e il Politecnico di Milano.

Preambolo

Arduo, certamente difficile, scrivere di Alberto Seassaro per il carattere poliedrico della sua produzione progettuale quasi programmaticamente priva di perimetri facili da tracciare; quasi programmaticamente rivolta a *produrre eccezioni*, come scrive Beppe Finessi nel suo bel contributo sulla piattaforma Design Philology; quasi programmaticamente votata a guardare alle cose ancora da fare più che a quelle già fatte, tanto da inibire qualsiasi tentativo di catalogazione e riordino di quanto realizzato. Archiviare le proprie esperienze come esemplari e degne di essere ricordate non appartiene all'attitudine, per certi versi dissipativa, di chi, tra raccogliere frammenti del proprio vissuto e guardare al futuro sceglie sempre di andare oltre. L'ambizione a collezionare traguardi e successi professionali, tipica di chi aggiorna puntigliosamente e con costanza il proprio profilo curricolare, è del resto lontana da un'indole sempre critica verso sé stessi prima ancora che verso gli altri.

Una sola grande *eccezione* al pullulare di *eccezioni* che hanno costellato la sua intensa vita: quella del suo ruolo di Preside della Facoltà del Design. Ruolo che lo ha assorbito nella fase matura della sua carriera e nel quale ha riversato una tale energia da indurre chi lo ha conosciuto in quel momento a far coincidere una parte con l'intera sua esistenza.

Determinazione personale, capacità di cogliere idee e contenuti condivisi, di dare senso a un progetto unitario, di governare un percorso di legittimazione, creano il terreno per la costruzione, al Politecnico di Milano, di una Facoltà del Design di portata internazionale. È l'inizio degli anni '90.

In questa storia, Alberto Seassaro entra in scena quasi per caso, trascinato dalle insistenze dei colleghi più che da personale convinzione. Nonostante questa ritrosia iniziale, in questo lungo e articolato processo di edificazione istituzionale, egli giocherà il ruolo di protagonista, assorbito in questa avventura in ogni suo sforzo progettuale.

Teatro e al contempo attore comprimario di questa narrazione, il Politecnico di Milano, Università del progetto, fino a quel momento istituzione della formazione di ingegneri e architetti.

Mentre scriviamo questo libro è passato un anno e poco più da quando è on line la piattaforma *Design Philology* che ricostruisce «le

tracce storiche dello sviluppo e istituzionalizzazione dell'insegnamento e della ricerca in design al Politecnico di Milano e più complessivamente a livello accademico» (Bertola, Rebaglio, 2024, pp. 217-218). La piattaforma racconta

[...] il percorso di ricostruzione collettiva dei caratteri identitari e delle radici culturali del Dipartimento [di Design NdR] e più complessivamente del Sistema Design del Politecnico e della sua comunità di riferimento». Il Progetto *Design Philology* che celebra il trentennale della nascita del primo Corso di Laurea in *Disegno industriale* – punto di avvio dell'intero Sistema Design del Politecnico di Milano –, si struttura «come progetto di codifica e ricostruzione della memoria storica del *Sistema Design*, come strumento per chiarirne i caratteri identitari e su cui radicare nuove prospettive strategiche. (Bertola, Rebaglio, 2024, p. 216)

Il progetto, oltre a descrivere le principali tappe che hanno portato alla costruzione del Sistema Design del Politecnico di Milano, prevede anche una parte dedicata alla celebrazione dei Maestri, ovvero alla celebrazione delle figure che hanno alimentato con il proprio pensiero, con le proprie idee, con le proprie riflessioni e con le proprie posizioni culturali, il processo di costruzione dei valori e dei principi che hanno animato la Scuola del Design fin dalla sua nascita e lungo tutta la sua evoluzione: Attilio Marcolli, Raffaella Crespi, Francesco Trabucco, Ezio Manzini, Andrea Branzi e molti altri ancora testimoniano il pluralismo culturale come cifra caratteristica dell'intero progetto istituzionale.

Il ricordo dei Maestri non può che iniziare precisamente qui, con Alberto Seassaro, *l'uomo-artigiano* (appellativo rubato alla celebre definizione di Richard Sennett), intelligenza progettante di un intero sistema, del quale è stato ideatore e architetto oltre che ricamatore-tessitore, orafo-cesellatore, fabbro-manutentore. Come l'artigiano di Sennett, Alberto Seassaro, oltre alla personale capacità visionaria, ha messo in questo progetto tutta la sua passione, dedizione e impegno personale (Sennett, 2009, p. 28).

Sennett ci ricorda anche che «la parola greca che traduciamo con artigiano è *demiourgos*, un termine composto che unisce l'idea di pubblico (*demios*: appartenente al popolo) e di produzione (*ergon*: opera,

lavoro)» (Sennett, 2009, p. 29). Termine che, crediamo, sarebbe piaciuto al Seassaro *uomo del popolo* per come amava presentarsi e per la facilità nell'entrare in relazione con gli altri a tutti i livelli, e anche al Seassaro uomo operoso, cogliendo in questo termine l'impegno, il talento inventivo e le doti realizzative. Artigiani, del resto, è sempre Sennett a ricordarlo, sono coloro che sanno utilizzare al contempo la testa e la mano, l'idea e le tecniche per raggiungere lo scopo, coloro che sono, in altri termini, in possesso della capacità di progettare e delle abilità per approntare strumenti di concretizzazione sia concettuali che materiali per dar corpo alle idee. Un'attività, quella dell'artigiano, che Sennett, richiamando Platone, vede sempre caratterizzata dall'«aspirazione alla qualità» (Sennett, 2009, p. 31), dall'operare spinto dal desiderio di migliorare, senza accontentarsi di «risultati modesti» (Sennett, 2009, p. 31). In questo spirito dell'artigiano-demiurgo rinveniamo quello di Alberto Seassaro, Preside dotato di doti personali, comprese le astuzie del *mestiere* tipiche dell'artigiano, messe a disposizione di una comunità per dare una casa al design. Una sfida non semplice da affrontare perché, nel caso del design, ci troviamo di fronte non solo ad una disciplina degna di insegnamento e di percorsi di ricerca autonomi ma anche ad un fenomeno emergente della cultura italiana i cui esiti sono celebrati come i fasti di una sintesi immaginativa che è diventata, anche fuori dal nostro Paese, un modello di invenzione. Riprenderemo nel paragrafo // *Demiurgo* alcune di queste riflessioni.

Biografie collettive

Corre l'obbligo, in questa parte introduttiva, un breve accenno al tema delle *biografie* (tema che, anche in questo caso, verrà ripreso più oltre) come genere narrativo specifico che, distinto dalle autobiografie, rende necessario, sul piano epistemologico, distinguere tra forma letteraria, giornalistica o storica, tanto è il rischio di cadere in un'aneddotica poco significativa sul piano conoscitivo. La biografia, come genere storiografico, si pone in primo luogo il problema della autorevolezza delle fonti e della correttezza del loro utilizzo. Questione questa a maggior ragione pertinente a una ricerca filologica di tipo documentale quale quella avviata con il progetto *Design Philology*.

Gli studi sul tema, tuttavia, ci insegnano che

il confine tra ciò che è storia e ciò che non lo è ha una sua zona neutra, in cui la distinzione diventa difficile, in cui le differenze sfumano sempre di più: dove la storia si avvicina al genere narrativo e la letteratura acquista alcune connotazioni storiografiche, sia nell'accertamento dei fatti sia, soprattutto, nella capacità di interpretarne le ragioni più profonde. [...] E talvolta la letteratura, grazie ai minori vincoli di documentazione, e quindi alla maggiore libertà di cui gode, riesce a chiarire alcuni aspetti del passato e soprattutto le motivazioni delle azioni umane meglio della storiografia. [...]
(Pignatelli 1999, pp. 299 e 301)

Non si vuole qui sostenere che la rievocazione biografica che qui proponiamo sia priva di fondamenti documentali. Tutt'altro. Si vuole piuttosto privilegiare la categoria della *comprensione* rispetto a quelle dell'*interpretazione*, della prova e del controllo documentario (Rebeschini, 2006, p. 435) più propri di un approccio storico rispetto ad un approccio, che tenderemo qui a privilegiare, più tipico delle scienze sociali.

Peraltro le curatrici non sono storiche di professione e, soprattutto, hanno come interesse autentico quello di sciogliere, nel racconto, il ricco intreccio tra la storia di un singolo individuo e la storia delle strutture socio-culturali in cui è stato immerso, ovvero hanno interesse a rintracciare i segni del contributo che il singolo ha lasciato al micro-sistema sociale in cui è stato inserito e viceversa, così da comprendere «quale sia stata la dialettica tra la persona e il suo contesto» (Pignatelli 1999, p. 302).

Un simile atteggiamento rispetto alla ricostruzione biografica vale, in particolar modo, quando risulti difficile e forse addirittura inopportuno distinguere le peculiarità dell'apporto di una singola figura, seppur di spicco, rispetto ad un sistema di azioni collettive a cui viene allargato il campo descrittivo.

Del resto, questo modo di porsi ha senso anche quando ci si riferisca alla biografia come genere storiografico. Anche in questa fattispecie, infatti, «l'utilizzo della categoria di individuo come entità a cui ancorare la ricostruzione storiografica», (Rebeschini, 2006, p. 231) diviene elemento critico e, la lente delle microstorie diviene quella capace di

«osservare le componenti individuali all'interno di uno spazio istituzionale» (Rebeschini, 2006, p. 235).

È sempre più frequente, infatti, che «l'interesse biografico in senso proprio risulti secondario poiché dissolto nel contesto di cui sono considerati significativi» i *come* e i *perché* (Pozzi, 1999, p. 290), che hanno portato un soggetto di rilievo ad essere il problem-setter e il problem-solver di problemi centrali dell'ambiente istituzionale di appartenenza.

Nelle stesse biografie di scienziati, imprenditori, innovatori, l'azione individuale è intrecciata al sistema di interessi e alle infrastrutture che diventano parte e supporto alla loro azione e dunque, la celebrazione dell'ingegno autonomo e individuale non riesce, da solo, a spiegare storie di invenzioni e progressi come non lo è neppure il solo talento per gli artisti (Spagnolo, 2010). Nel caso di Alberto Seassaro poi, diviene difficile addirittura definirne un ruolo storiografabile: che cosa rappresenta infatti, sul piano della memoria collettiva, e cosa ci racconta la storia di un Preside di Facoltà? A che tipo di figura ci troviamo di fronte? Una figura delle istituzioni? Un accademico? Un intellettuale? Un burocrate? Un politico? Un uomo di progetto e di innovazione? Forse addirittura un artista, per i guizzi che hanno assistito la sua azione? Un «grande giocatore di solitari che riesce sempre a chiudere la partita», come ebbe modo di definirlo Andrea Branzi sulle pagine di *Interni* (A. Branzi, 2020, senza numerazione pagine). Forse tutte queste accezioni insieme. E, molto probabilmente, nel caso di Alberto Seassaro è anche limitativo ricondurre il suo lavoro solo a quello di Preside di Facoltà dal momento che, prima di *presiedere* una istituzione, l'ha creata, trasformata, fatta evolvere, per certi versi persino inventata quando nessuno avrebbe immaginato un suo sviluppo alla portata che oggi conosciamo: quella di un grande sistema della formazione in design di livello internazionale.

I pochi dati biografici, volutamente ridotti all'essenziale, che di seguito elenchiamo, tratteggiano una carriera accademica non dissimile da quella di molte figure universitarie che si trovano a ricoprire nella loro età matura ruoli gestionali nel sistema universitario:

- Alberto Seassaro nasce a Milano nel Luglio del 1939.
- Si laurea in Architettura al Politecnico di Milano nell'Aprile del 1964.
- Professore associato in Tecnologia dell'architettura nel 1980

e straordinario nel 1990, presso la Facoltà di Architettura del Politecnico di Milano; titolare della cattedra di Tecnica ed economia della produzione e, dal 1995, è Professore Ordinario di Disegno industriale.

- Presidente del Consiglio dell'Indirizzo Tecnologico del Corso di Laurea in Architettura del Politecnico di Milano dal 1981 al 1989;
- Presidente del I Corso di Laurea in Disegno industriale al Politecnico di Milano dal 1995 al 2003.
- Fondatore e Preside della Facoltà del Design dal 2000 al 2010;
- Fondatore e Presidente del Consorzio Poli design dal 1999 al 2002.
- Fondatore del Dipartimento In.d.a.co (Industrial Design, Arti e Comunicazione) oggi Dipartimento di Design.
- Fondatore e Presidente della Conferenza Nazionale dei Presidi delle Facoltà del Design (CPD) dal 1999 al 2010.
- Fondatore e Presidente della Società Italiana del Design (SI.design) e delle precedenti forme associative (AUDI) dei docenti e ricercatori del SSD di Disegno industriale dal 2005 al 2010.
- Professore Emerito del Politecnico di Milano dal 2013.

Dati che, sottratti all'aridità dell'elenco curricolare, ci presentano Alberto Seassaro come primo Presidente del primo Corso di Laurea in Disegno industriale al Politecnico di Milano dove ha poi fondato e presieduto la prima Facoltà del Design in Italia e il primo Consorzio di Design – Consorzio POLI.design – e portato a istituzione il primo Dipartimento di Design (Dipartimento In.D.A.Co, Dipartimento di Industrial Design, Arti e Comunicazione).

Questa attività di costruzione di un sistema di ricerca e formazione parte dal Politecnico di Milano ma si diffonde poi a livello nazionale dove Seassaro ha operato per promuovere lo sviluppo del design negli Atenei italiani, favorendo la nascita di Corsi di Laurea e Laurea Magistrale in diverse sedi universitarie.

A partire da questa azione su scala nazionale, arriva a fondare e coordinare la *Conferenza nazionale dei Presidi di Design* e la *Società Italiana del Design*, promuovendo la diffusione della cultura del design anche al di fuori del sistema universitario in senso stretto, portandola a contaminare e farsi contaminare dal mondo della cultura del progetto già molto attivo in particolare a Milano grazie alla ricca presenza di as-

sociazioni e istituzioni culturali, riviste di settore, fiere, mostre ed eventi. Un processo di contaminazione che arriva a toccare anche il ricco indotto delle professioni del progetto sospeso tra industria e artigianato; tra sfera intellettuale e mondo produttivo; tra arte, scienza e tecnica [1» 2» 3» 4» 5» 6» 7» 8»](#).

Alcune note di metodo

Quando, nella veste di curatrici di questo testo, ci siamo sedute attorno al tavolo per costruire il canovaccio della biografia di Alberto Seassaro, avevamo ben chiaro che il tratto più manifesto del suo profilo coincidesse con la sua vita accademica e in particolare con il ruolo vitale di promotore prima e di Preside poi di quella che, a detta di molti, ha rappresentato, dopo la nascita della Facoltà di Architettura che data 1934, l'evento più innovativo nella storia del Politecnico di Milano: l'istituzione della Facoltà del Design presso l'Ateneo milanese [9»](#).



9. Cesare Stevan,
Professore Emerito del
Politecnico di Milano.
[Documento →](#)

Ci era altrettanto chiaro, nel legare questo importante accadimento istituzionale alla figura del suo fondatore, il pericolo di cadere in una retorica narrativa agiografico-celebrativa, consapevoli dei passi falsi che ci si trova a compiere quando si indugi sul dato biografico e sulle doti personali, come è tipico di quelle storie tutte «interne» (Ferguson, 1974) che sacrificano, in nome di un singolo protagonista, la dimensione collettiva sottesa allo sviluppo di una grande istituzione.

Se da un lato è innegabile il ruolo di attore principale da lui giocato nella costituzione del Sistema Design Italiano, nel diffondere dal Politecnico di Milano in tutte le sedi universitarie italiane l'insegnamento del design come percorso formativo autonomo, è altrettanto innegabile che attribuire ad una sola persona i meriti di quello che per oltre un decennio è stato un cantiere diffuso della sperimentazione didattica di questa disciplina, rischia di relegare la storia che stiamo iniziando a raccontare entro una prospettiva debole.

Questa preoccupazione unita alla profonda adesione ai nuovi «statuti biografici» e alle «biografie sociali» della *nouvelle histoire* (Le Goff, 1980) ci ha spinte a scrivere un testo nel quale la biografia personale è sempre immersa nel suo contesto di sviluppo ed anzi, rintraccia proprio nel contesto *l'humus* culturale e politico capace di foggiare gli interessi

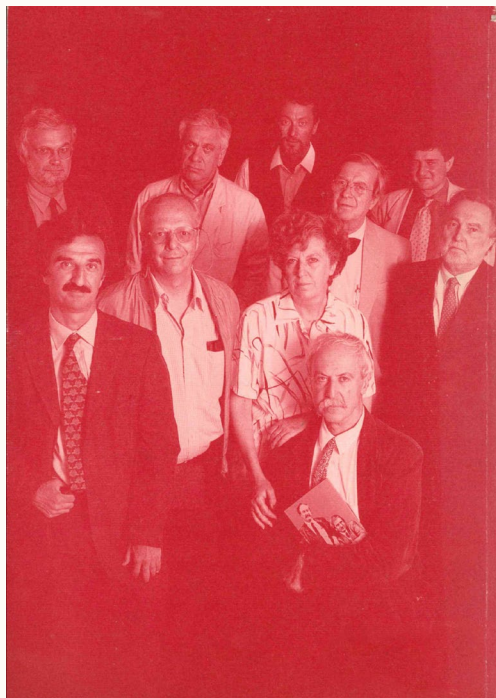


Figura 1.

Sul retro di copertina della Guida dello Studente A.A. 1999-2000, la prima Giunta del Corso di Laurea in *Disegno industriale*. Dall'alto a sinistra: Ezio Manzini, Francesco Mauri, Arturo Dell'Acqua Bellavitis, Attilio Marcolli, Medardo Chiapponi. Davanti da sinistra: Alberto Cigada, Giovanni Anceschi, Gabriella Belotti, Alberto Seassaro, Francesco Trabucco.



1. Politecnico di Milano, sede di Milano Bovisa, campus Durando.

[Documento →](#)



Prot. N. 602

c.a. Rettore del Politecnico
Adriano De Maio
e p.c. Cesare Stevan
Pier Luigi Della Vigna

Caro Adriano,
in risposta alla tua (del 23 giugno) di commento alla mia informativa sull'o.d.g. del nostro prossimo Consiglio di Facoltà (il primo!) ti preciso:
- so bene che la Facoltà può fare solo proposte circa la nostra denominazione, ma poiché il Senato si è già più volte espresso nel corso dei suoi lavori (ad esempio da parte di Stevan e di Della Vigna) in modo univoco e concorde, ritengo opportuno che anche i docenti della Facoltà riuniti nel loro organo deliberante possano esprimersi.
Quindi, in attesa di un prossimo formale passaggio alla configurazione delle "Facoltà tematiche", la (importante) questione comunicativa, come ti avevo già proposto, potrebbe essere così risolta:
a) adottando in tutti gli atti formali con il MURST, la denominazione "III Facoltà di Architettura con sede Milano Bovisa" (come dal decreto ministeriale);
b) adottando nelle comunicazioni interne relative agli atti istituzionali di Ateneo, (ad esempio, in questi giorni, nel calendario accademico), la denominazione "III Facoltà di Architettura/Design";
c) adottando nelle comunicazioni esterne (alla città, alla stampa, nella pubblicistica e nelle comunicazioni sociali in Italia, ma soprattutto all'Estero, nonché nel linguaggio parlato, sulla carta del lettera, etc...) la dizione di "Facoltà del Design (III Facoltà di Architettura)", dizione adeguata per le esigenze internazionali e anche corretta dal punto di vista scientifico-disciplinare dei suoi contenuti formativi.

Queste sono le proposte che porterò ai colleghi in consiglio perché possano "democraticamente" esprimersi.

Sarà poi il Senato a disporre, accogliendo o meno (in toto o in parte) le proposte del Consiglio quando potrà (non sono al corrente del calendario accademico, ma penso che potrete sempre trovare una qualche molecola del vostro tempo per esprimervi nel merito).

Grazie, ciao
Alberto Seassaro

Via Durando 38/a, 20158 Milano - tel. 02.23959961 - fax. 02.23959977 - mail. id@mailto.polimi.it

*[denominazione, sede e recapiti previsti per lo svolgimento delle procedure di costituzione della facoltà]



PIANO DI SVILUPPO della III Facoltà di Architettura - Design ANNO 2001

Delibera del Consiglio di Facoltà del 13 ottobre 2000

Milano,
27 ottobre 2000

il Preside
Prof. Alberto Seassaro



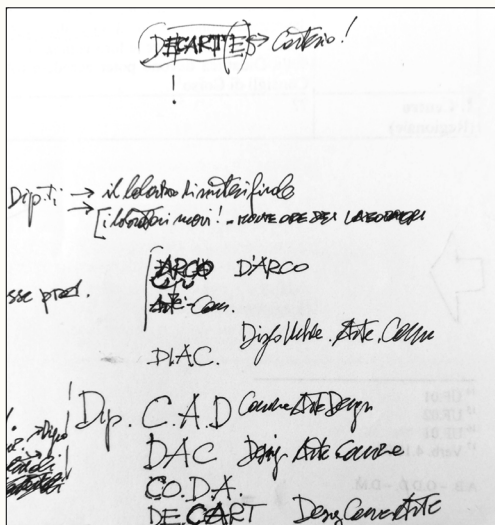
2. Alberto Seassaro, Lettera al Rettore Adriano De Maio sulla denominazione della III Facoltà di *Architettura-Bovisa*.

[Documento →](#)



3. Piano di sviluppo della III Facoltà di *Architettura-Design*, anno 2001.

[Documento →](#)



4. Alberto Seassaro, appunti per la denominazione del Dipartimento INDACO.

[Documento →](#)



**conferenza nazionale dei presidi
delle facoltà di design**
e dei presidenti di corso di studi
delle classi di disegno industriale e design



5. Logo conferenza nazionale dei Presidi delle Facoltà del design. Progetto Mario Piazza.

[Documento →](#)



6. Fotografia di Alberto Seassaro con il Rettore Giulio Ballio.
[Documento →](#)



7. Fotografia di Alberto Seassaro, Cesare Stevan e Antonio Scoccimarro.
[Documento →](#)



Figura 2.
 Riunione Società Italiana del Design (SID). Da sinistra:
 Medardo Chiapponi, Patrizia Ranzo, Massimo Ruffilli,
 Alberto Seassaro, Antonella Penati.



8. Fotografia con Alberto Seassaro, Benedetta Spadolini, Gillo Dorfles, Vico Magistretti, Vanni Pasca.

[Documento→](#)

e le passioni di Alberto Seassaro oltre all'attitudine ad avere nell'Istituzione il fine verso cui tendere.

In questo senso, le stesse premesse biografiche, qui lette in stretta connessione ad accadimenti, eventi, persone e fatti, divengono luogo di narrazione aperto, permettendoci di non esaurire il racconto interamente nella figura di Alberto Seassaro.

Il Politecnico di Milano è luogo e attore comprimario e, seguire le vicende di Alberto Seassaro, è tutt'uno con il seguire la ricca storia dell'Ateneo milanese dove si è laureato; ha compiuto la parte più importante della sua carriera e dove ha rivestito un ruolo di rilievo nel determinarne l'evoluzione verso la forma della sua contemporaneità.

Come gli storici sanno, di una storia è sempre importante la scelta del punto di inizio. Lo stretto legame di Alberto Seassaro con il Politecnico di Milano, stabilisce in buona sostanza anche la soglia di ingresso al nostro racconto che non inizia il 16 marzo del 1995, data in cui Seassaro viene ufficialmente eletto Presidente di Corso di Laurea in *Disegno Industriale*, ma prende avvio dal periodo dei suoi studi universitari.

Alberto Seassaro si laurea il 14 aprile 1964, giorno in cui, per straordinaria coincidenza, nasce la seconda figlia, non a caso chiamata Ulla Laurea Seassaro.

Quelli di Alberto Seassaro studente sono anni caldi alla Facoltà di Architettura. Anni molto ben raccontati da Raffaele Pugliese, Francesca Serrazanetti e Cristina B ergo che hanno raccolto in un libro dal titolo emblematico *Sperimentazione o dell'architettura Politecnica. Origini e sviluppi della cultura moderna dell'architettura nella ricerca e nella didattica al Politecnico di Milano* (2013) moltissimi documenti e materiali grigi che tratteggiano gli avvenimenti che hanno caratterizzato, in quegli anni, l'insegnamento del progetto, e la vera e propria svolta rappresentata dalla nascita degli Istituti Universitari, quelli che poi saranno i Dipartimenti, luoghi che testimoniano l'esigenza di costruire saperi disciplinari, alimentati dalla ricerca finalizzata all'insegnamento.

Questi intensi anni di vita studentesca costituiscono un patrimonio di esperienza e lasceranno un segno profondo nel percorso culturale successivo di Alberto Seassaro, facendo maturare il suo interesse e la sua attitudine a dedicarsi ai processi di trasformazione istituzionale e alla relazione tra contenuti culturali e forme organizzative. A titolo di esempio il nesso inscindibile tra ricerca e didattica che Seassaro-Pre-

side ha sempre messo al primo posto e portato fino all'estremo, considerando la didattica di progetto come una forma peculiare di investigazione, capace di alimentare e arricchire i modi più canonici della ricerca accademica. Tutta l'impostazione delle forme di conduzione della didattica di progetto porta con sé quest'idea che ha radici profonde e lontane e deriva proprio dalla sua formazione.

Un ulteriore nodo critico che ha orientato la scrittura, soprattutto nella parte relativa agli anni della lunga ascesa del Design al Politecnico e in Italia – gli anni della Presidenza alla Facoltà del design e della Presidenza dell'Associazione Italiana del Design – è rappresentato dal carattere, ancora troppo recente, degli avvenimenti, laddove la breve distanza temporale rende non semplice il compito di dare prospettiva storica ai fatti. Anche l'essere state personalmente coinvolte nella costruzione di questa storia istituzionale, e l'aver lavorato fianco a fianco con Alberto Seassaro, può essere letto come elemento critico passibile di influenzare il modo di raccontare e interpretare eventi che hanno natura intrinsecamente politica e per i quali è corretto trovare un punto di vista obiettivo e imparziale distinguendo tra fatti e dati oggettivi, tra opinioni e interpretazioni. La vicinanza prospettica porta con sé l'ulteriore rischio che vengano enfatizzati in misura fuorviante gli aspetti positivi così come quelli negativi di una storia che non vorremmo restituire, lo ribadiamo, attraverso una chiave di lettura epica.

Proprio per evitare semplificazioni o generalizzazioni di elementi controversi, come curatrici, abbiamo preferito, nella parte del racconto biografico strettamente connessa alla suo ruolo di Preside, più soggetta a punti di vista differenti, ricorrere a un repertorio documentale che restituisca in modo piano la storia, lasciando nelle disponibilità degli autori che hanno redatto i contributi di questa sezione del testo, l'opportunità di cogliere tratti identitari della figura complessa di Alberto Seassaro. Sono punti di vista autoriali non chiamati a spiegare politicamente che cosa sia avvenuto in quegli anni di grande lavoro istituzionale, bensì a caratterizzare il racconto, cogliendo qualità peculiari più legate alla persona che al ruolo rivestito.

Una annotazione conclusiva la deriviamo, ancora una volta, dalla *nouvelle histoire* che ci sollecita a dare importanza al *retrobottega della storia*, a tutto ciò che avviene nel back stage, perché questo punto di osservazione rende più facile rinvenire nelle specifiche circostanze

di contesto, oltre a singoli fatti e singoli eventi, i vincoli, le opportunità, le istanze di diversi attori come avviene tipicamente all'interno di organizzazioni complesse, ma anche le occasioni offerte da cambiamenti normativi, da necessità istituzionali così rilevanti nel portare a cambi di rotta e ad adattamenti di strategia.

Le storie che hanno come loro punto di osservazione privilegiato le attività quotidiane nel loro svolgersi concreto, rendono quasi-naturale, tra le altre cose, la presa di distanza da impostazioni narrative fatte di resoconti di progressivi successi e trionfi, da un modo di raccontare gli avvenimenti come processo lineare privo di ostacoli.

Molteplici decisioni prese quotidianamente a tutti i livelli, intrecciati con accadimenti nella sfera istituzionale, sociale, normativa, portano in primo piano la complessità del contesto, la pluralità e la ricchezza di fattori e attori che hanno partecipato a questa importante storia accademica.

In adesione al progetto *Design Philology*, la ricostruzione filologica, organizzata attorno a testi e testimonianze, ben si presta a sostenere questa impostazione narrativa che racconta, materializzandoli in artefatti documentali di diversa natura, i diversi passaggi del processo di progettazione di un oggetto immateriale: la nascita di una organizzazione istituzionale finalizzata alla didattica e alla ricerca in un settore nuovo per la realtà formativa italiana.

Come anticipato in premessa, nel momento in cui questo volume viene composto, è già on line da più di un anno la piattaforma *Design Philology*. In essa, di fatto, è già presente, con grande ricchezza di materiali, la storia della nascita e dello sviluppo del *Sistema Design*. Questo testo nasce con una forma, per quanto possibile, ipertestuale che rimanda, ogniqualvolta sia stato ritenuto opportuno, ad approfondimenti documentali presenti nella piattaforma on-line dove, la presenza di Alberto Seassaro aleggia forte ovunque, anche quando il suo nome non viene esplicitamente citato nei diversi passaggi narrativi.

Alberto Seassaro. Il demiurgo

Demiurgo è l'attributo scelto per descrivere il ruolo giocato da Alberto Seassaro negli anni della Fondazione del *Sistema Design* del Politecni-

co e della diffusione del design nella rete delle numerose sedi universitarie italiane. Ma, per chi lo ha conosciuto, l'indole propria del demiurgo descrive più in generale il suo modo di porsi di fronte ai progetti sia di scala elementare sia di natura complessa.

Abbiamo utilizzato il termine *demiurgo* in questo contributo su Alberto Seassaro, non per esaltarne doti divine ma volutamente in contrapposizione al termine *artefice* volendo coglierne una accezione antiretorica. Non il creatore che dà vita, fa nascere e genera dunque, ma colui che ha la capacità di prendere elementi preesistenti di un contesto dato, generato da altri e, conferendo loro un ordine, sa creare valore e conferire senso.

Se Cesare Stevan – Preside della Facoltà di Architettura – e Tomás Maldonado – figura di riferimento nell'insegnamento del design, con alle spalle una lunga carriera in importanti Scuole internazionali –, sono i due veri artefici che hanno creato le condizioni politiche e istituzionali per la nascita di questa nuova realtà formativa al Politecnico di Milano, Alberto Seassaro è invece l'abile tessitore di relazioni sia umane, sia istituzionali, sia concettuali che prende per mano questa realtà nella sua fase iniziale e la porta a compimento, allo stato di sistema che conosciamo oggi. Dotato di una profonda conoscenza dei meccanismi istituzionali si dimostra, da subito, capace di utilizzare le dinamiche e le logiche di una organizzazione complessa come il Politecnico, per introdurre continue innovazioni.

La figura del demiurgo, come è noto, è centrale nel *Timeo* di Platone. Il demiurgo emerge proprio in contrapposizione al dio della creazione – l'artifex – e rappresenta chi è capace di trasformare il materiale di cui si dispone, modellandolo e conferendole una forma in funzione delle necessità (Reale, p. 28).

Nei documenti di questa storia emerge chiaramente che, anche i cattedratici di *Design* – allora *Disegno industriale* – più propensi alla fondazione di un Corso di insegnamento autonomo rispetto ad Architettura verso il quale non si nutrivano all'inizio grandi aspettative, mostravano tutti una certa ritrosia a procedere all'avvio di un percorso di insegnamento specialistico, ritenendo che, in quel particolare momento storico, Architettura non disponesse delle competenze necessarie (Penati, Rebaglio, 2024). La forza dirompente dell'azione di Alberto Seassaro sta proprio nel *prendere* ciò di cui il sistema dispone, in termini di

risorse umane, di conoscenze, di strumentazioni, di spazi, di usanze organizzative e, attraverso un minuto lavoro di adattamento, di micro-trasformazioni, di tattiche, disegnare un'azione strategica di portata impensabile, costruendo consenso attorno ad un progetto politico che, da individuale, diviene fin da subito collettivo.

Del demiurgo poi Seassaro ha avuto anche la pazienza: nessuno dei sinonimi che possono essere utilizzati per oggettivare la capacità di *fare ordine* con determinazione e quasi con testardaggine, passo dopo passo, è stata estranea al suo fare: «mettere a posto; assestare; disporre; distribuire; allineare; catalogare; classificare; aggiustare; regolare; regolamentare; accomodare; sistemare; codificare; disciplinare; coordinare; preparare; preordinare; predisporre; dare ordine/i; comandare; decretare; prescrivere»; fino anche ad «imporre» quando necessario¹.



Nota 1.
[Link →](#)

Ed infine, come ogni demiurgo che «dà misura alle cose» (Reale, p. 18) secondo fini che restano ai più imperscrutabili finché gli esiti dell'azione non si siano concretizzati, Alberto Seassaro ha avuto l'intelligenza di governare un processo lungo e non privo di ostacoli, utilizzando l'arte della persuasione. Abile tessitore di relazioni politiche a vari livelli, ha saputo muoversi tra correnti e controcorrenti, cercando di portare innovazione senza alterare gli equilibri interni, ricomponendo conflitti, governando opzioni divergenti di numerosi attori e soggetti sociali e istituzionali; corrispondendo alle attese di gruppi portatori di interessi; affrontando la fatica di modificare gli assetti e le forme organizzative e istituzionali tessendo nessi di segno strategico, studiando contropartite e contrappesi, soprattutto negli anni de *la grande bouffe* quando molti libavano tenendosi le mani libere da responsabilità gestionali e politiche. Da astuto stratega, ogni mossa era pensata per agevolare l'inserimento di *grappoli di innovazione* (di tematiche, di metodi, di strumenti, di infrastrutture) all'interno di un sistema arroccato sulle storiche realtà di Ingegneria e Architettura e con appetiti politici in abbondanza.

Ma oltre a fine innovatore che sa muoversi con cautela seguendo sovente la politica dell'innovazione incrementale, quando v'è stata necessità, ha rivestito anche il ruolo scomodo di agente provocatore che innesca l'innovazione, talvolta con intuizione spiazzante, talvolta con irruenza, sfruttando le contraddizioni del sistema e non trovando

sempre facile accoglienza. Una dote, tuttavia, lo ha sempre accompagnato: quella di sapersi muovere nei meandri dell'organizzazione con la capacità di individuare, quelli che con Langdon Winner, possiamo definire i «flexible character» (Winner, 1985, pp. 28-40) di un sistema politico-culturale di lunga storia come il Politecnico di Milano, sapendoli sfruttare a vantaggio della causa comune e trovando così legittimazione all'evoluzione continua. Sempre in equilibrio tra la pulsione progettuale e innovativa e il senso della *misura* nel valutare le condizioni di contesto con i suoi vincoli e i suoi tempi, la forza di Alberto Seassaro è stata l'apertura al confronto dialettico, costante e a volte anche ruvido ma sempre aperto.

È così che, nell'arco di un decennio, il sistema iniziale della formazione in *Disegno industriale* si trasferisce a quello della ricerca e riverbera poi nei sistemi socio-culturali e economico-professionali penetrando e irrorando di nuova linfa il sistema design milanese fino ad espandersi a livello nazionale prima e internazionale poi.

È un moto lento ma progressivo, costellato di momenti di accelerazione, a costruire attorno a nuovi interessi scientifici, a nuove relazioni sociali, a rapporti professionali e anche a investimenti economici, la realtà di un sistema socio-tecnico – quello del design – con i suoi artefatti istituzionali, con nuove aspettative, nuovi interessi diffusi e una base materiale che si impone con la forza della sua evidenza.

Attorno alla figura di Alberto Seassaro si è sviluppato negli ultimi anni della sua lunga gestione una sorta di accesa discussione critica tra quanti lo hanno ritenuto padre di un progetto culturale di ampia portata e quanti ne hanno criticato il ruolo egemone di chi esercita potere incondizionato di decisione su molti aspetti della vita accademica. È stata la fase più difficile, sul piano politico, della vita della comunità.

Oggi, a distanza di più di un decennio dalla sua uscita dal sistema, i frutti maturati grazie al suo lavoro ancora permangono in tutta la loro vitalità, consentendoci uno sguardo pacificato sul suo operato e contribuendo a restituirci in modo condiviso una identità risolta in quanto figura che ha goduto di indiscutibile autorevolezza e di notevole prestigio nella collettività.

La storia non saprà mai dirci come sarebbe stata l'esistenza di questo sistema e che forma avrebbe preso, senza l'opera di un paziente e instancabile demiurgo.

I passaggi per giungere alla facoltà del Design sono complessi [...]. Il Ministro Ruberti [...] condivise e appoggiò il progetto inserendolo nella legalità statutaria. [...] Tomás Maldonado mi appoggiò su tutto il percorso [...]. Angelo Cortesi, allora presidente ADI [...] operò per stabilire una connessione tra formazione e sbocco professionale. Il seguito è più noto e conosciuto: l'amicizia fraterna con Alberto Seassaro e il suo talento alimentarono la crescita e lo sviluppo dell'iniziativa come nessuno avrebbe potuto fare. Non ci risparmiammo e ponemmo così solide radici a un riconoscimento internazionale in un posto di indubbio prestigio. Oggi la Facoltà del Design sta nell'Olimpo che merita. (Cesare Stevan, 11 aprile 2024) ²⁵.



Nota 2.
[Link→](#)

Struttura del testo

Come premesso nei paragrafi introduttivi, il testo vuole far risaltare lo stretto legame tra Alberto Seassaro e il Politecnico di Milano. È infatti il clima culturale del grande Ateneo milanese ed in particolare della Facoltà di Architettura ad influenzare le sue scelte e il suo pensiero sin dagli anni '60 quando Alberto Seassaro entra al Politecnico come studente.

Il libro si apre infatti con un capitolo, curato da Antonella Penati, dedicato agli anni degli studi e dunque della formazione alla cultura del progetto, alla Facoltà di Architettura del Politecnico di Milano dove Alberto Seassaro si iscrive nel 1959. Mentre studia insegna e lavora come renderista in importanti studi di architettura, mostrando da subito il profilo di una persona dall'operosità incontenibile sia per indole curiosa e sperimentatrice, sia per necessità economica.

L'essere molto ingaggiato nell'attività professionale non lo distoglie dall'impegno politico nell'università allora teatro delle prime rivendicazioni studentesche che apriranno, nell'arco di pochi anni, a una straordinaria stagione di riforme. Sono questi gli anni che plasmano il suo pensiero e la sua azione istituzionale fino alla vicenda politica più rilevante, ovvero quella della sua elezione a Preside della Facoltà del Design nello stesso Politecnico che lo aveva visto studente.

Dopo la laurea, Alberto Seassaro inizia una frenetica attività progettuale a tutte le scale: dall'oggetto d'arredo, agli interni di abitazioni

10. *Seassaro. I morfemi.*
Presentati da Ettore
Sottsass Jr.
[Documento →](#)



private e spazi espositivi, alla partecipazione a diversi concorsi per la realizzazione di edifici passando attraverso una produzione artistica che lo vedrà presente in diverse esposizioni personali e collettive. Questa sezione del volume ospita scritti di Beppe Finessi, Giampiero Bosoni e Antonella Penati che commentano l'attività progettuale ed artistica di un Seassaro, appena laureato, nel pieno della gioventù e con «la forza e la felicità di tutte le cellule del corpo che funzionano bene» come ha modo di dire Ettore Sottsass nella sua presentazione contenuta nel catalogo della mostra *i Morfemi* tenuta presso la Studio 2B di Bergamo [10](#). Ne emerge una cifra di artista *impegnato* in rivendicazioni antimilitariste e a favore dell'obiezione di coscienza e di progettista versato alla sperimentazione nell'uso di materiali, nella composizione modulare, nel linguaggio che intreccia elementi strutturali e elementi allestitivi. Caratteri questi che si ritrovano nella intensa attività progettuale, con Ugo La Pietra (qui intervistato da Agnese Rebaglio), presso Montedison dove Alberto Seassaro è responsabile per alcuni anni del coordinamento del Centro Studi sui processi di prefabbricazione pesante con Silicalcite nei quali ripone, nell'ingenua fiducia giovanile, la speranza di una edilizia democratica.

Appartiene a questa sezione il contributo di Giovanni Baule che mette in luce il carattere sempre progettuale del pensiero di Alberto Seassaro che si esprime in prevalenza attraverso un linguaggio verbo-visivo. Nonostante, già subito dopo la Laurea, l'attività professionale sia intensa, Seassaro non ha mai abbandonato l'Università.

Nel 1964 e '65 è titolare di due Borse di Studio Ministeriali, che lo portano ad approfondire i temi di ricerca avviati con la tesi di laurea, volte a costituire il primo nucleo della nascente Biblioteca dell'Istituto di Composizione della Facoltà di Architettura con una sezione dedicata agli studi e alle culture sulla forma. Contemporaneamente inizia ad affiancare diversi docenti nell'attività didattica: Assistente volontario prima, in seguito Collaboratore alla didattica e infine Assistente incaricato presso gli insegnamenti tenuti da Ludovico Belgiojoso, Cesare Blasi, Giuseppe Ciribini, sia Al Politecnico di Milano, sia al Politecnico di Torino sia infine presso l'Università dell'Abruzzo. In questa lunga esperienza che lo porterà all'associatura nel 1980 e all'ordinariato nel 1990, mai fa mancare il suo apporto culturale e politico al processo di tensione trasformativa che ha costellato gli anni '70 e '80 alla Facoltà di

Architettura. Ne sono testimonianza le tematiche di progetto proposte agli studenti nella attività didattica e la sua appartenenza ai gruppi di ricerca sulla casa e le forme dell'abitare dove è palese la vicinanza dei suoi interessi progettuali ai problemi di un contesto sociale in forte trasformazione.

È la fase nella quale Seassaro affina e matura la sua capacità di interagire e coinvolgere nella didattica e nella ricerca gruppi, istituzioni e movimenti attivi sul territorio per immergere le esercitazioni e le ricerche progettuali nella concretezza della realtà. Questi passaggi sono tratteggiati nella sezione *Nelle pieghe della cultura tecnologica: premesse alla nascita del Sistema Design* dove Antonella Penati, Fabrizio Schiaffonati, Luciano Crespi, Cristina Tonelli, contribuiscono a contestualizzare, nel solco di una cultura tecnologica, l'età matura di Alberto Seassaro che precede quella di costruttore del Sistema Design. Cultura tecnologica che accomuna le esperienze di nascita di questo settore disciplinare – giovane nei diversi atenei della realtà italiana.

Questi anni possono essere considerati di preparazione ai ruoli successivi che rivestirà al Politecnico di Milano dove è sempre più coinvolto nella attività di costruzione di *parti* del sistema istituzionale. Sul fronte della ricerca, per esempio, lo vediamo impegnato nella creazione del Gruppo Nazionale di Ricerca del CNR *Produzione Edilizia*, sul fronte della didattica, invece, nella progettazione e nel coordinamento dell'Indirizzo di Tecnologia dell'architettura.

Come anticipato in premessa, la Sezione conclusiva del testo *Edificare l'istituzione per far spazio a contenuti nascenti* ha un diverso stile narrativo. La nascita del Sistema Design e la storia del suo tenace costruttore utilizza, come fonti principali, gli scritti dello stesso Seassaro, i documenti istituzionali e i materiali di comunicazione, privilegiando una narrazione documentale.

In particolare, la nostra scelta ha volutamente cercato di portare in primo piano l'attività del retro-bottega di un Preside, rappresentata, per esempio, dai più che quotidiani scambi epistolari intrecciati con i vari interlocutori istituzionali, dentro e fuori l'Ateneo, per ottenere finanziamenti, per caldeggiare azioni di sostegno politico, per richiedere mediazioni culturali, per ampliare l'impatto e la diffusione del design, per promuovere associazioni, per verificare dati tecnici utili all'avvio di aule, laboratori e spazi di lavoro, ecc. Di questi scambi abbiamo scelto

soprattutto quelli che fanno emergere non solo la tenacia del costruttore, la lungimiranza politica, la capacità di sensibilizzare i vertici dell'Istituzione, ma anche i tratti personali di Alberto Seassaro, il suo modo di essere, ironico, provocatorio, ma anche affettuoso, scherzoso, sornione. Questi documenti sono affiancati dall'omaggio dei colleghi (Paola Bertola, Luisa Collina, Flaviano Celaschi, Eleonora Lupo, Antonella Penati, Paolo Tinelli, Raffaella Trocchianesi) che aggiungono alla narrazione più istituzionale e più formale il comportamento e il modo di porsi di Alberto Seassaro rispetto ai problemi; il suo modo di lavorare *facendo squadra* ma affrontando sempre in prima persona la fase istruttoria del problema; il suo avere sempre ben in mente i caratteri politici e strutturali dell'istituzione in cui si muoveva, le tematiche e gli interessi culturali a lui più cari; le sue battute che sono anche la quintessenza di quello che, nel tempo è stato definito lo *spirito seassariano*.

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PARTE 1

La formazione

1. Qui dove tutto è cominciato. Il Politecnico di Milano all'insegna della sperimentazione

Antonella Penati

Dipartimento di Design, Politecnico di Milano

1.1 Il Politecnico di Milano all'insegna della sperimentazione

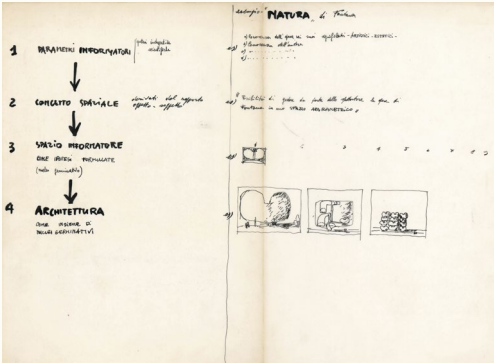
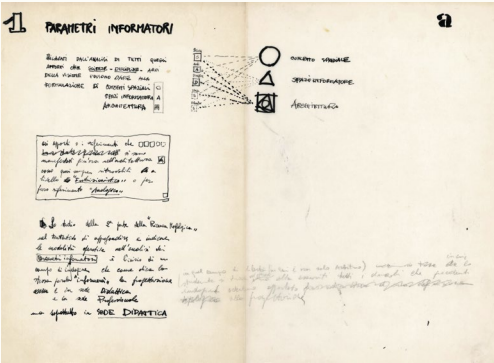
È il 14 aprile del 1964. Due giovani studenti ambiziosi e con in testa mille progetti per il futuro si laureano alla Facoltà di Architettura del Politecnico di Milano. Sul frontespizio dell'elaborato di tesi, non v'è traccia del relatore. La contestazione in atto, a cui i due laureandi partecipano attivamente, avanza infatti, tra le altre, l'istanza di totale autonomia dello studente nella scelta dei contenuti, dei metodi e delle modalità di esposizione dell'elaborato di tesi coincidente con la discussione di alcuni progetti presentati durante il percorso di studi. La materia oggetto della dissertazione si distingue dalle tematiche compositive più convenzionali e anche il modo di presentarla è inconsueto.

È una mostra, infatti, a mettere in scena e ad accompagnare la discussione de *La ricerca morfologica. Proposta di lavoro per gli Istituti di ricerca scientifica della Facoltà di Architettura*. La Commissione di Laurea, presieduta da Piero Portaluppi, proclama i laureati con 100/100

e lode e, per il lavoro di tesi, l'Associazione Allievi del Politecnico attribuirà loro la medaglia d'oro [1](#). I due giovani laureandi si chiamano Ugo La Pietra e Alberto Seassaro. Il primo diventerà un globetrotter del pensiero progettuale. Il secondo un globetrotter del pensiero innovativo delle strutture universitarie della formazione e della ricerca. A lui si deve la fondazione della prima e più importante Facoltà del Design d'Italia e tra le più grandi Scuole di design al mondo; la costruzione del primo Dipartimento di Design italiano; la costituzione del primo Consorzio Universitario per la formazione post-universitaria in design; la nascita della prima rete italiana di ricerca e formazione nel campo del design.



1. Estratto della Tesi di Laurea di Ugo La Pietra e Alberto Seassaro, *La Ricerca Morfologica*. Documento →

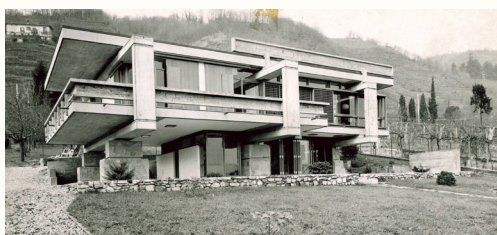
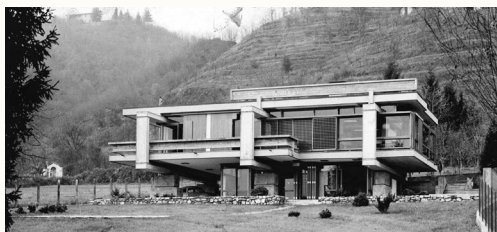


Nato a Milano nel 1939, Alberto Seassaro si iscrive nel 1959 alla Facoltà di Architettura, dopo aver acquisito l'abilitazione all'insegnamento nei licei di *Disegno Geometrico* e di *Disegno e storia dell'arte*.

Già padre della figlia Cristiana, è studente-lavoratore: grazie all'appoggio della segretaria del Preside, intenerita dal suo stato di giovane genitore, gli viene consentito di consegnare in anticipo le esercitazioni d'aula che svolge nel più breve tempo possibile per lasciare l'università e scappare al lavoro. Dal 1959 al 1964, infatti, insegna *Disegno e Storia dell'arte* all'Istituto Leonardo da Vinci e all'Istituto Cremona di Milano e *Arti grafiche applicate* alla Scuola Umanitaria dove viene chiamato da Sergio Coradeschi, suo insegnante di *Disegno e rilievo* al Politecnico a cui resterà legato nel tempo da stima, amicizia e riconoscenza.

Lavora inoltre come disegnatore nello studio dell'Architetto Roberto Morisi e, come renderista prima e co-progettista freelance poi, in importanti studi di Architettura milanesi (BBPR, Viganò, Zanuso, Frattini, Latis ecc.) e italiani (Luigi Moretti di Roma, Marcello D'Olivo di Udine,

Figura 1.
Tra i progetti seguiti come aiuto-
disegnatore presso lo studio
Morisi, quello di una Villa realizzata
in Piemonte negli anni 1961/62
(arch. Roberto Morisi).



Carlo Cocchia di Napoli). È a Roberto Morisi che Seassaro tributa il merito di averlo formato alla cultura del progetto e all'apprendimento della pratica professionale.

Alberto Seassaro si era iscritto alla Facoltà di Architettura alla fine degli anni '50, dopo aver conseguito il Diploma Artistico per attitudine e per passione culturale, e il Diploma Scientifico per compiacere il padre. Il padre, Carlo Seassaro, ingegnere elettrotecnico, nella speranza di instillare nel figlio la sua stessa passione per la scienza e la tecnica, lo stimolava con nozioni che, era sua speranza, ne avrebbero nutrito la vocazione tecnico-scientifica, indirzandolo verso gli studi di ingegneria. Già alle scuole elementari, durante il tragitto tra casa e scuola, lo interrogava sulle definizioni di impedenza, resistenza e reattanza. Per ognuna di que-

ste definizioni aveva ideato filastrocche in rima, per allenare il ricordo di Alberto bambino. Capitava poi che, nel tempo libero, lo portasse con sé agli stabilimenti delle manifatture Ginori dove era responsabile del controllo di qualità (così lo chiameremmo oggi) degli isolatori elettrotecnici in ceramica. Ma gli occhi di Alberto e la sua curiosità erano piuttosto sollecitati dai disegni di Gio Ponti e di Giovanni Gariboldi che campeggiavano nei corridoi degli uffici e dal vasellame di prima produzione che, nei laboratori, costituiva materiale di scarto in mezzo a cui trascorreva i suoi pomeriggi.

Dal padre, e dai suoi racconti di viaggio (il padre per necessità lavorative viaggiava frequentemente e per l'epoca i viaggi intercontinentali erano una rarità), aveva anche ereditato l'amore per le terre lontane, la curiosità verso *lo straniero*, verso usi e costumi che raccontavano una diversità culturale che lo ha sempre affascinato. Sempre eredita paterna, l'interesse per le mappe geografiche, per Alberto oggetto di grande fascino da cui trarrà certamente la sua nota propensione alle sintesi visive, alle ricostruzioni di fatti e eventi complessi in forma visiva. Il padre tramanda anche l'interesse per le raccolte di oggetti, a partire proprio dagli oggetti-souvenir che animavano i suoi racconti di viaggio al rientro in famiglia.

Chi ha conosciuto Alberto Seassaro e i suoi luoghi domestici, conosce la sua giocosa ossessione per le collezioni: oggetti che non dovevano avere il pregio del lusso ma dovevano essere autentici, popolari, anche modesti, legati agli usi propri nella vita di tutti i giorni. Non a caso il suo primo interesse va agli oggetti del cucinare, quelli dai quali è più facile risalire alle tradizioni alimentari di un popolo e quindi alla sua cultura popolare.

Tra scienza, tecnica e arte, dunque, la sua formazione e i suoi interessi arricchiti da una vera e propria passione per la storia, la geografia, l'etnologia e l'antropologia che troveranno negli studi di architettura il naturale approdo.

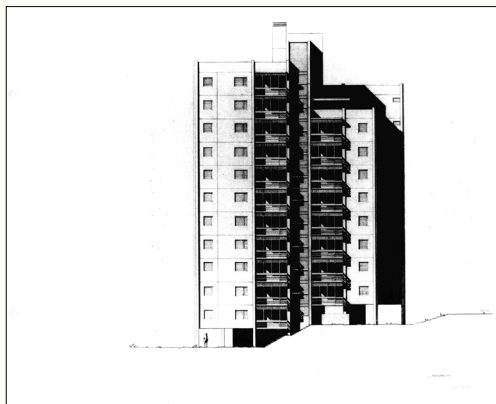
L'interesse per gli aspetti tecnologici, per il controllo della forma ma anche per i modi di vita delle persone è presente in molti progetti condotti da studente, in un sodalizio culturale ideale con Ugo la Pietra, diversi dei quali vengono presentati dalla docenza in pubblicazioni sulla didattica (Cesare Blasi, 1962) [2](#): *Casa a torre in Viale Sca-rampo* dove si cimenta con il Quartiere-modello QT8 di Piero Bottoni e con l'idea di quartiere autosufficiente; *Scuola elementare a Rozzano* dove passa in rassegna la tipologia degli spazi di apprendimento; indagine storiografica degli insediamenti rurali della Bassa Pianura Lombarda dove conduce una analisi filologica dello sviluppo degli antichi borghi e cascine che la caratterizzano, con la presenza della tipologia edilizia delle corti chiuse; gruppo di case per salariati agricoli, immobili destinati ad uso abitativo ma da considerare funzionali all'attività agricola.

Uno spaccato tematico che mostra la totale adesione ai problemi di un contesto, caratterizzato da sfide economiche e dai bisogni abitativi di una società e di un Paese in piena trasformazione [3](#) [4](#) [5](#) [6](#).

L'ossessione per la forma da un lato e il contenuto civile e sociale del progettare dall'altro, prendono pian piano corpo nel suo percorso di studi e nutrono lo sguardo con cui affronta le tematiche su cui si cimenta nei lavori di studente.

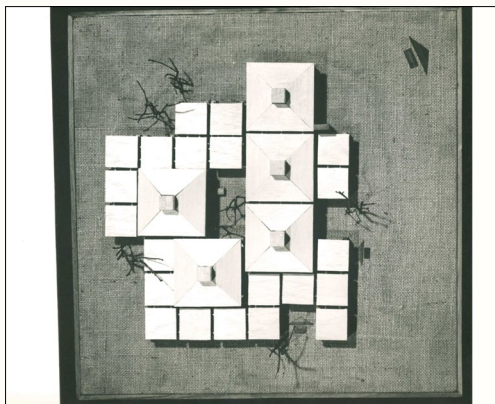


2. Cesare Blasi,
Un'esperienza didattica,
in *Comunità*, n. 100.
[Documento→](#)



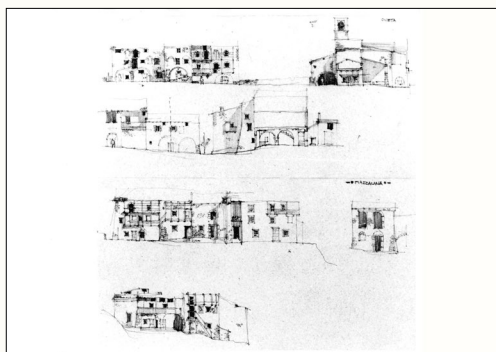
3. Alberto Seassaro, Progetto di una casa-torre in Viale Scarampo.

[Documento →](#)



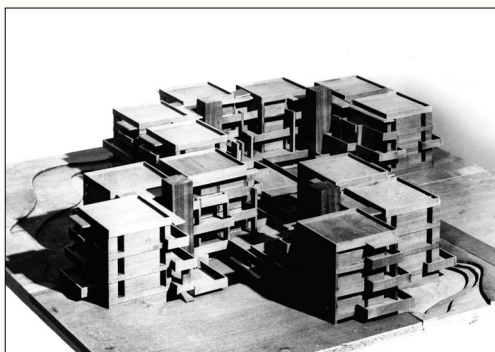
4. Alberto Seassaro, Scuola elementare a Rozzano.

[Documento →](#)



5. Alberto Seassaro, Architettura spontanea nella Val Brembana.

[Documento →](#)



6. Alberto Seassaro, Progetto di un gruppo di case per salariati agricoli.

[Documento →](#)

1.2 La Facoltà di Architettura e la sua *storia speciale*

Il Politecnico di Milano e la Facoltà di Architettura, costituiscono la culla dove tutto è nato; luogo elettivo di sperimentazione e progettualità; punto di partenza e *milieu* culturale da cui Alberto Seassaro non si sarebbe più allontanato, iniziando e chiudendo proprio qui la sua carriera, insignito della onorificenza di *Professore Emerito del Politecnico di Milano* e del *Compasso d'oro alla carriera* attribuito all'Ateneo proprio per la nascita e il consolidamento del Sistema Design [7](#) [8](#).

Seguire le tappe della sua formazione e della sua storia dentro l'istituzione universitaria è anche un modo per leggere in filigrana quella «storia speciale», come la chiama Raffaele Pugliese (R. Pugliese, 2013, p. 9), della Facoltà di Architettura. *Storia speciale* che prende avvio nel 1963 con la prima occupazione – con Alberto Seassaro studente vicino alla laurea – che prosegue con gli anni della sperimentazione didattica, esito della rivendicazione di spazi di autonomia da parte degli studenti – con Alberto Seassaro assistente volontario – e arriva fino alla nascita dei Dipartimenti (anni '80), evoluzione dei pre-esistenti Istituti di ricerca, con Alberto Seassaro giovane docente associato; per toccare, all'inizio degli anni '90, il punto più alto con l'articolazione dell'unica Facoltà di Architettura in più Facoltà: Architettura I, Architettura II e Architettura III – o Facoltà del Design. È della nascita e dello sviluppo di quest'ultima che Alberto Seassaro sarà il principale protagonista.



7. ADI, Compasso d'oro alla carriera, Politecnico di Milano.

[Documento →](#)



8. ADI, Motivazioni per il conferimento del Compasso d'oro alla carriera al Politecnico di Milano.

[Documento →](#)



POLITECNICO
DI MILANO

Politecnico di Milano

Il design nelle università italiane ha avuto un significativo sviluppo negli ultimi vent'anni. A questo ha contribuito in modo particolare il Politecnico di Milano che ha saputo istituire sopra le proprie storiche radici (si pensi al legame tra l'ateneo e alcune figure straordinarie della storia del design quali Gio Ponti, Franco Albini, Achille Castiglioni e Marco Zanuso) il primo corso di laurea in Disegno industriale e successivamente, a partire dal 2002, la Facoltà del Design, oggi denominata Scuola del Design. Ciò è avvenuto per l'impegno di molti, tra cui ci piace ricordare Tomás Maldonado e Alberto Seassaro, primo preside della Facoltà del Design. Il design al Politecnico di Milano è oggi un sistema integrato di competenze che opera, tra formazione e ricerca, attraverso le proprie strutture quali il Dipartimento INDACO (Disegno Industriale, Arti, Comunicazione e Moda), a cui fanno riferimento il Dottorato di Ricerca di Design e il Sistema dei Laboratori, e il Consorzio POLI.design. Punto di incontro di culture diverse, in forte dialogo con il mondo professionale e imprenditoriale e con i principali centri internazionali di ricerca e formazione, il design al Politecnico ha svolto un ruolo fondamentale nella creazione a Milano di una comunità scientifica di riferimento.

Nulla di quello che verrà poi, può essere compreso, se si trascura di indagare il contesto in cui Alberto Seassaro si è formato e l'*imprinting* – nel senso esteso che il termine *imprinting* ha assunto anche al di fuori della psicologia e dell'etologia (Lorentz, 1967) – culturale oltre che politico capaci di foggiare successivamente il suo agire istituzionale. È come se il permanere di Alberto Seassaro all'interno del Politecnico lo si possa leggere come una lunga e continua azione di occupazione di uno spazio istituzionale nel quale vedeva rispecchiate tutte le contraddizioni della società ma al quale riconosceva anche tutte le potenzialità proprie di un luogo di incubazione e di un agente di trasformazione capace di penetrare nel profondo i sistemi culturali, rinnovandoli (Siliato, 2020) [9](#) [10](#) [11](#).

È al quarto anno del suo percorso di studi, quando alla Facoltà di Architettura prende avvio il periodo delle grandi rivendicazioni studentesche che culminano con le occupazioni del 1963 e poi del 1967. La partecipazione attiva alle istanze di rinnovamento portate dagli studenti segnerà profondamente i contenuti delle sue attività di ricerca e di formazione e l'impegno istituzionale degli anni successivi.

Sono anni all'insegna della sperimentazione; della drastica revisione nell'organizzazione delle attività didattiche; del superamento delle aree disciplinari per andare verso l'idea della *didattica come ricerca*; della riflessione sulle possibili alternative metodologiche nell'insegnamento del progetto per affrontare i problemi emergenti; di una nuova consapevolezza politica capace di mettere al centro della formazione i bisogni e le esigenze sociali da tempo troppo lontani da una *Università d'élite* più propensa a tramandare saperi statici e avulsi dalle trasformazioni del contesto culturale e sociale; del «nuovo ruolo dell'architettura nei processi di trasformazione della città e del territorio» (Pugliese, 2013, pp. 9-10).

La sperimentazione è la parola chiave che segnerà le dinamiche di rinnovamento della Facoltà di Architettura, in un momento non privo di duri scontri e di contraddizioni.

[...] *Sperimentazione*: parola che si diffonde a partire dal 1964 nelle assemblee degli studenti della Facoltà di Architettura di Milano e che dal 1967 dà forma a proposte concrete per la riorganizzazione della didattica; nel 1968 il Consiglio di Facoltà chiede

LA FACOLTA' DI ARCHITETTURA
E' OCCUPATA DAGLI STUDENTI DA GIOVEDI'

Dopo una lunga agitazione rimasta senza riconoscimenti da parte delle autorità accademiche, abbiamo occupato la facoltà.

Ci stiamo battendo per essere resi responsabili della nostra formazione.

Lottiamo per un ordinamento universitario democratico, contro una struttura rigidamente autoritaria.

I nostri professori oggi non sono disposti a condividere con altri il potere direzionale della didattica e della ricerca. L'attuale struttura dà agli studenti solo doveri, nessun diritto.

Tutte le componenti del mondo universitario devono partecipare responsabilmente alla direzione degli istituti. Studenti, assistenti e professori al governo dell'università garantiscono la sua funzione di centro di elaborazione culturale autonoma e responsabile di fronte alle esigenze della società.

L'ordinamento democratico degli istituti universitari è il primo momento per la trasformazione della nostra università.

Gli studenti occupanti

L'ARRETRATO DELL'ARCHITETTURA



9. Manifesto degli studenti occupanti.
[Documento →](#)



10. Manifesto di Anarchik, *Stato, Chiesa, Esercito, Polizia, Scuola*, Atelier Libre '70.
[Documento →](#)



11. *Il futuro di Architettura comincia con le ricerche*. Estratto dell'intervista a Paolo Portoghesi.
[Documento →](#)

ufficialmente l'approvazione di una *sperimentazione ministeriale*.
(Vannini, 2009 p. 39)

[...] l'istanza *sperimentalista* rappresenta il tratto costitutivo delle complesse vicende dell'architettura al Politecnico di Milano. [...] così come l'intreccio tra formazione politecnica e radici umanistiche dell'architettura; la centralità del progetto come ricerca e sperimentazione dentro una tradizione critica e riflessiva; l'interpretazione difficile di un ruolo sociale e civile dell'università e dei suoi saperi. (Pasqui, 2013, p. 6)

[...] 1960, 10 giugno, verbale del Consiglio di Facoltà, riguardo il ridimensionamento del piano degli studi e riorganizzazione degli insegnamenti in quattro raggruppamenti fondamentali: Storia; Materie scientifiche e Tecnologiche; Urbanistica; Composizione architettonica. Tali raggruppamenti di organizzeranno in Istituti la cui attività sarà diretta alla ricerca e alla produzione culturale, il cui campo sarà esteso anche all'esterno come servizio diretto alla società. (Vannini, 2009, p. 39)

La sua partecipazione attiva alle occupazioni e ai momenti di lotta e protesta (occupante di notte, lavoratore di giorno) e il clima di quel contesto, fanno maturare anche il suo interesse per una ricerca di progetto autonoma rispetto ai saperi professionali e più connessa alle esigenze della formazione; lo spingono al coinvolgimento diretto di gruppi sociali portatori, a loro volta, di rivendicazioni sulla casa come diritto; fanno maturare l'attenzione alla città e alle sue trasformazioni con l'emergere prepotente delle necessità delle *classi* sociali più fragili. In ultima istanza portano Alberto Seassaro a guardare al progetto come atto politico.

1.3 La ricerca morfologica

La tesi di laurea si colloca in questo momento cruciale della vita della Facoltà di Architettura. Le istanze portate dal movimento studentesco mettevano in luce la crisi della cultura architettonica e del suo insegnamento, troppo ripiegato sulla pratica e sugli interessi professionali del-

la docenza, e la necessità di aprire nuove relazioni tra ricerca, progetto e didattica del progetto. Questa cornice culturale accelera e accompagna la costruzione dei primi contenuti degli Istituti, luoghi di riflessione teorica pensati come momento di raccordo tra ricerca e didattica.

Oltre ad una maggior aderenza ai nuovi problemi della casa e dell'abitare, della città e delle sue trasformazioni, gli studenti esigevano anche *lo svecchiamento* del corpo docente, l'adesione delle tematiche di progetto ai nuovi problemi sociali e chiedevano una maggiore apertura culturale verso discipline non contemplate nel curriculum di studi ma strettamente connesse alle culture del progetto.

È sulla base di queste richieste che «vengono chiamati ad insegnare in Facoltà, personalità esterne come Umberto Eco (Teoria della forma), Dino Formaggio (Metodologia della visione), Franco Russoli (Storia dell'arte)» (F. Serrazanetti, p. 19). L'interesse di Alberto Seassaro è naturalmente accogliente nei confronti di questi insegnamenti così vicini alle culture dell'arte coltivate negli anni del liceo e così vicine ai suoi interessi per le culture visive.

Questi fermenti culturali e politici pervengono a sintesi con la tesi di laurea. I contenuti della ricerca di tesi compendiano l'interesse e la passione per le culture artistiche, le arti visive e le teorie della forma con l'impegno politico volto ad elaborare i contenuti istituzionali e le finalità scientifiche dei nascenti Istituti della Facoltà di Architettura, nei quali, come detto, si vanno delineando, proprio in quel momento, i nessi tra ricerca e didattica.

Qualche anno più tardi, nel 1965, nelle premesse ad una ricerca finanziata dal Ministero, sono gli stessi autori (Ugo La Pietra ed Alberto Seassaro) a raccontare le finalità di ricerca della loro dissertazione di tesi:

La Ricerca morfologica è lo sviluppo di un lavoro universitario articolatosi durante l'anno accademico 1962-1963 presso il corso di Interni II e presentato l'anno successivo per la Laurea in forma di mostra con il titolo: *La ricerca morfologica. Proposta di lavoro per gli istituti di ricerca scientifica della Facoltà di Architettura.*

La ricerca può essere assunta come primo esempio, all'interno della Facoltà, di un contributo culturale e politico volto a prospettare in termini scientifici le specifiche problematiche morfologiche,

all'interno degli Istituti universitari, come elementi essenziali per la fondazione di una nuova scienza architettonica. [...]

Dopo un'introduzione delle problematiche della ricerca scientifica, della loro funzione all'interno delle Università, vengono affrontate tematiche specifiche, articolate secondo i seguenti argomenti:

Libertà della forma; Artisticità ed esteticità; Relazione tra le arti (astrazione e figuratività in architettura); Apporto alla ricerca architettonica dei professionisti, degli utopisti e della didattica, ecc. La parte che, *in nuce*, contiene le ipotesi intenzionali [N.d.R. I due autori utilizzano il termine *intenzionale* nella loro dissertazione di tesi per indicare una ricerca finalizzata alla progettazione], viene elaborata all'interno del *metodo dei modelli*. Le parti più pregne di espressioni potenziali di intenzionalità, riguardano le riflessioni sulla logica, la metodologia e le finalità della ricerca scientifica; le prime formulazioni del *metodo dei modelli* in cui compaiono concetti e indicazioni operative sul suo uso e il suo significato: i concetti di *campo della forma* come *campo di possibilità*; di *sintropia* e di *finalismo*; di *concetto spaziale informatore*; di *modello spaziale elementare sperimentabile*; di *gradi di libertà*. Anche le ipotesi indagative formali, svolte a riguardo di *esempi espositivi*, con la loro volontà di porsi come alternative alla progettazione consueta, si costituiscono come *esperienza ricercativa* su basi rigorosamente astratte e possono intendersi come prima espressione di *modellazioni spaziali*. (Da Ugo La Pietra e Alberto Seassaro, La ricerca morfologica, 1966 – materiale grigio senza numerazione di pagina. Archivio Privato Alberto Seassaro)

L'elaborato scritto della tesi mette a fuoco diversi concetti che restano – come rilevano gli stessi autori – allo stato seminale, all'interno di uno scritto che ha eminentemente carattere teorico.

Concetto di Morfologia come concretizzazione spaziale dei comportamenti di fruizione delle forme. [...]

Concetto di Modelli di comprensione: modelli come strumento e al contempo metodo che consente di integrare in un unico momento l'elaborazione della teoria e la sua verifica sul reale in forma reciprocamente interagente. [...]

Concetto di *Modelli come utensili spaziali*. [...]

Concetto di *Sinestesia tra le arti*. [...]

Concetto di *campo della forma come campo di possibilità* e i connessi concetti di *sintropia*, *finalismo*; idea di *concetto spaziale informativo* e di *modello spaziale elementare sperimentabile*. [...]

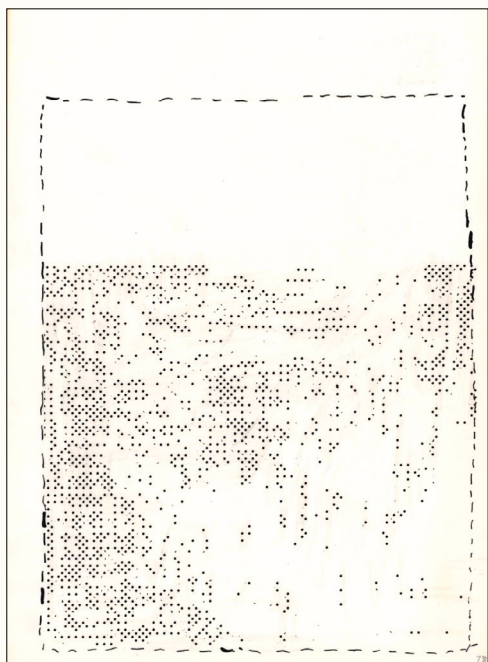
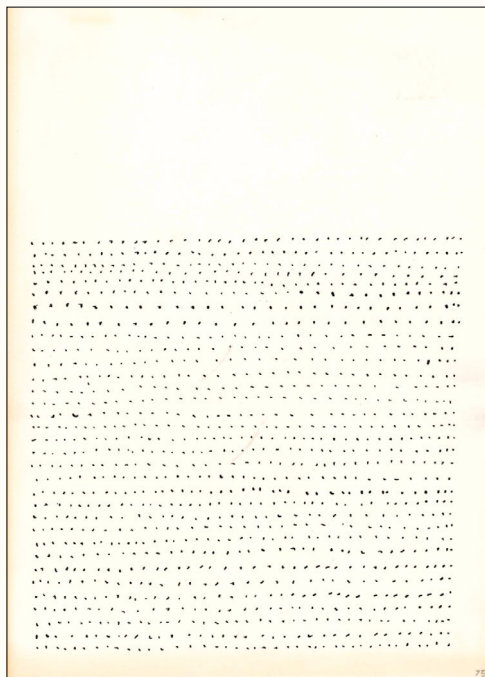
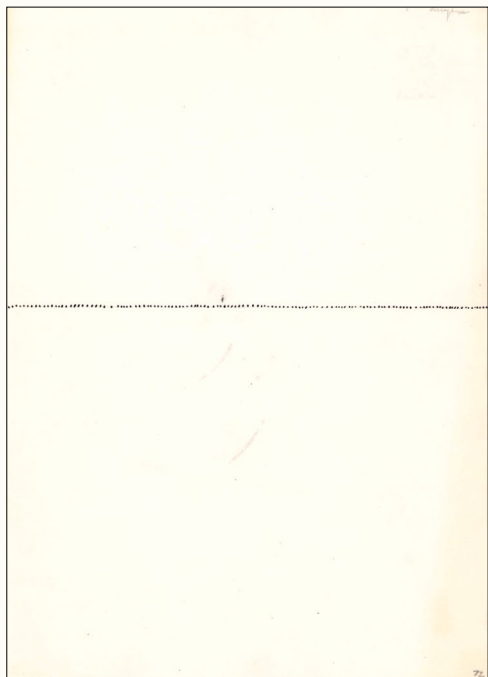
Concetto di *Natura esistenziale dello spazio e natura spaziale dell'esistenza* (rielaborati da Merleau-Ponty). [...]

Concetto di *Spazio modulare e tessiture* e concetto di *corpi tissuranti*. (Dalla Tesi di Laurea, *La Ricerca Morfologica*, Ugo la Pietra e Alberto Seassaro, 1964)

Centrale invece, e ben strutturata, la definizione del concetto di *forma* e della sua *operabilità* entro una prospettiva di osservazione e un perimetro del campo di validità – per usare i termini dei due autori – rappresentati dal progetto architettonico.

Il concetto di *morfologia come concretizzazione spaziale dei comportamenti di fruizione delle forme*, in cui l'accezione di fruizione viene estesa agli aspetti d'uso, si pone come risolutore sia della tradizionale dicotomizzazione dell'architettura in tipologia-morfologia, in cui questa è di fatto intesa come sinonimo di forma, sia delle settorializzazioni della semiotica in sintattica-semantica-pragmatica, riconducendole al loro aspetto strumentale. Con questa definizione si individuano come ambito della ricerca *le interazione di mutua modificazione intercorrenti tra forme e comportamenti*, evidenziando come siano propriamente le forme a costituire l'obiettivo specifico della nostra intenzione operativa in quanto strumento della nostra *tecnica* di intervento nel divenire dei comportamenti ¹². (Dalla Tesi di Laurea di Ugo La Pietra e Alberto Seassaro, 1964)

Ma, oltre al contenuto culturale, la tesi annuncia sin dai primi passaggi la sua intrinseca vocazione politica che si esprime nel denunciare le carenze della formazione proprio sul piano della *forma come contenuto primario del progetto di architettura* e il rischio che i contenuti formali siano messi in secondo piano e emergano nel processo progettuale come conseguenza, risultato, delle questioni funzionali.



12. Estratto della Tesi di Laurea di Ugo La Pietra e Alberto Seassaro, *La Ricerca Morfologica*, pp. 71-82.

[Documento →](#)

Lo studente di architettura oggi è il più dogmatico assertore della supremazia del *momento del contenuto* nei riguardi del *momento della forma*. E quindi nella sua formazione disciplinare le premesse, le indagini preliminari, i processi deduttivi, le dichiarazioni programmatiche costituiscono il *clou* della situazione, di cui la finale esperienza di concretizzazione formale è accettata come inevitabile. Questi sintomi vengono variamente interpretati: alcune diagnosi sostengono addirittura che non di *stato clinico* si tratti, bensì di uno stato di particolare salute. Noi, come constatazione di fatto, riportiamo, individuando solo come sintomo di crisi, oltre a uno scarso impegno di approfondimento dei significati delle forme architettoniche, la mancanza di apertura verso una ricerca per una conoscenza delle componenti percezionali, simboliche, psicologiche, di informazione e di comunicazione della forma. [...] Accanto all'espressa enfattizzazione del *contenuto*, si è inoltre verificato un altro processo distorto le finalità architettoniche: ovvero il *mito della metodologia*. È avvenuta cioè la feticizzazione di uno strumento che da supporto didattico, approntato ai fini dell'acquisizione disciplinare dell'architettura, è divenuto fine a sé stesso, chiudendosi in un giro solipsistico di autoverifica assolutamente sterile. [...] Il risultato di ciò, è un'impotenza a livello della forma che porta alle elementari assunzioni di cliché, di forma tipo, di forma standard, camuffate da moralità o probità della forma. [...] A questo punto sarebbe probante della nostra tesi, la dimostrazione di quanto abbiano influito queste insufficienze nella produzione architettonica italiana e in particolare di quanto abbia influito su ciò la mancanza di un adeguato impegno della classe docente nell'università. Qui soprattutto ci preme sottolineare come, proprio nell'università, debba essere portato l'impegno di chiarificazione disciplinare sui problemi della morfologia.

(Dalla Tesi di Laurea, *La Ricerca Morfologica*, Ugo la Pietra e Alberto Seassaro, 1964)

L'insegnamento del progetto viene considerato sterile se non viene nutrito dalla ricerca finalizzata alla didattica e alla formazione. La tesi è, in questo senso, anche una ricerca sulle finalità e il ruolo degli Istituti Universitari e della ricerca che in essi viene svolta.

Lo strumento degli Istituti Universitari si individua come quello più pertinente, per le sue strette interrelazioni con la didattica e quindi per la diretta incidenza sul vivo della elaborazione culturale che in essa dovrebbe avere origine. Alla ricerca, e in particolare alla ricerca pura, negli Istituti Universitari della Facoltà di Architettura deve essere rimandato l'impegno di inserire nei suoi programmi questo particolare momento ricercativo.

(Dalla Tesi di Laurea, *La Ricerca Morfologica*, Ugo la Pietra e Alberto Seassaro, 1964)

Ambiziosa sul piano teorico ma, osservata a distanza di tempo, anche ingenua per due studenti poco più che ventenni.

Certamente emergono la passione per le culture e le teorie della forma e la forza polemica nel rivendicare la necessità di intervenire sulla didattica per produrre un reale rinnovamento delle sue forme e dei suoi contenuti.

La tesi, allestita come mostra, verrà riproposta nel 1965 presso l'Istituto di Composizione e nel 1966 presso la Galleria Flaviana di Locarno.

[...] Poi arrivò la laurea, da molti anni non si era più visto un trenta e lode, io e Seassaro fummo baciati dal Preside Dodi con complimenti e apprezzamenti per la nostra tesi che in modo spettacolare presentammo in una mostra: foto, disegni, pannelli, modellini: la *sinestesia tra le arti*, con proposte per fare ricerca all'interno della Facoltà di Architettura. [...]

(Ugo la Pietra, in Stefano Follesa, *Pane e progetto. Il mestiere del designer*. FrancoAngeli, Milano 2009)

La tesi di Laurea di La Pietra-Seassaro (1964-1965) è il punto di avvio di successive Ricerche finanziate dal Ministero (1965 e 1966) sul concetto di *forma* come *ambito ricercativo intenzionato* alle dinamiche spaziali proprie degli studi di architettura.

Le due ricerche, prosecuzione e approfondimento delle tematiche della tesi, saranno finalizzate a definire criteri per la messa a punto di un repertorio bibliografico sugli studi della *forma* nell'ambito delle discipline progettuali all'interno degli Istituti di Composizione. Con queste ricerche inizia la vita universitaria di Alberto Seassaro.

La centralità delle tematiche morfologiche affrontate nella tesi sul piano teorico costituisce inoltre il punto di avvio delle sue attività artistiche e progettuali.

Figura 2.
Da Ugo la Pietra e Alberto Seassaro,
La ricerca morfologica, Catalogo
della Mostra, Galleria Flaviana, 26
marzo 1966.

La ricerca morfologica

1962-63 Prima elaborazione
svolta nel corso di Architettura degli Interni

1964 Seconda elaborazione.
Mostra alla Facoltà di Architettura di Milano, a cura dell'Istituto di Architettura degli Interni.

1964-65 Terza elaborazione.
Ricerca svolta presso l'Istituto di Composizione Architettonica della Facoltà di Architettura, con Borsa di Studio del M.P.I.

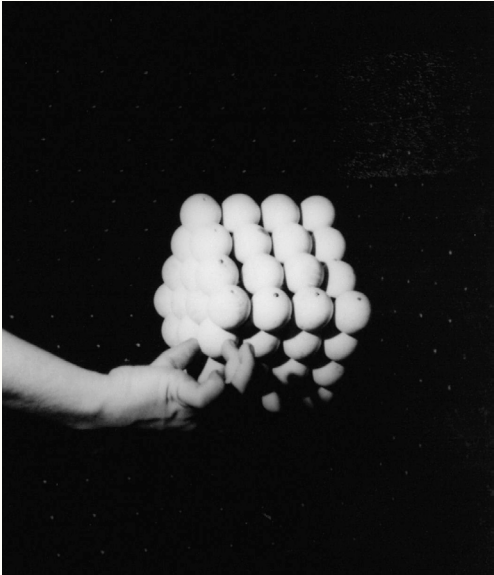
1965-66 Quarta elaborazione.
Ricerca in via di svolgimento, presso l'Istituto di Composizione Architettonica della Facoltà di Architettura, con Borsa di studio del M.P.I.

Ugo La Pietra

- Laureato nel 1964 alla Facoltà di Architettura del Politecnico di Milano.
- Assistente nel 1964-65 nel corso di Architettura degli Interni II (Prof. V. Viganò).
- Assistente nel 1965-66 nel corso di Elementi di Composizione II (Prof. C. Biasi).
- Ricercatore presso l'Istituto di Composizione Architettonica.

Alberto Seassaro

- Laureato nel '64 alla Facoltà di Architettura di Milano.
- Assistente nel 1963-64 e 1964-65 nel corso di Composizione Architettonica I e II (Prof. L.D. Belgiojoso).
- Assistente nel 1965-66 nel Corso di Elementi di Composizione II (Prof. C. Biasi).
- Ricercatore presso l'Istituto di Composizione Architettonica.



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2. È stato un bel viaggio, comunque. Intervista a Ugo La Pietra

Agnese Rebaglio

Dipartimento di Design, Politecnico di Milano

Note 1.

Link→



1. Ugo La Pietra. Quasi coetanei, il loro incontro alla Facoltà di Architettura del Politecnico di Milano dà vita a un sodalizio che prosegue solidissimo per tutti gli anni di studio e che si interrompe bruscamente e definitivamente dopo alcuni anni di attività professionali condivise. I due perseguiranno poi in modo autonomo le proprie carriere, sviluppando tuttavia, ciascuno nel proprio ambito – Ugo La Pietra nel suo studio di progettazione e Alberto Seassaro soprattutto nell'università – quella radice di ricerca condivisa e costruita negli anni giovanili. Una radice che si è nutrita di un humus fertile, costituito, come si intuisce dalle parole di La Pietra nell'intervista che segue, prima di tutto dal riconoscersi entrambi estranei a un certo sistema sociale e formativo che era consolidato nella Facoltà di Architettura degli anni '60, ma anche certamente da una comune passione, viva e concreta – quasi un'ossessione – per una pratica della ricerca progettuale che oggi diremmo interdisciplinare. Il sentimento di alterità rispetto al contesto da un lato e la poliedricità artistica e progettuale dall'altro, li portano a

sviluppare, ancora studenti, progetti didattici coraggiosi e visionari che culminano, nel 1964, nella tesi di laurea che espone, in forma di mostra, la loro *ricerca morfologica* fondata sulla *sinestesia delle arti* ¹.



Le esperienze condivise in quegli anni si moltiplicano intercettando una fitta rete di docenti, professionisti e colleghi di studi (e di studio professionale poi), che a vario titolo rappresentano alcuni tra i protagonisti della storia della Facoltà e dell'architettura milanese del secolo scorso, in un intreccio di storie inseparabile.

Sono determinanti gli incontri con i professori Vittoriano Viganò, Franco Albini, Cesare Blasi, Benedetto Resio, Carlo De Carli ma anche con i colleghi Renzo Piano, Milly Cappellaro, Cesare Stevan, Bico Belgiojoso, Carlo Guenzi, Filippo Tartaglia, Gianmaria Beretta, Giuliano Banfi, solo per citarne alcuni, e con alcuni di loro sperimentano le prime esperienze di lavoro.

Il rapporto tra Alberto Seassaro e Ugo La Pietra si nutre delle reti sociali e del clima culturale del tutto peculiare che avvolge il Politecnico di Milano e la città di Milano e che interroga i giovani studenti sul ruolo e le responsabilità civili del progetto. Dentro questo mondo e per molti anni, la loro relazione è, sul piano personale e professionale, citando le parole di La Pietra, così *simbiotica* e viscerale da sfociare alla fine in una *fatica alla reciproca accettazione*, che ne determina la netta interruzione, mai più ricucita. Una complessa tessitura di storie e di vite, insomma, che rivela dinamiche profondamente umane, in cui i principi generatori di passioni e interessi comuni della giovinezza evolvono, nel divenire degli anni, in disegni e fili paralleli.

Nell'intervista che segue, raccolta nello studio di Ugo La Pietra nell'aprile del 2025, la testimonianza di quei principi, di quel clima, di quel viaggio.

Cominciamo dall'inizio: come vi siete conosciuti?

Ci siamo conosciuti all'università. Nel 1957 era facile conoscersi perché gli studenti erano davvero pochi. A quel tempo si iscrivevano praticamente soltanto figli di architetti o di imprenditori e invece raramente persone senza legami familiari con la disciplina. Quindi, chi come me o Alberto non aveva una tradizione familiare alle spalle, si distingueva subito. Questo nostro piccolo sodalizio è nato dunque in modo piuttosto naturale. Alberto aveva una spiccata sensibilità arti-

1. Ugo La Pietra e Alberto Seassaro, Catalogo della mostra *La Ricerca Morfologica*. [Documento →](#)

stica perché veniva dal liceo artistico. Era più giovane di me di un anno perché quel tipo di scuola gli aveva permesso di anticipare l'iscrizione. Io, da parte mia, ero già un pittore: prima ancora di iscrivermi ad Architettura avevo allestito delle piccole mostre. Tra tutti i nostri colleghi, noi due eravamo i più vicini al *mondo dell'arte*, ed è proprio questo a legarci fin da subito.

E poi c'era questa nostra costante competizione con gli altri studenti, anche se non cercata. Noi non eravamo *figli della casta*, come altri che potevano già contare su un'eredità familiare nel mondo dell'architettura. Noi venivamo da un'altra storia, e forse proprio per questo, ogni volta che ci veniva assegnata un'esercitazione, cercavamo di spingerci sempre oltre. Se venivano richiesti trenta disegni, noi ne portavamo trentacinque. Facevamo sempre di più, in modo sempre più complesso. Vivevamo quasi un'esplosione creativa, e anche la tesi di laurea fu concepita con quello spirito.

Abbiamo vissuto molte esperienze comuni da studenti anche se non abbiamo mai sviluppato un progetto insieme perché a quell'epoca gli studenti elaboravano solo progetti individuali. Tuttavia, i miei lavori finivano spesso per assomigliare ai suoi, e viceversa. Ricordo un episodio al Politecnico: un giorno dovevamo presentare il modellino di un progetto che ci era stato assegnato. Io tenevo il mio nascosto sotto un velo, per non farlo vedere ad Alberto.

Quando lui ha mostrato il suo, era praticamente uguale al mio... solo un po' più brutto! Io avevo elaborato quel progetto in solitudine, convinto che fosse particolarmente originale, e invece lui aveva pensato a un progetto molto simile al mio. Insomma, c'era davvero una grande sintonia tra noi, che è durata per tutti gli anni degli studi ed è culminata nello sviluppo condiviso della tesi di laurea.

In realtà, ancora prima della tesi, avevamo collaborato a un progetto bellissimo, anche per il suo valore storico, insieme a Renzo Piano e Milly Cappellaro, che allora era la mia ragazza. Per molti giorni, abbiamo rilevato e disegnato quasi tutte le cascine della bassa lombarda, con disegni strepitosi, ritratti dal vivo. Oggi non ne conservo neanche uno, perché li raccolse tutti Blasi, che nel frattempo era diventato nostro professore e poi nostro relatore. Io non li ho mai più rivisti, se non per un unico disegno che conservo ancora. Ogni volta che lo guardo, penso: *cavolo, quanto eravamo bravi!*. Disegnavamo tantissimo allora e io

ho proseguito poi per tutta la vita. In Italia, purtroppo, ancora oggi il disegno non ha il riconoscimento che merita, soprattutto nel campo del design: è sempre stato considerato un omaggio da regalare al collezionista, niente più. Eppure, il disegno è una disciplina a tutti gli effetti, ma non ha un mercato, non ha collezionisti, non ha nemmeno un museo. Io sono un bravo disegnatore – Alberto diceva che fossi il più bravo – ma a parte me e altre due o tre persone, questo non lo sa nessuno [24](#).

La vostra tesi di laurea era davvero fuori dall'ordinario per il suo portato artistico, così anomala per la Facoltà di Architettura di allora dove le tesi erano tutte votate a una progettualità compositiva più canonica. Come avete avuto quell'idea?

Mi è difficile dire con precisione come sia nata la nostra tesi di laurea perché a distanza di tanti anni i ragionamenti di allora si confondono. So però che, a un certo punto, arrivammo alla convinzione che l'integrazione delle arti – o *l'intégration des arts* – fosse ormai superata. L'idea di un'architettura che si limitava a *ospitare* l'arte, riservando spazi al bassorilievo o alla scultura, non ci bastava più: sentivamo che non fosse più sufficiente integrare ma bisognasse fondere le arti, per riconsiderare seriamente la loro relazione.

È da qui che nacque l'idea della *sinestesia* tra le arti, il tema centrale della nostra Tesi. Credo che, in fondo, ci fosse una nostra aspirazione a essere noi stessi *strumenti sinestetici*. Io stesso, da giovanissimo, ho vissuto un periodo complesso, oscillando tra varie discipline: suonavo in un'orchestra (ho suonato dal 1955 fino agli anni '90), dipingevo, stu-



2. Fotografia di Alberto Seassaro, Renzo Piano, Ugo La Pietra, Milly Cappellaro.
[Documento →](#)



diavo Architettura. Insomma, non ci siamo mai sentiti legati a un unico ambito di studio e di espressione. Per questo, l'ipotesi di superare i confini, di attraversare i diversi ambiti disciplinari e di mettere in relazione i diversi linguaggi creativi ci sembrava – prima in modo intuitivo, poi in modo sempre più consapevole – avere un senso profondo per il progetto.

Inoltre, sentivamo fortemente la necessità di rivendicare, dentro l'università, uno spazio per la ricerca, con dei laboratori dove sperimentare, dove sviluppare esperienze, anche prescindendo dalla disciplina specifica, con l'obiettivo di portare avanti vere ricerche collettive, esperimenti progettuali e generare così conoscenze nuove. Questo approccio alla ricerca, in Italia, non era contemplato nelle Facoltà di Architettura ma noi, fin dall'inizio, ne avvertivamo fortemente l'esigenza. Io, noi, ci siamo sempre sentiti dei *ricercatori*. E probabilmente quella nostra tesi, così atipica, nasceva proprio da lì: dall'intuizione che la vera ricerca dovesse fondarsi sul principio di sinestesia tra le arti e le discipline.

E in effetti, c'è stato poi un momento, agli inizi degli anni '70, in cui le discipline hanno davvero cominciato a perdere i loro confini. In quel periodo, tutto sembrava che potesse appartenere sia al mondo dell'arte sia a quello dell'architettura. Quella nostra visione, all'epoca della tesi quasi utopica, sembrava concretizzarsi. La crisi energetica del 1970-1972, e il conseguente cambiamento sociale e culturale, avevano infatti spinto per un avvicinamento tra le discipline creative.

Oggi, al contrario, queste discipline sono tornate ad essere mondi separati: l'architetto pensa ai suoi monumenti, il designer agli oggetti di consumo, l'artista lavora per il sistema dell'arte. Noi avevamo tentato di mettere in discussione proprio questi confini e io, personalmente, ho continuato su questa strada per tutta la vita. Ho mantenuto fede a quell'intuizione iniziale, e ancora oggi la porto avanti.

Come è proseguito il vostro percorso in università?

Dopo la laurea io sono diventato assistente incaricato di Vittoriano Viganò, andando anche a lavorare nel suo studio, e dopo un paio d'anni Alberto e io siamo diventati assistenti di Cesare Blasi, sia a Milano che a Pescara. Ma Blasi, alla fine degli anni '60, era una figura non valorizzata nel panorama del Politecnico di Milano per motivazioni politiche. Eppure, tra i suoi assistenti c'erano i migliori della nostra generazione:

Stevan, Belgiojoso, Banfi, Seassaro, Tartaglia ed io. Eravamo un bel gruppo, davvero.

Di quel periodo a Pescara ho un *vuoto* strano. Avevo una ragazza e la fotografavo spesso, ma devo ammettere che non conservo immagini né memoria dei momenti vissuti lì con Alberto, anche se so per certo che ci fosse! Ricordo bene, invece, che partivo da Milano con la mia Volkswagen – persino la stessa auto che aveva anche Alberto! – e percorrevo tutta l'Adriatica, paese dopo paese, perché non c'era ancora l'autostrada, con i vigili che ti fischiavano se superavi i 50 km all'ora. Eppure, io partivo con entusiasmo, perché a Pescara si respirava un'atmosfera completamente diversa da quella di Milano dove, nel 1969, il clima era micidiale e per strada si sparava. Laggiù, invece, era un altro mondo. Gli studenti erano gentili, i genitori venivano a incontrare i professori, la sera ti invitavano fuori, ti trattavano bene. Era quasi una vacanza per me.

Dopo un paio d'anni, però, le cose cambiarono e il gruppo intorno a Blasi si disperse: Belgiojoso, Banfi, Stevan, Tartaglia, Guenzi, Seassaro, tutti si allontanarono. Rimasi solo io, perché sono sentimentale e non avevo capito la situazione. Alberto, grazie a un'amicizia del padre con Ciribini – il grande tecnologo – divenne suo assistente e noi ci perdemmo di vista. Io, invece, mi ero avvicinato a Vittoriano Viganò: avevo collaborato con lui a diversi progetti e mi stimava molto. Un mio lavoro del secondo anno, seguito sotto la sua supervisione fu particolarmente apprezzato e, addirittura, venduto al Centre Pompidou! Fu lui a farmi diventare assistente subito, anche se normalmente ci volevano prima almeno dieci anni come collaboratori. Eppure, dopo l'esperienza con Blasi, non intrapresi la carriera accademica: dopo tre o quattro anni, resomi conto che le cose non funzionavano, un giorno semplicemente me ne andai, senza dire niente a nessuno, lasciando la Facoltà.

Quello fu un momento decisivo, una sorta di passaggio catartico. Tutti, nella nostra generazione, presero la loro propria strada, cercando il proprio mentore e, in quel momento, le nostre strade si separarono.

E fuori dall'università, come avete collaborato?

Fino a quel momento, per tutti gli anni '60, abbiamo condiviso uno studio professionale. Sempre grazie alle conoscenze del padre di Alberto, avevamo ottenuto un contratto importante di consulenza per un nuovo sistema di prefabbricazione edilizia, di origine russa: prefabbricazio-

ne semi-pesante con silicalcite. Abbiamo lavorato per anni su questo tema, producendo prototipi, case, rivestimenti. Ricordo che portavo a casa 350.000 lire al mese, come lo stipendio di mio padre che era dirigente in una grande azienda. Per un raffronto, quando lavoravo da Viganò con un contratto che non aveva nessun altro, il mio stipendio medio era di 150.000 lire al mese. Quelle cifre ci hanno permesso di fare tante cose, anche se il lavoro sulla silicalcite non ci entusiasmava. Abbiamo disegnato una quantità infinita di cose, ma non era certo quello il nostro sogno. Grazie alla mia frequentazione con il mondo dell'arte, ero riuscito anche a ottenere alcuni incarichi per il nostro studio.

Abbiamo progettato la galleria *Il Cenobio*, poi la *casa-galleria di Spaggiari*, e persino un progetto mastodontico per una palazzina, sempre per Spaggiari, che era un mercante molto benestante. La palazzina l'abbiamo progettata e abbiamo realizzato un bellissimo modellino che non ci è mai stato pagato. Siamo andati in causa e l'abbiamo anche vinta, ma non abbiamo potuto riscuotere nulla perché il proprietario era ufficialmente nullatenente. Insomma, siamo stati fregati e abbiamo dovuto sostenere noi le spese. Ma così andava allora.

Già dagli anni '60 abbiamo cercato di superare il nostro sodalizio a due, che a tratti era anche soffocante, mettendo insieme un gruppo di architetti per creare uno studio collettivo, più ampio. Ne facevano parte Stevan, Belgiojoso, Beretta, Algarotti, Seassaro ed io. Prima, invece, eravamo solo io e lui. Belgiojoso era bravo; Beretta era bravo a tenere i conti. Avevamo iniziato con uno studio in viale Romagna, poi ci siamo spostati in via Solferino, e infine in viale Petrarca. Ma lì ho resistito pochissimo, forse un anno o poco più. E, come mio solito, un giorno me ne sono andato senza dire nulla a nessuno. È finito tutto così.

Questa è la mia storia con Alberto. Dopo, non è più accaduto nulla tra noi. L'unico episodio degno di nota è che io ho aperto uno studio in corso Garibaldi al numero 50 e, per pura coincidenza, – davvero, non era voluto! – lui ha preso casa proprio lì. Ma questo non ha significato nulla, perché non ci siamo più visti, né frequentati. Qualche volta ci siamo incontrati per caso, io gli chiedevo cosa stesse facendo ma senza andare oltre.

Com'era, in studio, la vostra collaborazione professionale?

Devo premettere che abbiamo sempre collaborato con tante perso-

ne, non eravamo quasi mai da soli a lavorare sui progetti e, oltre ai colleghi in studio, avevamo anche una rete di collaboratori esterni. Mi ricordo per esempio di un artigiano molto bravo, in periferia, dove andavamo a far realizzare i modellini. Ma anche di tante altre persone.

Comunque, pur lavorando insieme, eravamo molto diversi. La vera differenza tra noi era che io passavo tutto il giorno a lavorare come un matto, mi *strafogavo* di disegni per ore, mentre lui si metteva all'opera solo di notte – mamma mia! Alle nove di sera arrivava in viale Romagna, dove avevamo lo studio, e prima di salire si fermava a chiacchierare con le puttane per un'oretta buona. Poi finalmente saliva, quando io ero già esausto e stavo per tornare a casa borbottando, anche perché, oltre al lavoro, facevo pure il pittore, organizzavo mostre e la sera suonavo.

Quindi sì, lavoravamo insieme, ma in condizioni molto diverse, sia per l'approccio professionale che per lo stile di vita. E così nel 1971 ho avuto il coraggio di dire basta. Me ne sono andato dal Politecnico, dove non riuscivo a realizzarmi; me ne sono andato dallo studio di architettura, dove lavoravo con soci che non sopportavo; e mi sono anche separato da mia moglie, una donna tremenda che mi aveva incastrato come una strega. Nel 1971 sono rinato.

Quali erano le divergenze più significative tra te e Alberto Seassaro, dal tuo punto di vista?

Il nostro è stato un sodalizio che è durato a lungo e abbiamo condiviso veramente tanti momenti di vita, anche intima e quotidiana. Conservo, per esempio, ricordi meravigliosi delle tavolate a casa di mia madre, dove Alberto era di casa. Mia mamma era una donna stupenda, affettuosa, calorosa, accogliente nella sua casa e, probabilmente, molto diversa da quella di Alberto, di cui lui parlava infatti in modo amaro. La mia si affezionava agli amici e alle amiche che portavo a casa e li accoglieva come figli.

E questo modo di fare, per Alberto, era importante; forse sentiva un calore domestico che non trovava a casa sua. Ricordo che abbiamo condiviso cene, feste, tavolate con la pasta al sugo e il bicchiere di vino che non mancava mai. Eravamo veramente simbiotici. Eppure, Alberto era proprio il classico tipo di persona che

ho sempre fatto fatica a sopportare. Ti faccio un esempio: frequentavamo spesso il bar Jamaica, un luogo iconico per gli artisti. Prima di avere il coraggio di entrarci, però, ho passato anni a guardarlo da fuori, senza osare entrare, perché quegli artisti mi intimidivano. Quando finalmente mi sono deciso a parlare con la proprietaria, la signora Lina, lei mi accoglieva con dolcezza perché ero un ragazzo timido, minuto. Alberto, invece, era l'opposto: entrava con disinvoltura e subito salutava a gran voce: *Cara mamma Lina, come stai?*. La chiamava *mamma* al primo colpo. Mi faceva morire! Questa era la differenza profonda tra noi che mi metteva in difficoltà.

E poi, arrivato a ottant'anni, ho scoperto qualcosa di sconvolgente, che prima non sapevo: sono dislessico. E questo, improvvisamente, spiega tante cose!. Ho capito solo dopo molti anni una differenza che non sopportavo in Alberto: per me studiare era sempre stato un tormento, mentre a lui risultava molto semplice e naturale. Quando eravamo studenti, per studiare un libro (di fisica, chimica, o di una qualsiasi materia), io dovevo passare tre mesi a ricopiarlo interamente su quaderni, parola per parola. Avevo infatti una spiccata memoria visiva ed ero bravissimo a disegnare: quando mi interrogavano, chiudevo gli occhi e *vedevo* e *leggevo* il mio quaderno nella mente. Lui, invece, studiava tutto in dieci giorni. Lo faceva in modo un po' spavaldo, magari senza approfondire tutto, ma gli bastava. E questa cosa mi faceva impazzire. All'epoca non capivo perché per me fosse tutto così difficile mentre per lui tutto così facile. Oggi lo so: ero dislessico, ma nessuno me l'aveva mai detto. Insomma, quanto lui era espansivo, brillante, divertente, accentrava l'attenzione, al contrario io ero

3. Videointervista con
Ugo La Pietra.
[Documento→](#)



chiuso, un po' malmostoso, perché ho passato tutta la mia infanzia e adolescenza sentendomi l'ultimo, il più brutto, quello che non capiva. Vivere accanto a una persona così diversa da me, per 24 ore al giorno, è stata una sfida enorme. Eravamo simili nei concetti, ma agli opposti nei modi di essere.

Questo ha generato inevitabilmente, alla fine, una *fatica alla reciproca accettazione*, un cortocircuito. È stata una relazione che mi ha segnato e che in un certo senso è ancora una questione aperta perché, di notte, io sogno ancora, regolarmente, Alberto Seassaro. È stato un bel viaggio, comunque [34](#).

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3. Alberto Seassaro, un ricordo

Giancarlo Consonni

Emerito Politecnico di Milano

Ho frequentato il primo anno alla Facoltà di Architettura del Politecnico di Milano nel 1962-1963. Il biennio iniziale era concepito sulla falsariga di quello di Ingegneria (una decisione del 1934, quando Architettura fu istituita come facoltà autonoma). L'architettura si riduceva a poche materie: *Elementi costruttivi I e II* (Carlo Villa, con il manuale di Enrico A. Griffini), *Elementi di architettura e rilievo dei monumenti* (Claudio Buttafava al primo anno, Umberto Sabbioni al secondo, sostituito in corsa da Piero Bottoni), *Storia dell'arte e storia e stili dell'architettura* (Alessandro Degani al primo anno, Carlo Perogalli al secondo), *Caratteri stilistici e costruttivi dei monumenti* (Luigi Crema, l'unico che tenesse lezioni di un qualche interesse). Il resto – la parte preponderante degli insegnamenti – era costituita dai corsi cosiddetti *scientifici*. Se superavi il *catenaccio* – lo sbarramento del biennio –, arrivavi al terzo anno affamato di architettura. Su questa penuria la prima occupazione della Facoltà dell'inverno 1963 aveva dalla sua ragioni sacrosante. Ma gli occupanti erano troppo presi dalle loro rivendicazioni per coinvolgere i neoiscritti. Alle matricole non restava che osservare lo spettacolo del fuoco acceso in un bidone all'ingresso dell'appena inaugurato edificio

di via Bonardi e sgobbare, con riga a T e squadra, sui tavoli da disegno nella vecchia sede di piazza Leonardo da Vinci. Al mio fianco, a sbuffare sulle tavole, c'erano Demetrio Stratos e Thalia Istikopoulou.

Una luce nel buio fu, al secondo anno, l'arrivo di Piero Bottoni che rivoluzionò il corso di *Elementi di architettura e rilievo dei monumenti*. Su invito di un gruppo di studenti del quinto anno, che erano stati tra i protagonisti dell'occupazione del 1963, il progettista del QT8 trasformò l'esercitazione in una ricerca sui caratteri insediativi ed economico-sociali di alcuni paesi della *bassa milanese* (contesto che allora, soprattutto in ambito agricolo, versava in condizioni di indigenza). Fu per molti studenti un tuffo nella realtà, con indagini e rilievi sul campo, condotti per gruppi (un'altra novità). Un'esperienza fondativa, almeno per il sottoscritto.

Ad accendere un'altra luce, sempre per chi scrive, furono dei pannelli esposti negli spazi della biblioteca. Erano gli elaborati che Ugo La Pietra e Alberto Seassaro avevano appena presentato alla discussione della loro tesi di laurea. Un lavoro insolito, tanto innovativo nei temi e nella veste grafica da spingere la commissione esaminatrice, presieduta da Piero Portaluppi, a decretare che quegli elaborati meritavano di essere esposti in modo che tutti gli studenti ne prendessero visione. Ho conservato nel tempo memoria della forza comunicativa, efficace e fascinosa, di quei pannelli.

Riguardate a più di sessant'anni di distanza, le due novità, quella di Bottoni e quella di La Pietra-Seassaro, assumono il carattere di anticipazioni di alcuni percorsi che la Facoltà di Architettura di Milano avrebbe intrapreso non solo negli anni roventi del decennio successivo, ma nella storia a seguire.

Mentre Ugo La Pietra andò per la sua strada, Alberto Seassaro fu tra i non pochi *assistenti* che, nel cuore degli anni Sessanta, affiancarono il movimento degli studenti nella richiesta di un radicale rinnovamento degli studi in Architettura.

La sostanziale sintonia, che si creò tra le rivendicazioni degli studenti e gli orientamenti di larga parte del corpo docente, a cominciare dal preside De Carli e dal consiglio di facoltà, non venne però gradita dai vertici dell'Ateneo che invocarono e ottennero dal governo centrale interventi repressivi che rimangono un'eccezione – un *vulnus* – nella storia dell'Italia repubblicana. Il primo a usare la mano pesante fu il

ministro della pubblica istruzione Giovanni Battista Scaglia (governo Leone II) con la revoca, il 9 agosto 1968, della nomina a preside di Carlo De Carli. Più di tre anni dopo fu la volta del ministro della pubblica istruzione Riccardo Misasi (governo Andreotti I) che il 23 novembre 1971 sospese gli otto membri del Consiglio di Facoltà (Franco Albini, Lodovico Belgiojoso, Piero Bottoni, Guido Canella, Carlo De Carli, Paolo Portoghesi, Aldo Rossi e Vittoriano Viganò). Infine, tra maggio, ottobre e novembre del 1972, toccò al nuovo ministro dell'Istruzione Oscar Luigi Scalfaro (governo Andreotti II) completare l'opera con il licenziamento di 23 professori incaricati: Emilio Battisti, Sandra Bonfiglioli, Dario Boradori, Bianca Bottero, Maurice Cerasi, Raffaella Crespi, Sergio Crotti, Mario De Micheli, Adriano Di Leo, Giorgio Ferraresi, Leonardo Fiori, Giorgio Gaetani, Corrado Levi, Lodovico Meneghetti, Antonio Monestiroli, Guido Nardi, Augusto Rossari, Giovanni Salvestrini, Giacomo Scarpini, Fabrizio Schiaffonati, Alberto Seassaro, Cesare Stevan, Gio Vercelloni.

Un forte e tenace impegno nella ricerca fu la risposta di studenti e docenti al commissariamento della facoltà (affidato a Corrado Beguinot). Una resistenza che, unita alla mobilitazione di eminenti esponenti della cultura italiana, portò nel 1974 alla riabilitazione dei membri del Consiglio di Facoltà. Si aprì allora, nella facoltà milanese, una fase di rinnovate energie e, insieme, di tensioni e confronti serrati.

Cambiavano anche le condizioni al contorno. Nel giro di qualche anno l'intero Politecnico di Milano, come il resto dell'università italiana, si avviava verso una stagione feconda, densa di speranze all'insegna dell'autogoverno. Nel Politecnico l'istituzione dei dipartimenti nel 1981 e i non pochi passi per ridurre, almeno formalmente, il divario nel peso decisionale fra ingegneri e architetti diedero frutti copiosi, anche grazie a tre rettori lungimiranti: Emilio Massa, Adriano De Maio e Guido Ballo. La costruzione del Politecnico rete (De Maio) – con i poli regionali di Como (poi soppresso), e di Lecco, Cremona, Mantova e Piacenza – e l'istituzione nel 1995 delle facoltà di Architettura Civile e di Design alla Bovisa sono tra i frutti migliori di questa stagione.

Ho avuto la ventura di seguire da vicino queste vicende in vari organi di governo: il Senato Accademico Integrato, che mise a punto lo Statuto dell'autonomia; la Commissione d'Ateneo, che svolse una funzione strategica nel sollecitare e controllare la formazione dei dipartimenti; infine, il Senato Accademico a pieno regime.

Si trattò di una fase esaltante, ancor più se confrontata con quanto è venuto dopo il 2009, con la controriforma Gelmini.

E Alberto Seassaro? Le accese e persistenti turbolenze che, per anni, precedettero la formazione della Facoltà di Architettura Civile lo vedevano defilato, tra il distaccato e il divertito, con quel suo sorriso vagamente ironico sotto i baffi. In apparenza era schierato sul fronte opposto al mio; ma questo non impediva che ci scambiassimo battute sulla inconsistenza dei detentori del potere accademico.

Ma, volente o nolente, neghittoso o solo in attesa, venne il suo turno. Varata la Facoltà di Design, gli stessi promotori si resero conto che, perché il progetto andasse in porto, occorreva una figura di tessitore colto e accorto. Pochi altri a Milano avevano le competenze e la rete di relazioni che poteva vantare lui. Sotto la sua guida, il Politecnico e la città videro così prendere corpo un'impresa ragguardevole.

Con lui siamo poi stati spalla a spalla nel Senato Accademico negli anni in cui venne avanti la controriforma. In quella sede, con altri – ricordo in particolare Renzo Rosso e Antonella Penati – abbiamo resistito con tutte le nostre forze all'involutione a cui l'università italiana stava andando incontro, indicandone i pericoli. Invano. Lo tsunami Gelmini travolse le nostre come le altre resistenze. Con gli effetti che sono sotto gli occhi di tutti e che hanno fatto delle università italiane delle entità impossibilitate a autogovernarsi e, soprattutto, dei luoghi tristi.

Di Alberto Seassaro mi rimane il ricordo di una persona che sapeva mescolare una disposizione gioiosa a levità e nonchalance. Con quelle sue meravigliose cravatte (lavorate all'uncinetto dalla moglie) a fare da biglietto da visita.

PARTE 2

Tra sperimentazioni artistiche e progettuali

4. Indisciplinato!

Antonella Penati

Dipartimento di Design, Politecnico di Milano

4.1 Tra arte, scienza, architettura e design

All'insegna della frenesia progettuale sono, per Alberto Seassaro, gli anni che seguono la laurea.

L'attitudine sperimentale incubata negli anni della formazione si dischiude a percorsi di ricerca molteplici: nell'Università dove inizia, appena laureato, a collaborare con Ludovico Belgiojoso, con Cesare Blasi e poi con Giuseppe Ciribini; nel mondo delle pratiche artistiche dove si esprime seguendo alcune intuizioni delineate in forma teorica durante gli studi universitari; in ambito progettuale dove passa dalla scala dell'oggetto a quella degli interni a cui si aggiunge l'importante esperienza in Montecatini che si tradurrà in vere e proprie sperimentazioni progettuali di moduli abitativi costituiti da sistemi e componenti prefabbricati. Questi piani espressivi del progetto nient'affatto lontani costituiscono il banco di prova di un *laboratorio* nel quale viene messa concretamente in pratica l'idea che il processo creativo lavori trasversalmente sulle discipline della forma non per integrazione, giustapposizione, contrapposizione e neppure per semplice similitudine o analo-

gia ma per sintesi dialettica, per travasi e contaminazioni di linguaggi, di esperienze, di procedimenti, di modi del pensiero, di materiali, di *orientamenti estetici ed etici* alla ricerca di quella *sinestesia delle arti* teorizzata con Ugo La Pietra nella loro tesi di Laurea (La Pietra, Seassaro, 1964) in antitesi all'*intégration des arts* [integrazione delle arti].

Come ricorda Ugo La Pietra in *La sinestesia delle arti*, la loro ricerca di tesi accomunava le culture del visivo individuando nel *segno* il minimo comune denominatore e nel *metodo dei modelli* lo strumento operativo utili a superare le separazioni codificate dai vari sistemi artistico-culturali (La Pietra, 2001, p. 15).

Un modello morfologico [...], oltre ad essere strumento di sperimentazione ai fini della conoscenza scientifica delle interazioni comportamentistiche con la forma, acquisisce una precisa essenza segnica come ricettore di processi di intenzionalizzazione formale e quindi come veicolo di poetica. Questa intenzionalità può di fatto portare un modello a superare il proprio ambito ontologico e, attribuendogli proprietà di 'ambito reale', consentire di assumere al suo interno un atteggiamento progettuale architettonico. Il primo obiettivo sperimentale della ricerca – costruzione di un modello spaziale strumentabile ad una operabilità morfologica – è stato approssciato mediante l'introduzione di un 'sistema spaziale' caratterizzato da un 'modulo spazio temporale' [...] in grado di recepire 'elementi di posizione e situazione' e le primarie esperienze percezionali di orientamento, direzionalità, distanza, dimensione, densità. Questa parte della ricerca ha portato alla costruzione di moduli operabili come 'utensili spaziali', dotati di una elementare omeostaticità che li renda capaci di indurre 'effetti' e di recepire le retroazioni dell'operatore. L'acquisizione dell'oggetto architettonico può essere così attuata tramite le operazioni di modellazione, nella verifica costante del rapporto formatività-oggettualizzazione di eventi morfologici elementari. Come ulteriore fase di una esplorazione strumentale dell'intero ciclo ricercativo, si è posta la verifica del 'sistema spaziale elementare' realizzato, che viene effettuata caricando il modello di implicazioni comportamentistiche e funzionali, ovvero operandone precipitazioni progettuali che lo rendano tramite di intenzionalità formale.

A ben osservare il modo di operare di Alberto Seassaro in questi diversi ambiti del progetto, ci si trova di fronte ad un *continuum* che ha il suo punto di avvio in alcune riflessioni teoriche che compaiono in suoi scritti e trova le prime formalizzazioni nelle serie de *I morfemi* che influenzano poi, per linguaggio e per approccio al mondo delle forme e delle superfici, i suoi oggetti concepiti come moduli prolungabili all'infinito così come gli interni domestici e gli allestimenti per gallerie d'arte sino ad arrivare ai *moduli* abitativi trattati come *oggetti componibili* o come *varianti* di uno stesso oggetto.

Il tema del *segno*, elemento significante minimo, e del *modello*, strumento di *operabilità attiva e dinamica* – ovvero interattiva – derivano ad Alberto Seassaro dalle sue letture e dai suoi interessi per le teorie della forma, per le culture semiotiche e per la cibernetica. Disciplina, quest'ultima, che lo aveva affascinato dopo la collaborazione universitaria con Giuseppe Ciribini e a seguito delle frequentazioni con Silvio Ceccato ai seminari di Verucchio.

È la fase giovanile degli innamoramenti verso approcci e discipline affascinanti proprio perché fuori dal percorso canonico della tradizione di studi dell'architettura; è il tempo delle posizioni granitiche *senza se e senza ma* tipiche di un animo dalla curiosità insaziabile.

Ma è anche il momento delle scorribande intellettuali verso il nuovo universo di segni portato dalle Avanguardie artistiche e dal tema delle contaminazioni tra diversi linguaggi: la musica, la pittura, la grafica, il fumetto, il cinema. E ancora, è il momento del venir meno della *solidità* dei perimetri disciplinari e anche il mondo dell'arte fa cadere molti muri: primo fra tutti quel muro che si ergeva a definire una distinzione netta tra arti maggiori e arti minori; tra il mondo del visivo e del sonoro; tra arti di pura estetica e arti funzionali. Tra queste il design che ha rappresentato per molti il tramite sfuocato tra arte e architettura.

La sua biblioteca testimonia la vicinanza tra questi diversi mondi, da cui Alberto Seassaro ha attinto a piene mani, e di cui è stato un grande collezionista. Per Seassaro, appropriarsi di un mondo – sia questo musicale, artistico, culturale, oggettuale – significa abbracciarlo fino a conoscerlo tutto, un tutto totalizzante, quasi maniacale.

E se sul piano musicale l'anima jazz lo porta a *mettere assieme* intere collezioni di vinile (da Bille Holiday, Charlie Parker, Ella Fitzgerald, Louis Armstrong, Duke Ellington, Miles Davis, Ray Charles, David Murray, Thelonious Monk a George Gershwin), sul piano cinematografico tutto Fellini, tutto Bergman, tutto Kubrick, tutto Hitchcock; tutto Welles, tutto Kurosawa, tutto Antonioni, tutto Visconti, tutto Wenders, tutto Tarantino, tutto Truffaut, tutto Allen, tutto Monty Python e via e via – dove *tutto vuol dire tutto* in maniera ossessiva. Sul piano della cultura visiva e in particolare sul piano dell'invenzione linguistica e della contaminazione di linguaggi diversi, la sua biblioteca testimonia poi, con i numerosi libri di storia dell'arte, organizzati per autori, per stili e correnti, per Scuole, per Musei e Gallerie d'arte ecc., la curiosità selettiva per la cultura fumettistica: da Andrea Pazienza, a Filippo Scòzzari, Tanino Liberatore, Tullio Pericoli, Moebius, Jean-Marc Reiser, senza escludere l'intera collezione di Paperino (ma Topolino NO), e poi i Simpson (l'intera famiglia e tutti i suoi personaggi tappezzano ancora oggi le pareti dei bagni di casa Seassaro), Mafalda fino a Zerocalcare (ma i Manga NO). Dove il collezionare, in Seassaro, non coincide mai con il possedere ma con il mettere vicine mille varianti dello stesso motivo e cogliere, proprio nella varianza, anche la più piccola, il senso profondo e l'interesse per le sfumature e le diversità.

Sul collezionare un intero capitolo andrebbe dedicato al suo interesse per le discipline estetiche, per il mondo dell'arte e per le culture della luce. Per altri versi nota è anche la sua collezione di *elefanti*, con una predilezione per quelli indiani rispetto a quelli africani, testimonianze dei suoi viaggi e dei viaggi di amici e familiari. Nessuna importanza data alla preziosità dell'oggetto ma alla sua storia e alla sua collocazione dentro la storia materiale della cultura di un popolo, i suoi aspetti simbolici, le sue caratteristiche materiche e le sue lavorazioni che raccontano molto del saper fare locale.

4.2 Brera come *milieu* culturale

Gli entusiasmi e i miti della sua giovinezza, il suo amore per le culture artistiche, i suoi ideali politici sono sfamati grazie a un'attitudine da vorace spigolatore, attitudine che non lo ha mai abbandonato, e che

lo spingeva a raccogliere informazioni, nozioni, saperi da fonti diverse, anche le meno convenzionali e ad andare a cercare *qua e là* tutto quello che soddisfacesse i suoi interessi: non solo libri ma anche riviste, giornali, atlanti, depliant, fotografie, report e resoconti e poi la radio, il cinema e i luoghi di incontro. I luoghi di incontro. Eh sì, perché è impossibile comprendere a fondo quel *certo modo* di vivere, di stare nel mondo, di pensare, di osservare, di comunicare e di tradurre in progetto di Alberto Seassaro, se si omette di indicare, tra le fonti principali dei suoi saperi, lo stare in mezzo alla gente, l'apprendere *scambiando due parole*, il feliniano *perder tempo* passato ad osservare come gira il mondo, il raccogliere punti vista dalle persone più disparate, anche le più umili, quelle che incontri dal tabaccaio, sulle scale del condominio, al bar o nelle vie del suo amato quartiere Brera.

A Brera aveva respirato l'arte da studente e la matrice artistica rendeva Brera una sorta di idealtipo per l'humus fertile che la caratterizzava. Brera rappresentava non solo un luogo ma anche una stagione, un crocevia di ambienti, situazioni, personaggi e un concentrato di occasioni, di espressioni artistiche e intellettuali. Aveva eletto Brera luogo e quartiere ideale della sua vita, dove infatti ha *abitato* al Garibaldi 50 prima e al 44 poi, anche e forse soprattutto per la sua atmosfera popolare: la Nora, la Barbara, il Coletta rendevano quelle strade e i suoi abitanti familiari. La Brera degli anni 2000 non gli corrispondeva più, un *posto di fighetti* e di *turisti che vanno e vengono*, dove nessuno conosce più nessuno.

Brera è l'ambiente che Alberto frequenta all'inizio della sua carriera: a Brera raccoglie amici, avvia scambi culturali, ricerca sollecitazioni. Brera, con le antenne sempre sintonizzate a cogliere i segnali del contemporaneo, è il luogo degli incontri: artisti, attori, fotografi, pittori, scrittori. Brera è colpevole di aver invertito il bioritmo di Alberto Seassaro: di giorno, fino a sera inoltrata a girovagare alla ricerca di stimoli e occasioni di scambio, a cercare nel riposo (poco) i momenti di sintesi; la notte che va verso il mattino i momenti di lavoro febbrile. Sarà così per il resto della vita. Ugo La Pietra, che con Alberto Seassaro ha condiviso, nei primi anni dopo la laurea, lo studio professionale, racconta le lunghe giornate di attese snervanti passate ad aspettare che arrivasse in studio. Ma Alberto arrivava la sera tardi, molto tardi, dopo che si era fermato a parlare con tutte le puttane di Brera (vd Ugo La Pietra, in que-

sto volume). A Brera aveva iniziato a frequentare Demetrios Stratos, ammaliato dalla sua voce e dalle sue sperimentazioni vocali. Lo aveva conosciuto alla Facoltà di Architettura e, nonostante fosse di qualche anno più giovane, aveva iniziato a frequentarlo e a frequentare il suo gruppo musicale gli Area. A Brera aveva conosciuto Gian Maria Volontè (diventato poi suo inquilino al Garibaldi 50); Dario Fo che gli regalava i bozzetti delle sue scenografie, Giorgio Gaber (con cui veniva spesso confuso per via della loro magrezza e del naso aquilino), Uliano Lucas e poi, al mitico bar Jamaica, gli esponenti delle avanguardie milanesi, termine che qui utilizzo per accomunare diverse correnti e pratiche artistiche della Milano degli anni '60 caratterizzate da un forte spirito di sperimentazione e innovazione: Arturo Vermi, Emilio Isgrò, Piero Manzoni, Lucio Fontana ed anche Fausto Melotti. Brera non era solo luogo degli incontri facili ma anche ambiente vivo di fermenti artistici; immerso in un pullulare di segni lasciati da artisti affermati e di strada a testimonianza concreta della loro presenza con la produzione quasi quotidiana di installazione immagini disegni sculture e manufatti creativi. Tutto quello che Seassaro, alle soglie dei 30 anni, trova in Brera lo cercherà poi nei suoi infiniti viaggi in terre e culture lontane.

La curiosità personale alimentata dal mondo artistico racconta solo una parte della storia di Alberto Seassaro. Per comprenderne fino in fondo l'*animus*, occorre calare la sua fase giovanile all'interno della cultura, delle lotte politiche, dei movimenti sociali e delle speranze di una generazione. Il suo impegno politico contrassegna le scelte progettuali ma, più in generale, le scelte di vita di Alberto Seassaro. Un impegno, praticato sin da studente con la partecipazione attiva ai fermenti della Facoltà di Architettura; portato poi all'interno delle aule universitarie, prima come giovane assistente e poi come docente, attraverso temi che testimoniano la sensibilità verso i problemi in primis abitativi delle classi sociali più fragili. Suoi anche diversi interventi di carattere politico in seno al Consiglio di Facoltà o nei Seminari di ricerca di Cultura tecnologica e nel Gruppo Nazionale di Ricerca CNR dove è sempre predominante la dimensione politica della tecnologia. Ma la sua militanza vitalissima – che ha termine appena inizia ad avvertire le prime avvisaglie che porteranno poi ai momenti bui della lotta armata, da cui prese con veemenza le distanze – si esprime anche al di fuori dell'ambito accademico con la partecipazione ai movimenti del 1968 e degli anni

1. Lettera del Comitato
per la promozione
dell'attività antimilitarista
e per l'obiezione di
coscienza, indirizzata ad
Alberto Seassaro.
Documento →



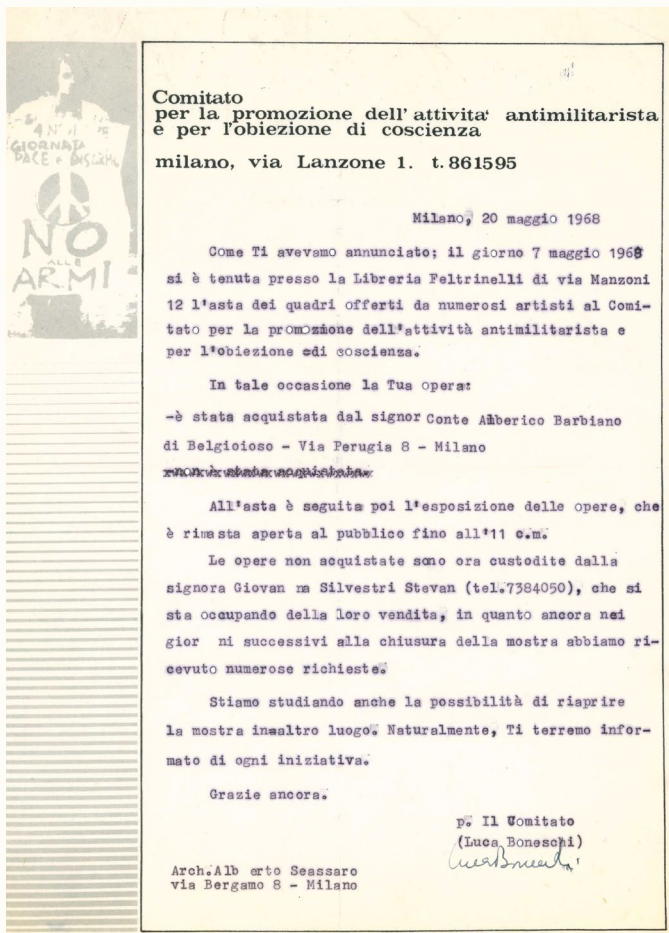
'70. Come artista partecipò a diverse manifestazioni per la raccolta fondi a favore del Comitato antimilitarista mettendo all'asta alcune sue opere; sempre come artista ritirò le opere dalla XXXIV Biennale d'Arte Contemporanea di Venezia del 1968 dove era stato invitato da Argan nella *Rassegna giovani*, aderendo alle manifestazioni di

dissenso di numerosi artisti; come professionista coordinatore di una struttura di progetto di una grande industria come Montecatini, scese in piazza con i lavoratori nelle rivendicazioni operaie contro lo *sfruttamento dei padroni*. Atto che gli costò il licenziamento 19 29.

È stato attento osservatore e ha analizzato, anche seguendo molte tesi di laurea, la vita dei circoli culturali e politici, dei centri sociali e di tutti quei luoghi in apparenza confinati e minori, portatori tuttavia di una controcultura capace di alimentare il mutamento, prefigurando nuovi e diversi futuri. Ha dato voce ai movimenti per le occupazioni delle case, portando l'esperienza concreta di as-

sociazioni civili, comitati di quartiere, organizzazioni attive sul territorio all'interno delle ricerche universitarie, in un momento in cui la casa rappresentava una delle principali emergenze sociali.

Ha favorito all'interno del mondo universitario luoghi e modi per rendere possibili pratiche di autoriflessione per portare a galla i problemi del mondo giovanile; ha partecipato attivamente ai movimenti femministi grazie anche al suo essere vicino nella vita e nella militanza politica a Ida Farè 39 49.



4.3 I progetti giovanili

È questo il paesaggio culturale, artistico e politico che fa da sfondo a molti suoi progetti giovanili che prendono avvio già nel 1964 quando, con Ugo La Pietra apre lo studio *P/S Project Studio*. In quegli anni maturano esperienze di progetto nell'ambito dell'architettura d'interni, dell'allestimento e del design pervenendo alla realizzazione di opere e alla produzione di artefatti pubblicati su Riviste di settore tra cui *Domus*, *Abitare*, *Interni*, *Edilizia Moderna*, oltre all'importante lavoro nel campo della industrializzazione edilizia per Montecatini Edison.

Molti progetti vengono alimentati da quel percorso comune che li aveva visti lavorare assieme nella tesi di laurea su un terreno, quello della forma, crocevia di arte, architettura e design.

Sono progetti dal carattere fortemente sperimentale che trovano le premesse culturali e metodologiche proprio nel loro lavoro di tesi. È così per esempio il progetto *Tuberie*, presentato al concorso *Monumento alla Resistenza per la Città di Brescia* a cui partecipa Nanda Vigo. Seassaro l'aveva incontrata e conosciuta davanti al bancone di un bar al porto di Genova. Nella sua passione per il girovagare, i porti erano luoghi di incontro privilegiati.

Il progetto prende spunto da una delle famose liriche oggettuali del poeta futurista Farfa (Vittorio Osvaldo Tommasini): *Tuberie*. Una poesia merceologica, che annovera «tubi reali e immaginari, simbolici e industriali, trasfigurati e onirici; tubi che si aggrovigliano tra loro in un continuo salto da una sfera sensoriale all'altra, da un contesto all'altro. Tubi metaforici, erotici e idraulici, tubi 'per tutti gli usi'» (Francesca Bergadano, 2018).

Come raccontano gli stessi La Pietra e Seassaro, il Monumento alla resistenza per la città di Brescia doveva rappresentare «un percorso urbano nel quale, l'elemento narrativo utilizzato è il tubo cilindro conduttore. Il carattere relazionale del tubo è espresso come fatto simbolico dalla poesia di Farfa tuberie. Il monumento è condotto, e percorso del condotto stesso, e trasmissione degli eventi storici. Il percorso: da passaggio stretto a frattura e quindi a somma di paesaggi e percorsi, è la rappresentazione metamorfica di un percorso storico che va dall'oscurantismo fascista alla resistenza per finire alla ricostruzione del Paese» (La Pietra, 2001, p. 34).

INVITO PERSONALE

inaugurazione della mostra,
dibattito "antimilitarismo",
politica delle sinistre".
con Felice Accame, Luca
Boneschi, Giorgio Maiorino,
Marco Pannella;

ORE 22.15 :

asta; presenzieranno la
sign.ra Pia Rame ed il
prof. Gillo Dorries.

hanno aderito offrendo loro quadri, tra gli altri, i pittori :

e scame, simone, sunarotone, bai
 coard, cessa, cazzaniga, chippine,
 cozz, d'ottavi, nova, fabbri,
 franceschini, lambaro, fabbri,
 medin, marinese, marzot, mieneco,
 mitec, paglia, oberio, bapora,
 simonetti, mignat, elboni, pozz,
 scavino, scognamiglio, sassaro,
 serlonga, smer, simonetta, salla-
 zomari, sottsass, cadini, volpato,
 zamboni, zambini, ziochi, zurio.

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Documento →



Documento →

Milano deve essere una città fatta a misura degli interessi dei lavoratori

Lo sfruttamento e la violenza privata dei padri della fabbrica e dell'ufficio continua in modo infame nella

CASA

L'Università ci prepara ad essere i costruttori della città controllata dal capitale: lottiamo per una città liberata dalla speculazione lottiamo per una FA COLTA, LIBERA E RESPONSABILE.

LA FORZA DEI LAVORATORI PUO' SALVARE LA CITTA' DALLA DISTRUZIONE DEI SUOI VALORI STORICI E UMANI E TRASFORMARE LA SCUOLA DI ARCHITETTURA IN UNO STRUMENTO DI CULTURA DEMOCRATICA.

GLI STUDENTI ARCHITETTI INSIEME CON TUTTI I LAVORATO-
RI LOTTANO PER UNA CITTA' CIVILE E UMANA CONTRO LA
METROPOLI CAPITALISTICA.

Il Comitato Esecutivo degli studenti di architettura del POLITECNICO di Milano



Documento →

Tubi d'acqua d'aria di gas / di scolo di scarico di scappamento / di gres di terracotta di cemento / di vetro di gomma d'ebanite / tubi di tutta la merceologia / tubi del closet del sentimento / tubi della stufa e della noia / tubi tunnel avidi di ferrovia / tubi del tormento e della gioia / tubi di tutti i metalli / tubi dei guanti gialli / tubi idranti dei pompieri / lancianti cubi d'acqua fresca / per calmare il calore delle fiamme / tubi delle stilografiche / colanti il pensiero / nero come l'umore / rosso come l'amore / tubi di pressione sanguigna / tubi digerenti / pei valzer lenti della digestione / tubi di budella / per la tarantella / delle smorfie viscerali / tubi aggrovigliati di seni / tubi genitali e verginali / tubi di camini d'officine / di piroscafi di locomotive / con seme di fumo / dimostranti la nullità / della voluttà / tubi delle panche dei giardini / profumati dai gelsomini / tubi per tutti gli usi / tubi per tutti gli abusi / tubi di latteria curvati / a mano che ghermisce / cui l'acqua espulsa / prolunga le dita / tubi di canne di grondaie di bocchini / tubi Bergmann / tubi Togni tubi Mannesmann / tubi di tutte le macchine / tubi di tutti i motori / tubi dei gambi dei fiori / tubi dei fucili e dei cannoni / pel cambio rapido delle generazioni / tubi ossi buchi dei polli / che furono pasciuti e satolli / tubi dei nasi infreddoliti / tubi dei cuori inteneriti / tubi dei cannocchiali / che nelle notti belle / si riempiono di stelle / tubi d'organi e d'argani / tubi d'istrumenti musicali / picchianti col fiato / sui timpani degli orecchi / motivi stravecchi / tubi turati e sturati / tubi nominati e innominati / tubi d'ogni specie e d'ogni tipo / tubi d'ogni spessore e dimensione / tubi ritti e a gomito acuto / tubi in sempiterna operazione / di masturbazione / del proprio contenuto / tubi di presa / di discesa / di salita / tutti in fregola universale / ogni tubo un cordone ombellicale / che lega che salda alla vita / tubi scroscianti e silenti / io sono il vostro cantore / sono un incantatore di serpenti.

(Farfa, *Tuberie*, 1993. In Farfa, *Noi miliardario della fantasia*, Edizioni La Prora)

Altri progetti, pur non abbandonando la cifra dello sperimentalismo, mostrano già una maturità progettuale e professionale più compiuta (anche se sia Alberto Seassaro sia Ugo La Pietra lamentano di non essere mai riusciti a farsi pagare dai loro committenti). Tra questi i proget-

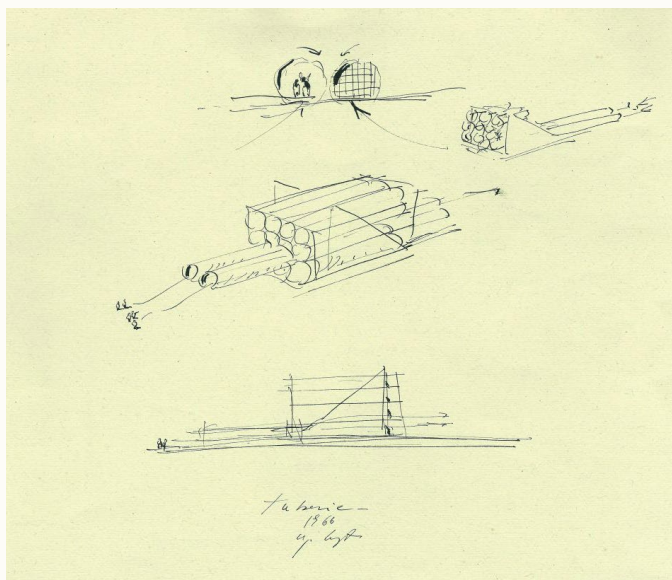
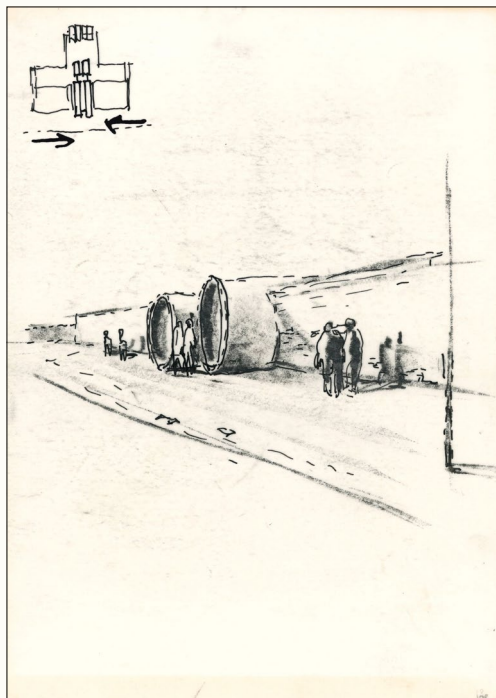


Figura 1.
Progetto *Tuberie* di Ugo La Pietra, Alberto Seassaro, Nanda Vigo.

ti di gallerie d'arte, sempre con Ugo La Pietra, e quelli di sistemi componibili di arredo, e di spazi abitativi, dove invece Seassaro predilige il cemento individuale.

Nel progetto, le forme, i materiali utilizzati e le tecniche di lavorazione vengono sollecitati nelle loro potenzialità espressive sia in ambito artigianale sia nella produzione industriale.

Tra i progetti con Ugo la Pietra, nel 1968, la Galleria privata Walter Spaggiari a Milano pubblicata su *Domus* (*Domus*, n. 465, 1968) nella quale l'attitudine alla sperimentazione è rivolta a ripensare la tradizionale tipologia della galleria d'arte come spazio non solo per guardare le opere d'arte, ma anche per contenere un magazzino di opere, e uno spazio per stare [52](#) [62](#).

Una tipologia complessa che ha trovato nella successione delle textures i motivi strutturali dei vari ambienti. È uno dei primi esempi di apertura della tipologia 'galleria d'arte' [...] capace di rompere il sistema tradizionale per 'aggiunta e integrazione'. (La Pietra, 2001, p. 42)

La lamiera metallica forata, le tessiture di elementi tubolari del soffitto, i pannelli e i parallelepipedi modulari sono segni di un linguaggio peculiare che ritroviamo nell'altro progetto di Galleria // *Cenobio* a Milano progettato nel 1967. (*Domus*, n. 451, 1967)

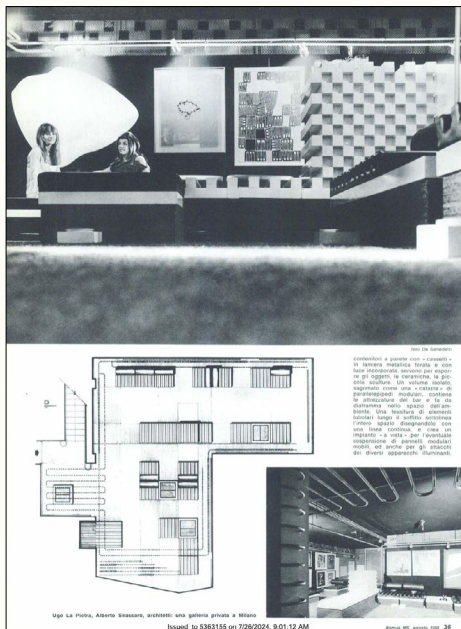
Quella di concepire gli ambienti come un grande oggetto unitario è una caratteristica che ritroviamo nei progetti di La Pietra e Seassaro e che ricorre anche quando Alberto Seassaro opera singolarmente come avviene negli interni domestici. Pochi i suoi progetti e simili tra loro nel linguaggio allestitivo e materico. Un linguaggio molto riconoscibile che ritroviamo nel progetto di Casa Rizzi a Camogli [72](#), nella Casa di famiglia a Camogli, nell'abitazione di via Franchetti a Milano per la sorella Paola [82](#). Gli interni sono concepiti come spazi attrezzati dove componenti reticolari integrano le pareti diventando tutt'uno con esse e non è più possibile distinguere gli elementi strutturali da quelli che li arricchiscono per favorirne l'uso e organizzare lo spazio. L'apparato allestitivo, caratterizzato da estroflessioni sulle pareti e sul soffitto, annulla, di fatto, la differen-



7. Alberto Seassaro, Casa Rizzi a Camogli, in *Interiors '70*. [Documento→](#)



8. Alberto Seassaro, Spazio abitativo a Milano, in *Interiors '70*. [Documento→](#)



5. Ugo La Pietra e Alberto Seassaro, Galleria privata Walter Spaggiari, in *Domus*, n. 465.

[Documento →](#)



6. Ugo La Pietra, Alberto Seassaro, *Il Cenobio*, in *Domus*, n. 451.

[Documento →](#)

za tra contenitore e contenuto generando un continuum dove l'arredo sparisce e c'è ovunque, senza che l'occhio avverta una cesura netta tra elementi che fungono da contenitore, da apparato di illuminazione, da struttura polifunzionale ecc.

Nella progettazione allestitiva dello spazio domestico, le forme e gli accostamenti di materiali rimandano ai suoi lavori di carattere più artistico nei quali sperimenta nuovi linguaggi espressivi, dove domina il bianco sagomato in molte lavorazioni di superficie.

Questo modo di pensare il progetto degli spazi presuppone che ogni singolo elemento, ogni singolo oggetto, ogni particolare costruttivo e allestitivo siano disegnati ad hoc: tavoli, piani e ripiani, contenitori, mensole e scaffali.

Notiamo nella foto il tavolo progettato per la casa di via Franchetti, pensato per una realizzazione di tipo artigianale ma che ritroviamo poi in una versione semplificata per la produzione su scala industriale nel progetto *Add* per Acerbis [95](#).

Se in questi progetti, gli interni sono governati come fossero un grande oggetto concepito in tutti i suoi dettagli, a maggior ragione con il progetto del *Monoblocco per arredo integrale*, presentato alla mostra internazionale tenutasi a New York nel 1972, *Italy. The New Domestic Landscape*, ci troviamo di fronte ad un vero e proprio oggetto-spazio in cui diversi ambienti e diverse prestazioni vengono composte, quasi assemblate.

Qui aleggia la filosofia delle *macchine per abitare* (Fagone e Favata, 2011) che in quegli stessi anni animava le esperienze progettuali di Joe Colombo: l'uso di nuovi materiali come il metacrilato, l'idea di sistema costituito da elementi componibili portati alla scala dell'arredo totale; la costruzione di un ambiente completamente svincolato dall'architettura che lo con-



9. Alberto Seassaro,
Addition, Tavolo
attrezzato componibile,
Acerbis.
[Documento →](#)

Figura 2.
Tavolo progettato da Alberto
Seassaro per la casa di via
Franchetti.



10. *L'intero mobile
corre su rotaie*,
Alberto Seassaro, in
Domus, n. 489.
[Documento →](#)



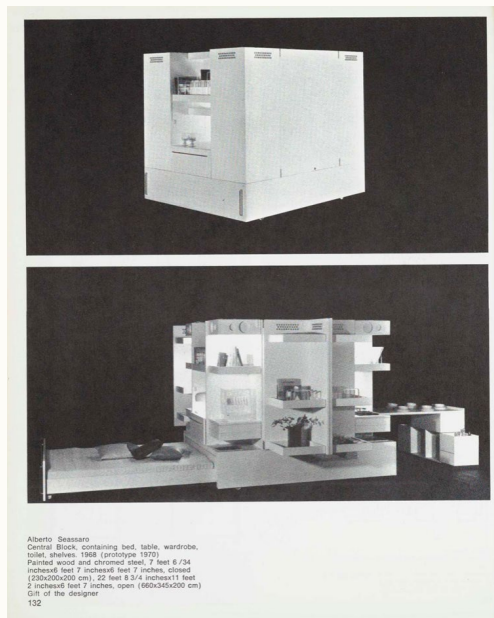
spazi minimi e risente al contempo dei processi di razionalizzazione dei sistemi abitativi (vd. *L'intero mobile corre su rotaie*, Alberto Seassaro, in *Domus*, n. 489) [10](#).

Nel progetto, le questioni sociali dell'abitare vengono rielaborate non cercando una risposta retorica, ironica, anticonvenzionale ma una soluzione che risponde all'uso giocando con i temi della modularità e della flessibilità [11](#). (Catalogo della mostra *Italy: The New Domestic Landscape*, MoMA, 1972)

I principi della flessibilità e della modularità; le proposte di interni che non guardano tanto alla tradizione ma all'evoluzione sociale, ai nuovi stili di vita, alle nuove esigenze che fanno spazio a nuovi modi di abitare; le sperimentazioni con nuovi materiali, nuove tecnologie, nuovi linguaggi non le ritroviamo solo nella progettazione di interni ma le ritroviamo anche nel progetto di cellule abitative realizzate con l'impiego della prefabbricazione e della produzione in serie. Un ambito della progettazione, questo, che lo vedrà impegnato per diversi anni presso il Settore Ricerche di Montecantini Edison e che svilupperà con Ugo La Pietra. La progettazione modulare e le tecnologie industriali di prefabbricazione del componente edilizio costituiscono certamente una parte fondamentale, forse la più rilevante, della ricerca progettuale di Alberto Seassaro in ambito professionale.

Nel modulo prefabbricato e nel progetto di attrezzature integrative ripongono la speranza di una edilizia democratica una generazione di architetti che, per la stretta contiguità ai modi della produzione industriale si avvicinano ai modi progettuali più tipici del design. Le competenze maturate in questo ambito da Alberto Seassaro nella sua ricerca professionale diventeranno materia di studio anche nella vita universitaria e costituiranno il punto di avvicinamento all'area tecnologica prima e a quella del design poi.

Il tema dell'industrializzazione del settore edile e la produzione di componenti e manufatti industriali per uso residenziale, per edifici di



Alberto Seassano
Central Block, containing bed, table, wardrobe,
loilet, shelves 1968 (prototype 1970).
Painted wood and chromed steel, 7 feet 6 3/4
inchesx8 feet 7 inchesx8 feet 7 inches, closed
(230x200x200 cm), 22 feet 8 3/4 inchesx11 feet
2 inchesx8 feet 7 inches, open (600x300x200 cm)
Gift of the designer
132

pubblico interesse o industriali, lo avvicinano a figure come Giuseppe Ciribini, Marco Zanuso, Giacomo Scarpini e alla realtà di Industrie come Edison S.p.A. e Finsider S.p.A. per le quali lavora come consulente. Per l'industria *Sviluppo Silicalcite S.p.A.* di Montecatini Edison, sviluppa, con Ugo La Pietra, il *Programma di ricerca per la sperimentazione e lo sviluppo di un Sistema di prefabbricazione in Silicalcite per case unifamiliari e tipologie affini* (1966) che lo terranno impegnato diversi anni. Il programma di ricerca prevedeva la sperimentazione del prodotto Silicalcite e del procedimento produttivo, finalizzato alla messa a punto di un *Catalogo di abitazioni tipo*, di tipologie di componenti, di tipologie di assemblaggio di elementi prefabbricati di serie.

Il catalogo lo si può anche leggere come raccolta di nuovi materiali e del nuovo vocabolario che accompagnava l'evoluzione dell'industria edilizia. Nel 1971 entra a far parte del Centro Ricerche Montedil del Gruppo Montecatini Edison come responsabile dello sviluppo, coordinamento e integrazione dei prodotti edilizi e la supervisione delle realizzazioni degli interventi dei diversi complessi edilizi realizzati dall'Ufficio Tecnico Montedison e da progettisti esterni.

Emerge in questi studi l'entusiasmo per l'uso di elementi modulari in architettura per gli aspetti di flessibilità funzionale resi possibili dall'assemblaggio di componenti semplici in sistemi complessi e per

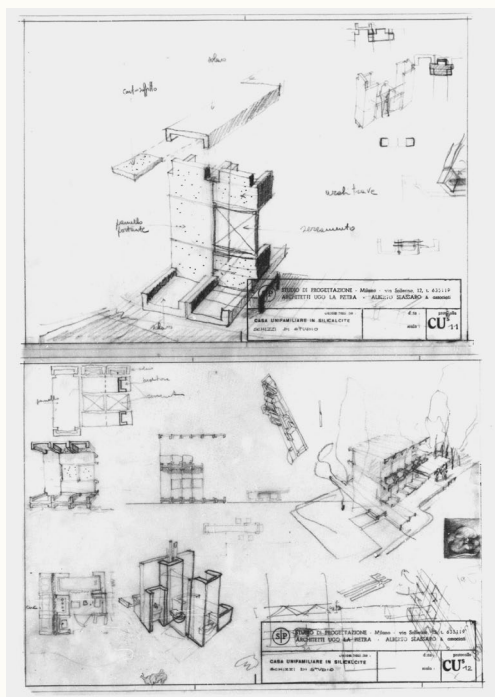


11. Estratto del Catalogo della Mostra *Italy: The New Domestic Landscape*, MOMA. [Documento →](#)

la loro vocazione a creare, attraverso gli accostamenti, texture di superficie. La possibilità di ottenere esiti diversi, a partire da componenti di base aggregabili in modo differente – quello che in tempi più recenti è diventato il mito della personalizzazione – viene qui caricata di valori etici che vanno verso l'idea di *casa-fai-da-te*, di democratizzazione della qualità dell'abitare. In questa generazione di architetti è sottesa anche la scommessa politica di insinuarsi – come tecnici del progetto – nelle maglie dell'industria, orientandone le strategie. Negli scritti successivi di Seassaro si leggerà la disillusione di questa speranza [12](#) [13](#) [14](#) [15](#). Il punto di arrivo della sua breve ma intensa attività professionale è il progetto, realizzato per ENEA, con l'arch. Gianni Scudo. Si tratta di un *Edificio per uffici e laboratori di tecnologie energetiche appropriate*, a Ispra (realizzazione terminata nel 1987) di cui diamo di seguito due brevi stralci di commento [16](#) [17](#) [18](#).

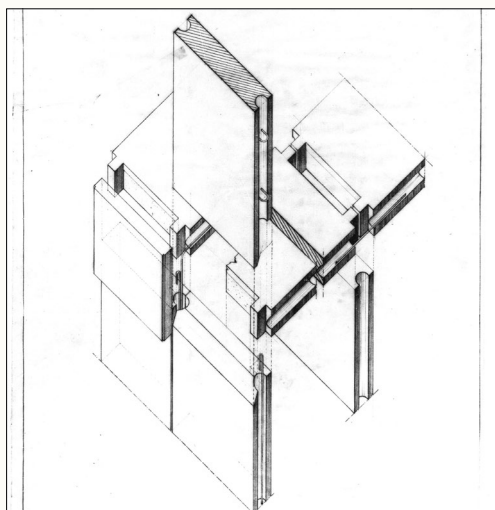
Di recentissima realizzazione è il nuovo edificio che a Ispra ospita alcuni laboratori del Dipartimento Fonti Alternative e Risparmio Energetico; la realizzazione è particolarmente interessante per come elementi della tecnologia solare passiva sono stati perfettamente integrati nell'architettura: in particolare per questo edificio è stata ideata una 'parete camino solare', realizzabile in modo industriale, e per la quale l'ENEA ha ottenuto un brevetto richiesto dalle industrie nazionali che lavorano nel settore degli involucri. (Umberto Colombo, *Architettura ed energia. In Sette edifici per l'Enea*, 1987, p. 9)

[...] Il laboratorio di ingegneria a Ispra è addirittura una sequenza di strutture sperimentali, ognuna col suo specifico valore di prototipo, montate con bravura in un insieme volutamente discontinuo; l'impresa che ha gestito la progettazione esecutiva [...] è passata attraverso molte varianti, registrando in anticipo l'impatto delle ricerche tecnologiche qui localizzate, riguardanti diverse forme di produzione di calore da fonte solare; involucro e impianti non sono più distinguibili, anzi in una parte dell'edificio gli impianti formano direttamente la scatola edilizia, con effetti geometrici inconsueti marcati dalla festosa policromia. (Leonardo Benevolo, *Architettura ed energia. In Sette edifici per l'Enea*, 1987, p. 13)



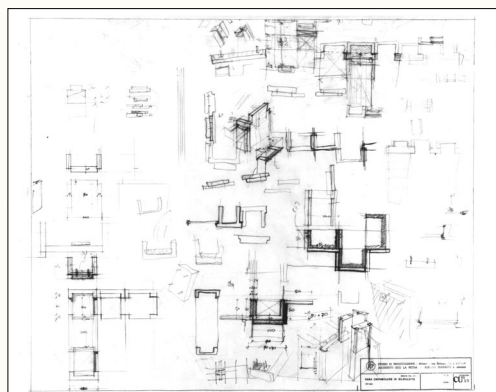
12. Ugo La Pietra e Alberto Seassaro, schizzi di progetto per Casa unifamiliare in Silicalcite.

[Documento →](#)



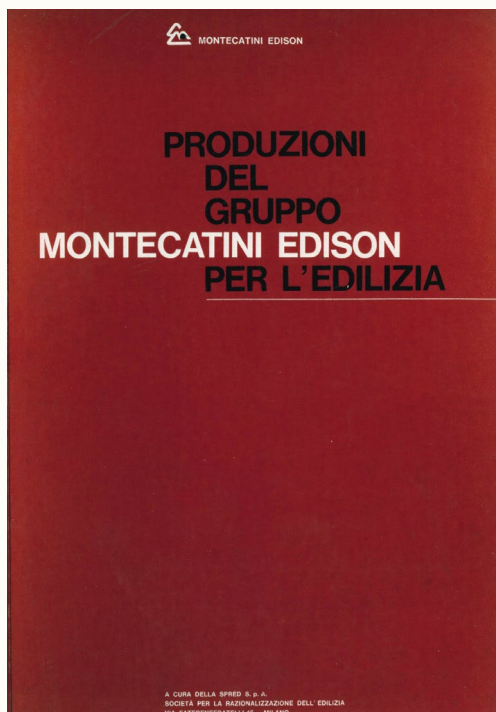
14. Ugo La Pietra e Alberto Seassaro, schizzi di progetto (assonometria strutturale) per Casa unifamiliare in Silicalcite.

[Documento →](#)



13. Ugo La Pietra e Alberto Seassaro, schizzi di progetto per Casa unifamiliare in Silicalcite.

[Documento →](#)



15. Produzioni del Gruppo Montecatini Edison per l'Edilizia.

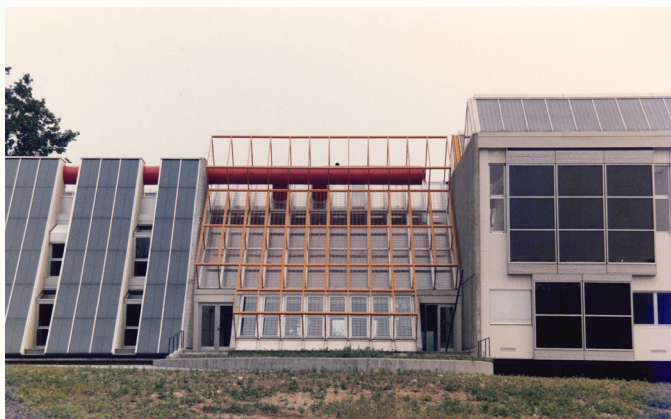
[Documento →](#)



16. Gianni Scudo e Alberto Seassaro, Fotografia dell'Edificio per uffici e laboratori di tecnologie energetiche appropriate, a Ispra. Dettaglio finestre.
[Documento →](#)



17. Gianni Scudo e Alberto Seassaro, Fotografia dell'Edificio per uffici e laboratori di tecnologie energetiche appropriate, a Ispra. Policromie strutturali.
[Documento →](#)



18. Gianni Scudo e Alberto Seassaro, Fotografia dell'Edificio per uffici e laboratori di tecnologie energetiche appropriate, a Ispra. Facciata esterna.
[Documento →](#)

4.4 Morfemi

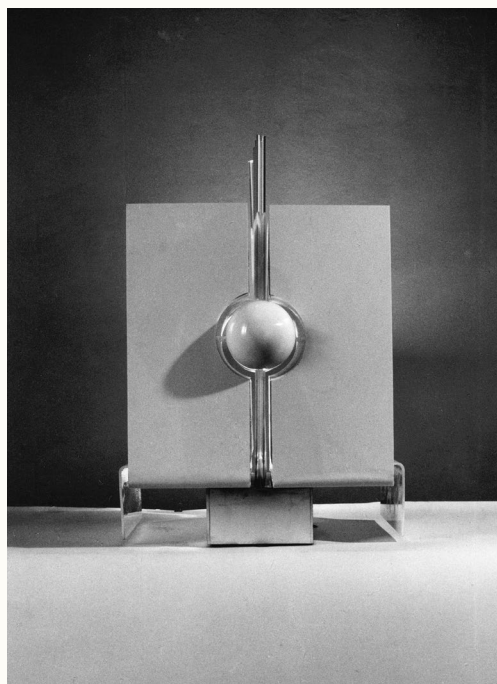
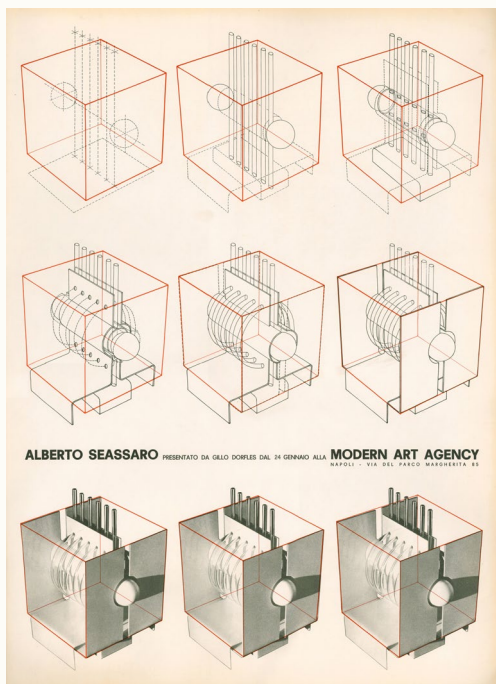
Parallelamente agli studi e alle attività professionali e universitarie, conduce, a partire dai primi anni '60, attività di ricerca e di sperimentazione artistico-estetologica sul *rapporto Arti e Scienze* che si muovono nel contesto culturale della FAST *Federazione delle Associazioni Scientifiche e Tecniche* di Milano, con Silvio Ceccato, e dei *Colloqui di Verucchio* sulla *Estetica Sperimentale* di Giulio Carlo Argan.

Le esperienze di Alberto Seassaro architetto, progettista di interni, designer non sono scindibili dalle sue esperienze artistiche. E, le stesse pratiche artistiche non sono facilmente classificabili nel mondo della sperimentazione artistica se le si disgiunge dai suoi studi e dai suoi interessi per l'architettura. Del resto, è proprio nel percorso di studi alla Facoltà di Architettura che la ricerca lo conduce a elaborazioni metodologico-progettuali sui processi di costituzione della forma che trapassano gli steccati disciplinari di singoli domini progettuali per approdare, con la tesi di laurea condotta con Ugo La Pietra, al concetto di *sinestesia tra le arti*. La modalità dell'operare progettualmente, conducendo al contempo ricerche teoriche e di sperimentazione sulla forma nell'ambito unificato delle arti visive, ha il suo momento più autentico nei *Morfemi*, nelle *Progressioni morfologiche* e nei *Morfo-ambienti luminosi*, manufatti e installazioni di estetica sperimentale che Alberto Seassaro realizza ed espone in mostre collettive e personali, con presentazioni e scritti critici di Gillo Dorfles, Lucio Amelio, Ettore Sottsass jr, Tommaso Trini, Germano Celant, Francesco Vincitorio, Emilio Garroni, Silvio Ceccato, Umbro Apollonio, Enzo Frateili.

Fra queste: Vincitore del 1° premio Piero Manzoni (Soncino, 1962); personale Galleria Blu (Milano, 1963); personale Galleria Flaviana (Lorcarno, 1966); personale Studio 2B (Bergamo, 1965); personale Galleria Modern Art Agency (Napoli, 1966); personale Galleria Arte Oggi (Pescara, 1967); personale Galleria Visualità (Milano, 1968) [19](#) a rassegne artistiche nazionali ed internazionali, fra cui: *Nuove tecniche d'immagine* (S. Martino, 1967); *Al di là della pittura* (S. Benedetto del Tronto, 1968); *Nuove tendenze* (Ferrara, 1969); *Biennale di Venezia* del 1969 curata da Giacomo Manzù (Venezia, 1969); *Documenta – A Quinquennial Contemporary Art Exhibition* (Kassel, 1970) [20](#) [21](#) [22](#). Cosa sono i morfemi? Oggetti? Sculture? Piccole architetture? Modelli



19. Cartolina della mostra *Micro 33*, Galleria Visualità.
[Documento →](#)



20. Manifesto della mostra *Alberto Seassaro*.
Presentato da Gillo Dorfles alla Modern Art
Agency.
[Documento →](#)



21. Alberto Seassaro, *Morfema*.
[Documento →](#)



22. Alberto Seassaro, *Ritratto con Morfemi*.
[Documento →](#)

sperimentali? Modelli di studio percettologico? Prototipi di processo? «Momenti di passaggio o sosta di un processo di ricerca» come ebbe modo di definirli Ettore Sottsass? Mi viene spontaneo dire che i morfemi possono essere proprio considerati esercizi di ricerca su elementi modulari di base che si trasformano nel progetto attraverso somme, sottrazioni, traslazioni, permutazioni, slittamenti di superfici. Una sorta di *basic design* della ricerca morfologica.

[...] mi pare che queste 'cose' bianche e rosse di Seassaro siano i risultati o magari anche solo i visibili e tangibili momenti di passaggio e sosta di un lavoro di 'ricerca' (come si dice oggi), e quindi – queste cose – si possano sistemare soltanto nella categoria della 'ricerca' e in nessuna delle categorie tradizionali con le quali sistmano le cose per liberarsene.

Non va bene dire che sono sculture e non va bene dire che sono architetture, neanche happenings e neanche oggetti regalo, neanche oggetti ricordo: sono quello che resta attaccato lungo le sponde della ricerca [23](#). (Ettore Sottsass, 1968, *Made In. Bollettino della Modern Art Agency*, gennaio-febbraio 1969a)

[...] I morfemi sono modelli spaziali che 'fissano', concretizzandoli in forme tangibili, gli esiti di una attività di ricerca di base sulla teoria e la metodologia del progetto di architettura, impiegabili nei processi di comprensione delle logiche di costituzione formale e nelle attività di sperimentazione trasformativa [24](#). (Alberto Seassaro, 1968, *Made In. Bollettino della Modern Art Agency*, gennaio-febbraio 1969a)

Nei morfemi è già rinvenibile l'interesse di Alberto Seassaro per la luce, per la sua natura e per le trasformazioni che è in grado di apportare alla percezione della forma.

Nei morfemi la luce diviene *completamento* dell'oggetto, elemento di trasformazione morfologica che avviene attraverso le infinite proiezioni dell'oggetto nello spazio nel loro continuo variare al variare dell'incidenza della fonte luminosa. Non è un caso che, ogni *Morfema* sia stato fotografato dall'autore in più sequenze proprio per restituire, oltre alla sua concretezza materica, l'apertura ad



23. Seassaro. I morfemi.
Presentati da Ettore
Sottsass Jr.
[Documento →](#)



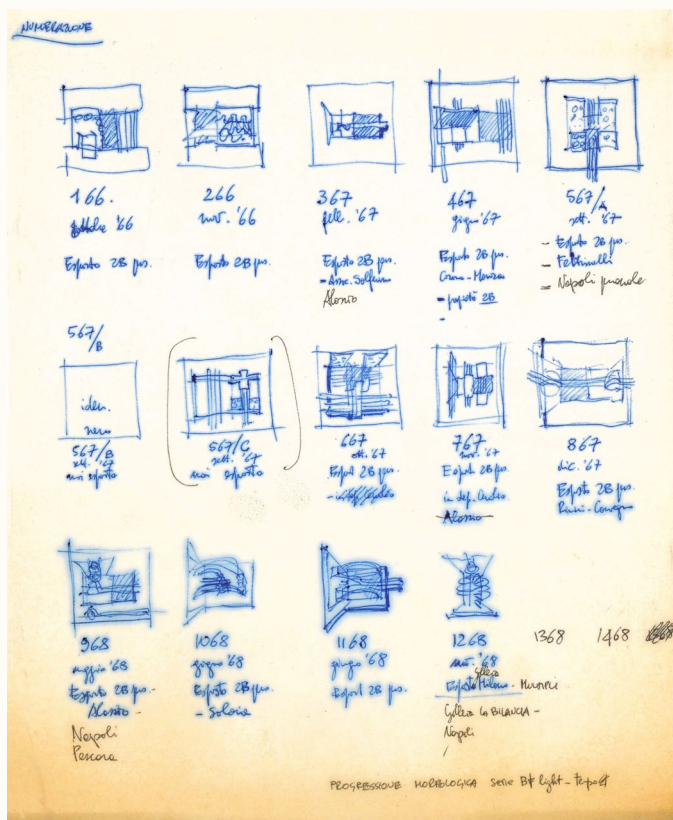
24. Made In. Bollettino
della Modern Art Agency,
gennaio-febbraio 1969.
[Documento →](#)

25. Alberto Seassaro,
schema di numerazione
dei Morfemi.
[Documento →](#)

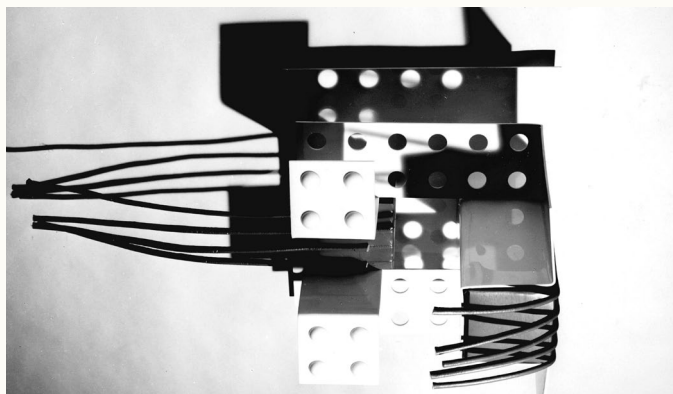


una tridimensionalità virtuale transeunte. Nel *Morfema*, la luce, lavorando per sottrazioni e addizioni aritmetiche, per composizioni e scomposizioni, per pieni e vuoti, per positivi e negativi,

per profondità ed emersioni, sa generare variazioni algebriche complesse. I morfemi si pongono come momento di inizio di un percorso di approfondimento sulle culture della luce che si compie poi con la realizzazione di artefatti artistici e ambientali. Costituiscono al contempo un banco di prova di teorie il cui sviluppo ritroviamo in diverse pubblicazioni di quegli anni (Seassaro, 1966; Seassaro, 1968; Seassaro, 1969b; Seassaro, 1969c) [25 ▽ 26 ▽](#).



26. Alberto Seassaro,
Morfema n. 567.
[Documento →](#)



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5. Sulle carte notazionali di Alberto Seassaro. La grana di una scrittura verbo-visiva

Giovanni Baule

Già docente al Politecnico di Milano

5.1 La perseveranza dell'appuntare

C'è un *filo* ^{1x} sottile e tenace che lega tra loro le *carte di notazione* di Alberto Seassaro. Diversi tra loro per origine e sostanza, questi fogli di appunti, di ricerca, di sistematizzazione sono accomunati innanzitutto

da un tratto identificativo che li connota in modo eloquente: si presentano come segni propri della cultura del progetto, sintomo di un pensiero progettante, di una puntigliosa perseveranza nell'appuntare, nel fissare tramite segni grafici riconducibili allo stile espressivo del disegno di progetto oltre che alla nota scritta di tipo stenografico e mentale: una forma propria dell'autocomunicazione, mediante accostamenti e mescolanze di codici scrittori, figurali, schematici e verbali.

È da considerare, in parallelo, la consistente mole documentaria di cui sono parte, che corrisponde a un'enorme produzione di materiale scritto, all'incessante accumulo di artefatti cartacei che ha caratterizzato un metodo di lavoro quotidiano: un accumulo orientato, contingente, ma finalizza-

Nota 1.

Sul tema del filo e la corrispondente archeologia di una metafora, cfr. Catucci, 2024, p. 41: «Il filo conduttore permette di legare insieme avvenimenti che a prima vista non hanno relazioni dirette, tanto possono essere distanti non solo rispetto al cuore di un'argomentazione, anche nel tempo e nello spazio. [...] Avere a che fare con l'eterogeneo può infatti suscitare l'esigenza di operare una selezione, di scartare qualcosa per valorizzarne un'altra, di estrarre dall'insieme solo alcuni aspetti scegliendoli in base a una strategia compositiva».

to: da distinguere radicalmente dalla raccolta intenzionale di chi riserva tracce a futura memoria 25; al contrario, si tratta in questo caso di un archivio del presente per una destinazione ravvicinata, talvolta immediata: strumenti per comunicare in tempi brevi, per chiarirsi e per chiarire, una strategia contingente per fissare e, semmai, trasmettere successivamente in una configurazione transitiva.

Non si ravvisa infatti, in queste carte, un destinatario diretto che le debba fruire come tali, ma si suppone costituiscano un'elaborazione preliminare, la fase iniziale di un'ulteriore mediazione, una *prima nota* 35 alla quale dare voce, all'occorrenza, in un secondo tempo, per una successiva esposizione.

Appaiono, in questo senso, come artefatti provvisori, non destinati alla pubblicazione, ma dispositivi per un atto riflessivo, anticipazione preziosa, sul piano delle intenzioni discorsive, di un percorso di studio o di un possibile progetto comunicativo; una scrittura di intenti, di previsione, molto raramente di scarti o *marginalia*.

Dove la frammentarietà è indice di un'incessante esplorazione di connessioni 45 e non contraddice la tensione alla sistematizzazione.

Nota 2.

A differenza della natura propria della traccia archiviante: di contro, sul senso dell'intento archivistico e sulle sue conseguenti implicazioni, cfr. Derrida, 2005.

Nota 3.

Sulla prima nota come scrittura di anticipazione, scrittura ausiliaria, di preparazione, di analisi istruttoria per altre forme comunicative e priva di forma obbligata ma di stesura libera come tutte le annotazioni provvisorie, vedi Baule, 2020.

Nota 4.

Sulla figura dell'esploratore di connessioni e il principio di incompletezza, cfr. Veca, 2011, p. 85 e seg.

5.2 Una geniale retorica verbo-visiva


A conferma dell'unitaria natura artefattuale di questi documenti e dell'idea di movimento scrittorio che ne sta alla base, li possiamo collocare in buona parte nell'ambito di quei sistemi grafico-espressivi che in origine precedono la scrittura alfabetica (Cardona, 2009): una grafia come frammistione di codici scrittori e visivi, una scrittura che si posiziona pienamente nel campo dell'espressione verbo-visiva; e anche in quei casi dove il segno sembra scorrere sul piano apparentemente prescrittivo, simile al disegno tecnico-costruttivo, ne supera la rigidità mantenendone il potenziale performativo.

Come afferma Giovanni Anceschi, che fa del tema uno dei suoi principali oggetti di studio:

[...] Quella notazionale è vista abitualmente come una modalità restitutiva di tipo rigido, mentre la *riproduzione tecnica* è vista

come continua, analogica, [...]. Niente di più apparente: la schematicità propria dell'annotazione finisce per essere ciò che consente all'esecutore, anzi ciò che in lui *genera* l'interpretazione. [...] La notazione è elastica, perché per principio è discontinua, e comunque imprecisa. La notazione funziona da produttore di varietà interpretativa [...] Mentre in ambito scientifico non contiene aspetti prescrittivi, [...] la notazione nelle attività tecniche e creative sembra avere entrambe le funzioni. (Anceschi, 1992, p. 132)

Vanno in questa direzione le tavole di esercitazione didattica che, per le indicazioni costruttive, più si avvicinano in apparenza al prescrittivo; in apparenza rivolte a un destinatario diretto (chi deve eseguire l'esercizio), probabilmente rappresentano un'elaborazione preliminare. Esercitazioni come *Accendi una luce* (fig. 1) rimandano a una suggestione discorsivo-narrativa e si propongono come partiture per una serie di possibili esecuzioni.

Ma è nel suo insieme che l'articolazione degli appunti per il *Corso sulla luce* rappresenta uno sviluppo dell'intera gamma del ventaglio notazionale: dai fogli sulla rappresentazione storica della luce (fig. 2) a quelli sull'etimologia e sulla metafora della luce (fig. 3) c'è una progressione che procede dal verbale puro alla schematizzazione verbale fino all'introduzione del visivo; dal simbolico-verbale con le rappresentazioni del *vedere* (fig. 4) fino agli studi sulla concavità (fig. 5), dove le forme tridimensionali evolvono in un gioco generativo. In questo caso agisce chiaramente l'imperativo progettuale, e la messa in figura mostra tutto il suo valore euristico: qui «la rappresentazione è sussidio per l'invenzione, per la *trovata*. In questo ambito, insomma, le immagini servono infatti a scoprire e a inventare» (Anceschi, 1992, p. 11). Sul medesimo tema, la tavola di sintesi *Trigonon light – le parole della luce e la genesi della metafora*  riporta la scrittura di un *testo figurale complesso* (Anceschi, 1992, p. 41) all'interno di una messa in scena che si ricollega all'iconografia triadica.

Anche il foglio di appunti relativi al corso di Tecnologia dell'architettura (fig. 6) include, sotto forma di schematizzazioni miste, figure e tracce caricaturali che convergono in una *manipolazione proiettiva* (Anceschi, 1992, p. 41), una vista sintetica che comprende la rappresentazione prospettica dell'edificio con effetto di trasparenza e visione

endoscopica, l'annotazione schematico-verbale degli elementi strutturali e, non ultima, la figura simbolica del *risparmiatore*.

Il codice illustrativo-caricaturale adottato in quest'ultimo caso ricorre in gran parte degli inserti illustrativi presenti nelle annotazioni e attraversa tematiche diverse: lo stile abbozzato in chiave fumettistica di questi pittogrammi sottolinea un punto di vista personale, confidenziale. Fino alla ricercata trasgressione dei bozzetti indicati come *Supplemento al Supplemento al dizionario italiano* di Munari 5 (fig. 7), provocatorio superamento dei limiti di un compito, seppur dichiarato, perbenismo della collezione munariana.

5.3 Il filtro dell'ironia

L'idea che per salvaguardare un'incontestabile saldezza di principi, oltre che una convinta dedizione disciplinare, sia necessario mettere in campo anche il gioco, l'ironia, la lezione della relatività e del pensiero aperto, lo confermano, ad esempio, le copertine delle dispense che coprono gli anni accademici corrispondenti al decennio '70 2 3 4.

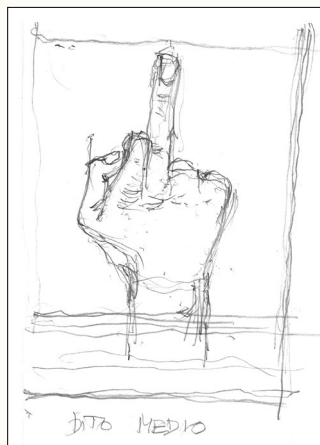
Il montaggio grafico delle illustrazioni di propria mano o riprese da altre fonti e inserite nel contesto della ricerca universitaria sono testimonianza di un approccio demistificante, intessuto di rovesciamenti ironici (Jankélévitch, 1997, p. 61 e segg.). Nel caso delle dispense per gruppi di studio (figg. 8, 9), dove i confini disciplinari sono travolti da libere connessioni, si accentua il portato visivo, felicemente irriverente e trasgressivo, assimilato da quei linguaggi della controcultura che contemplano montaggi da fotocopie sgranate, provvisorietà delle grafie, informalità dattiloscritte della *forma ciclostilata* 6. Lo sguardo sornione che inquadra la spigolosità delle cose, la meccanica del sistema dei poteri affrontata con la tattica del gioco, il continuo slittamento del punto di vista: un gradino sopra il principio di alterità, c'è l'esercizio di una costante, radicale relazione critica con il sapere istituzionalizzato; si tratta di stare al gioco, un gioco riconosciuto come tale, senza concedere tregua a chi fa di esso, per i propri fini, uno strumento di dominio.

Nota 5.

«In questo libro l'autore esamina i vari modi di esprimersi senza parlare, non solo con le mani. [...] Abbiamo creduto opportuno raccogliere il maggior numero, tralasciando i gesti osceni e volgari, per avere una documentazione il più possibile esatta, ad uso degli stranieri. [...] o come supplemento al dizionario italiano» (Munari, 1999).

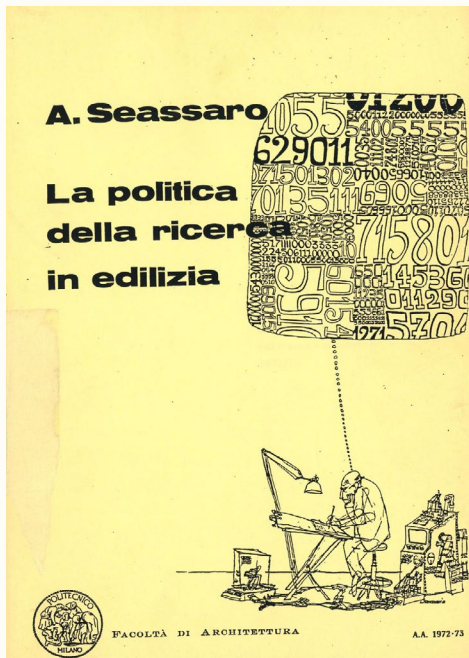
Figura 7.

Supplemento al Supplemento al dizionario italiano di Munari.



Nota 6.

Sulla forma ciclostilata e l'epopea del ciclostile, vedi Baule, 2008, p. 15.



2. Alberto Seassaro, *La politica della ricerca in edilizia*, Facoltà di Architettura, A.A. 1972-73.

[Documento →](#)



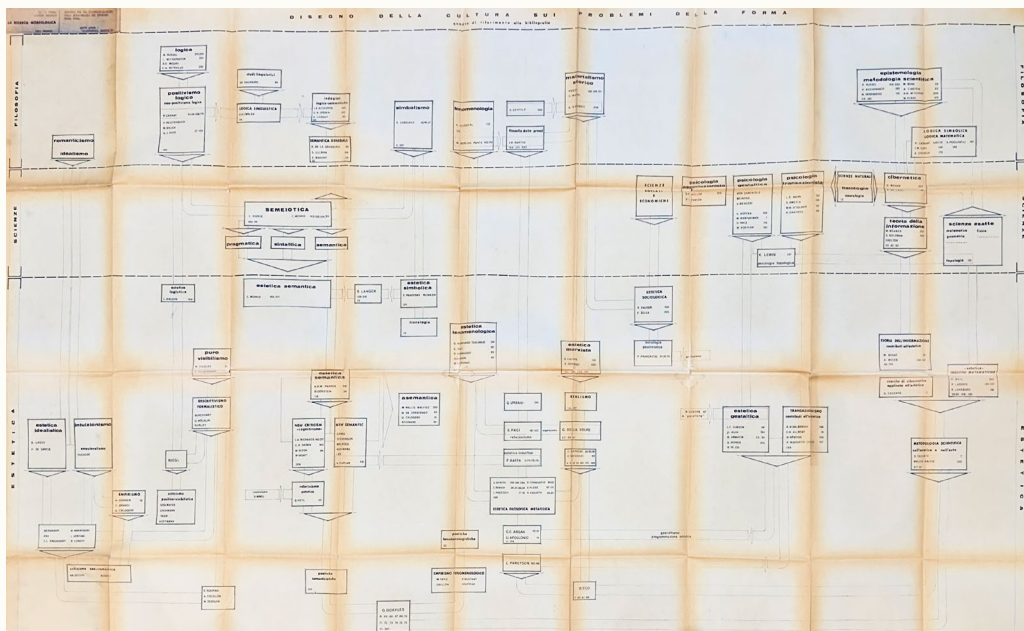
3. *Bollettino del Laboratorio di Produzione del Territorio*, giugno 1975, n. 3, Facoltà di Architettura, Politecnico di Milano.

[Documento →](#)



4. *Bollettino del Laboratorio di Produzione del Territorio*, settembre 1975, n. 4, Facoltà di Architettura, Politecnico di Milano.

[Documento →](#)



Al filtro dell'ironia che nasce dal respiro libertario, fa da contrappunto la meticolosità della grafia con la quale sono trascritte le note analitico-descrittive o prescrittive. La grande tavola *La ricerca morfologica – parte prima. L'approccio deduttivo* (Seassaro, La Pietra, 1965) (fig. 10) è un'ardita mappa testuale per la sistematizzazione dei saperi del campo di riferimento. Siamo nell'ambito di un progetto enciclopedico, dove il sistema dei contenuti si dispone nello spazio ordinatore di una configurazione tabellare, un dispositivo «rivolto in prima istanza verso colui che più che uno spettatore è un utilizzatore» (Anceschi, 1992, p. 101).



5. Ugo La Pietra e Alberto Seassaro, *La Ricerca Morfologica. Quadro della bibliografia di riferimento sulle culture della forma.*
[Documento→](#)

Di tipo tabellare diagrammatico sono, a loro volta, gli schemi ordinatori del *Progetto di iter didattico per l'Indirizzo tecnologico ad Architettura* 5A, un modello organizzativo per una destinazione istituzionale; con una peculiarità: il diagramma di flusso (Bertin, 1967) identifica, con abilità schematica, la pianificazione dei percorsi dell'iter formativo spiegandoli sul reticolo della struttura della didattica e della partitura temporale.

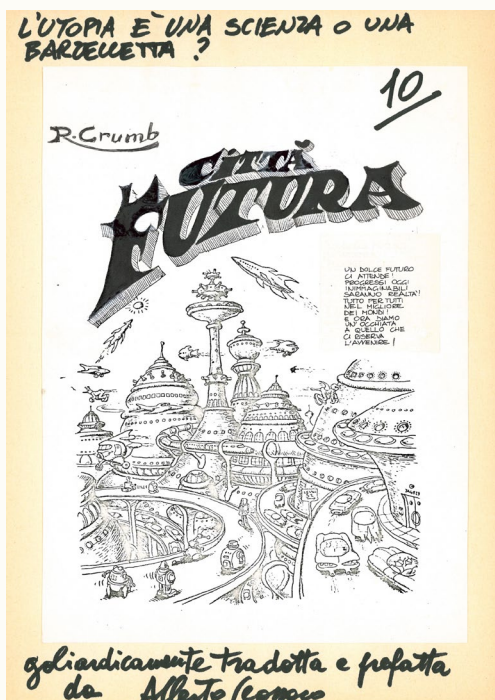


Figura 8.
L'utopia è una scienza o una barzelletta? Città futura,
dispensa per gruppi di studio, copertina.



Figura 9.
Densità e affollamento, dispensa per gruppi di studio,
copertina.

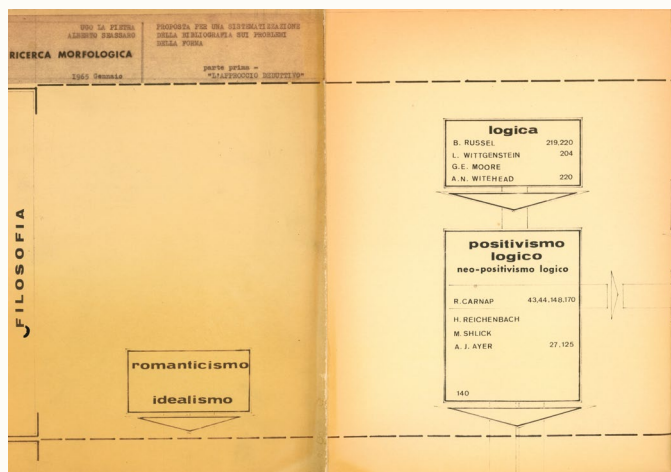


Figura 10.
La ricerca morfologica, tavola, gennaio 1965.



Documento →



5.4 Non lasciar nulla al caso

Di altro tenore, sia grafico che tematico, ma frutto della medesima meticolosità, sono invece le annotazioni manuali di carattere prescrittivo, evidentemente a destinazione privata, che rientrano nell'ambito delle istruzioni per l'uso, come nel caso dei *Preliminari all'uso della caldaia* (fig. 11); qui il dettaglio della sequenza operativa descrive un processo e illustra l'apparato tecnico corrispondente, accompagnando l'espletamento delle funzioni necessarie.

In questo stesso ambito si può annoverare la raccolta di schede-ap-punti, oltre un centinaio, che vengono raccolte sotto il titolo *Tradurre*

Nota 7.
Redatte su fogli di diverso formato
e colore, databili 2011-2012.

digitale/analogico. Decriptare il linguaggio tecnico 74. Si tratta di annotazioni derivate da lezioni di base sull'uso del computer e di esercizi-prove di autoapprendimento. Anche in questo caso si alternano note testuali e visive, registrate passo dopo passo, in tutto simili a una manualistica d'uso redatta in proprio, talvolta con indicazione d'argomento: *Non riesco a spegnere, Pagina della posta in arrivo, Scanner, [...]* (figg. 12, 13).

Infine, una sequenza a *storyboard*, bozza destinata a un uso in sede giudiziaria, ricostruisce le fasi di un incidente stradale (fig. 14) con una accentuata componente figurale e un montaggio narrativo dove, nuovamente, l'accento fumettistico non toglie credibilità all'oggetto della rappresentazione, ma schematizza in forma dimostrativa le fasi che costituiscono l'evento.

Registri differenti e differenti centri di riflessione, un vasto arsenale di riferimenti attraverso distinte tecniche di rappresentazione e forme

Nota 8.
E, come chiarisce Edgar
Morin: «L'anarchia non è
la non organizzazione, ma
l'organizzazione che si effettua
a partire dalle associazioni/
interazioni tra esseri che operano
senza che ci sia bisogno di un
comando o di un controllo che
emani da un livello superiore»
(Morin, 2015, p. 26).

di sistematizzazione conducono, nel loro insieme, a una forma grafica che sottintende una reiterata traduzione visiva (Baule, Caratti, 2016). È l'intento di fissare in forme ibride annotazioni che non possono essere ridotte al verbale. Sono dispositivi strategici, il cui valore performativo risponde a uno spirito visionario, progettualmente orientato, a un'utopistica determinazione retta da una sottile caparbia e indirizzato all'indisciplina creativa 84.

SCHEDA "NON RIESCO A SPEGNERE"

è capitato che

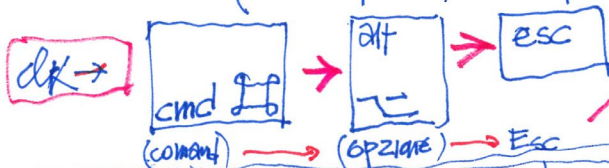
andando a spegnere --> c. **OK** --> "spegni"
 si accende:

il programma **TEXT EDIT** ha cancellato
 la **SPEGNIMENTO**..
 esito di **TEXT EDIT** e poi **OK**

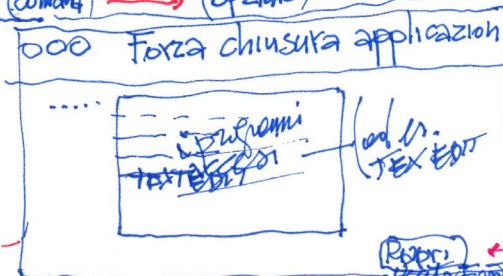
• facendo quello scritto, non riuscito e uscire da **TEXT EDIT**

QUINDI:

1) sulle **TASTIERA** a quel punto: --> **USCITA FORZATA**
 schiacciare (tenendo premuto), in sequenza i tasti:



2



evidenzi (click)
 i programmi
 non forzatamente
 chiudere

click su --> **Forza uscita forzata**

3



Figura 12.

Non riesco a spegnere, scheda per l'apprendimento dell'uso del computer.

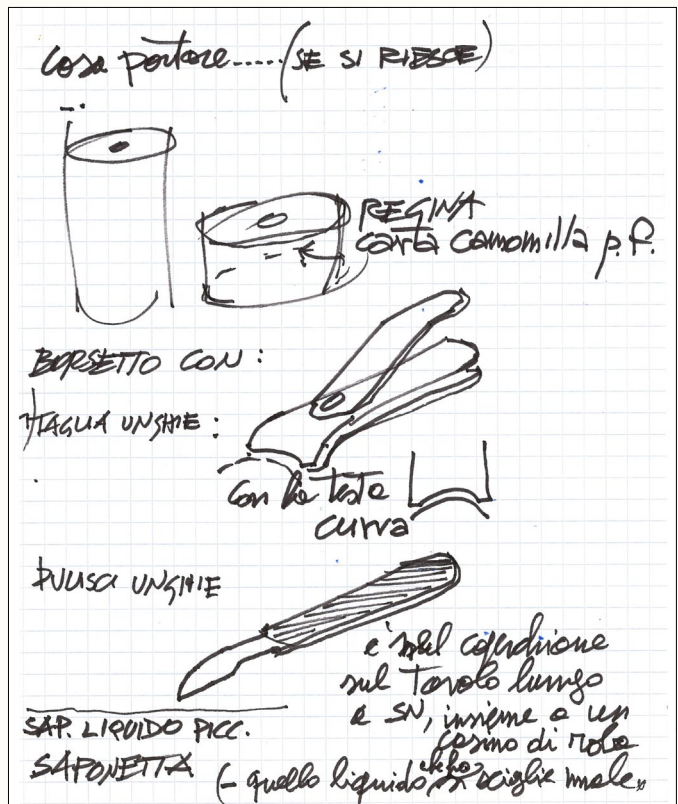
5.5 La voce visibile della scrittura

La scrittura-disegno di Seassaro è, certamente, un *ragionare sulla carta*, una forma di lucida e costante riflessività alla ricerca di schemi mnemonici. Ma, complice l'andamento calligrafico, è anche espressione di un'intrinseca valenza sinestetica. Questa scrittura visuale, infatti, suggerisce tracce sonore, che talvolta sono frecce: dal profondo della grana delle scritture (Barthes, 1986, p. 6) verbo-visive emerge in superficie la *grana della voce*. A dimostrazione che, ancor più di una scrittura semplice, che talvolta rasenta il 'grado zero' (Barthes, 1982), la scrittura autografa verbo-visiva può restituire al meglio una dimensione materiale e corporea. Questi segni di parole-figure sono gesti vocali, peraltro incancellabili dagli spazi politecnici.

Se Saul Steimberg – tra i primissimi studenti di Architettura al Politecnico di Milano – a sua volta illustratore di voci (Barthes, 1998) – avesse per avventura incontrato Alberto Seassaro, ne avrebbe certo saputo disegnare, con le nuvole parlanti dei suoi personaggi, l'andamento della voce: la dialettica sferzante, l'ininterrotta trama discorsiva, il procedere labirintico, il monologare dialogante e suadente, la sintesi geroglifica, la timbrica basso-vibrata.

Ci sono, tra queste carte, figure scritte (fig. 15) che, anche quando la voce si è fatta forzatamente silenziata, hanno saputo parlare da sole; e, come tutte le altre annotazioni, continuano a parlare. È questa la chiave che spiega la voce dei segni nella scrittura verbo-visiva di Seassaro.

Figura 15.
Cosa portare... (se si riesce).



Parlano, ci parlano, queste carte, e chiedono ascolto; restituiscono, indissolubilmente connesse tra loro, la traccia di una scrittura e la grana di una voce.

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6. Fare tutto, fare ad arte

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Dipartimento di Design, Politecnico di Milano

6.1 Progettare opere, scolpire spazi, suggerire traiettorie

Se c'è una caratteristica evidentemente eccezionale che unisce i più significativi creativi della scena italiana degli ultimi cento anni è quella di essere stati autori spesso transdisciplinari, attivi lungo traiettorie difficilmente tracciabili, attraverso linee di azione sempre spiazzanti e sorprendenti. Fuoriclasse in grado di muoversi tra vari ambiti professionali, passando con scioltezza dall'architettura al design, dall'allestimento alla scenografia, dalla grafica alla moda, dalla pittura alla scultura alla fotografia, spingendosi all'attività editoriale e divulgativa, a quella curatoriale, critica e didattica.

Personaggi proprio per questo difficilmente classificabili, orgogliosamente eccentrici e sempre fuori dal coro: come Giacomo Balla e Fortunato Depero, Gio Ponti e Marcello Nizzoli, Carlo Mollino e Bruno Munari, Ettore Sottsass e Angelo Mangiarotti, A G Fronzoni e Giancarlo Illiprandi, Leonardo Mosso e Roberto Sambonet, Enzo Mari e Alessan-

dro Mendini, Nanda Vigo e Getulio Alviani e molti altri ancora. E come Alberto Seassaro, architetto e artista che qui, alle nostre latitudini e tra le pagine di questo libro, ricordiamo soprattutto per il seminale, fondativo e immenso lavoro fatto per costituire la Scuola del Design all'interno del Politecnico di Milano.

Perché Alberto Seassaro, dopo una partenza effervescente tra le arti visive e l'architettura, sostenuto da un'energia esplosiva che alimentava un'azione indomabile, avrebbe sempre di più portato il suo sguardo (scientificamente aperto, sensibilmente curioso) verso il mondo della formazione universitaria, per arrivare (anche dopo aver vissuto con totalizzante coinvolgimento la stagione delle contestazioni del 1968, e aver forse compreso che l'*impegno* respirato nelle assemblee e nelle aule occupate non poteva più andare sottobraccio con il mondo delle gallerie, né con progetti di case per una committenza borghese) ad abbandonare dapprima il mondo dell'arte, e nel corso del tempo, anche quello dell'architettura e dell'architettura degli interni (ambiti che l'avevano visto realizzare alcuni originalissimi primati, sempre coerenti tra loro pur nelle diverse specificità disciplinari delle arti visive e dell'arredamento), per concentrarsi esclusivamente sull'attività didattica, e trovarvisi totalmente immerso in quel mondo, fino al punto di arrivare a sognare, progettare e poi realizzare una nuova Facoltà, quella del Design appunto, che da venticinque anni ormai rappresenta una pietra angolare a livello internazionale della formazione universitaria: progetto assoluto, mai riuscito prima di lui a nessuno dei grandi protagonisti che gravitavano tra la docenza universitaria e il mondo del design italiano (dai Zanuso ai Castiglioni, tanto per ricordare alcuni dei giganti che hanno portato il loro indiscutibile carisma e talento nelle aule del Politecnico di Milano), ma che Seassaro è riuscito a concretizzare attraverso una vera e propria *missione* che ha trovato, giorno dopo giorno, spazio e ascolto, sostegno e collaborazione.

Probabilmente perché Alberto Seassaro ha vissuto la fondazione della Scuola del Design come *il* progetto per antonomasia a cui dedicarsi, evidentemente per lui un *progetto di vita*, e facendo quello che avevano fatto (prima di lui) altri autori trasversali, professionisti della creatività che a un certo punto della loro carriera, e della loro storia personale, avevano sentito la necessità di impegnarsi soprattutto nell'attività didattica, nell'educazione e nella formazione: come A.G. Fronzoni,

maestro della comunicazione che mentre stabiliva primati nella grafica non ha mai smesso di insegnare anche attraverso la sua originale formula di una *scuola-bottega*, dove ha cresciuto più di una generazione di *progettatori*; o ancor prima come Bruno Munari, che a un certo punto del suo percorso (di artista, grafico, illustratore e designer) si è allontanato dal progetto delle *cose* per arrivare al progetto delle *persone*; o come lo stesso Tomás Maldonado, già artista e progettista, ma soprattutto protagonista della cultura del design attraverso la teorizzazione di quella «speranza progettuale» (Maldonado, 1970) che proponeva nel suo magistero alla Facoltà di Architettura di Milano, nella sua Cattedra di *Progettazione Ambientale*, dove aveva filtrato l'eredità dei suoi anni di docente e poi rettore alla *Hochschule für Gestaltung* di Ulm.

Un'evoluzione che ha permesso a Seassaro di arrivare a immaginare, tracciare e promuovere un percorso formativo capace di evitare «i modelli rigidi e favorendo invece la crescita di progettisti in grado di adeguarsi alle grandi diversità del mondo contemporaneo» (Branzi, 2020). E lo ha fatto mescolando le discipline, come aveva già fatto negli anni della sua formazione e all'inizio della sua attività professionale, e poi nel corso di tutta la sua vita, unendo architettura e scienza con le arti visive, e intrecciando e alimentando il tutto con un consolidato sapere umanistico: perché

ci sono alcuni architetti che fanno i costruttori, altri gli urbanisti, altri i tecnologi, i compositivi, i teorici (pochi), gli storici, quelli che fanno tutto e il contrario di tutto o, come diceva Malaparte, sono dei buoni a nulla capaci di tutto. Ci sono designer, arredatori, espositori, vetrinisti e poi coloro che si dedicano all'insegnamento. (Branzi, 2020)

Ed evidentemente fondare una *scuola* per Seassaro è stata l'avventura professionale più importante, quella a cui ha dedicato la stagione della sua maturità.

E tra le cose fondamentali da ricordare, ulteriormente e in questa prospettiva, c'è anche la fondazione di IN.DA.CO., un nome (bellissimo! quello di un colore, tra il blu e il viola) in forma di acronimo per un nuovo istituto, il *Dipartimento di Industrial Design, Arti e Comunicazione*, per sottolineare, ancora una volta e attraverso una precisa titolazione,

un'apertura a mondi diversi ma complementari, perché necessari gli uni agli altri: sì, proprio un dipartimento transdisciplinare per titolazione!

Ma oltre al progetto della Facoltà del Design, si vuole qui ricordare che Alberto Seassaro, da architetto di formazione, aveva inizialmente intrapreso – da giovanissimo – un percorso che lo avrebbe portato a svolgere un'attività da vero e proprio artista (una sua biografia del 1968 recitava: «Dal 1963 ricerca ed opera congiuntamente nei campi delle Arti Visive e dell'Architettura»).

E che oggi, nell'occasione di questa importante pubblicazione, riemergono dai forzieri della storia delle arti le ricerche che aveva iniziato a presentare a poco più di vent'anni, nei primi '60, e poi distillato ed elaborato con scientifica immaginazione per poco più di un lustro, fino ad arrivare al 1968-1969, momento epocale in cui ogni cosa veniva rimessa in discussione (con i giovani di tutto il mondo che scendevano in piazza per dire *no*), e biennio durante il quale la sua attività di artista *puro* arriva a risultati evidentemente originali, ottenendo riconoscimenti significativi: un diploma d'onore alla *Prima Rassegna Internazionale d'Arte Contemporanea d'Avanguardia – Premio Piero Manzoni*, la partecipazione a uno dei mitici incontri del Centro Pio Manzù (il 17° Convegno Internazionale Artisti Critici Studiosi d'Arte, dove è a fianco, tra gli altri, di Enrico Castellani e Gianni Colombo), un'opera donata al *Comitato per la promozione dell'attività antimilitarista e per l'obiezione di coscienza* e acquistata dal conte Alberico Barbiano di Belgiojoso ¹⁵, fino a una presentazione critica di Gillo Dorfles su *Made In*, bollettino della Modern Art Agency nell'orbita del grande gallerista Lucio Amelio.

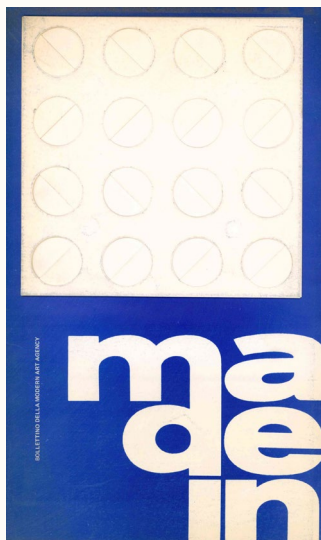
E che arriva soprattutto ad elaborare e proporre i suoi lavori più colti e per alcuni versi enigmatici: i *Morfemi*, opere che nel *sistema delle arti* occupano una posizione eccentrica e che dimostrano l'estrema originalità del suo pensiero poli-tecnico, proponendosi tra oggetti d'arte e meta-progetti, *modelli spaziali morfologici*, *nati da una ricerca urbanistica*, iniziata nel 1966, moduli ed elementi di costruzioni ideali che sembrano trovare linfa in alcuni pensieri architettonici di Enrico Prampolini e in alcuni disegni astratti di Bruno Munari della metà degli anni '30 (come i quadri della serie *Anche la cornice*), e che trattengono in filigrana alcuni segni di un suo importante mentore, Ettore Sottsass (quelli schizzati per alcuni tappeti per Redan nei primi anni '50, poi esplosi tridimensionalmente dieci anni dopo per il mobile a torre



1. Invito alla mostra
del Comitato per la
promozione dell'attività
antimilitarista e
l'obiezione di coscienza,
Libreria Feltrinelli Milano.
[Documento →](#)

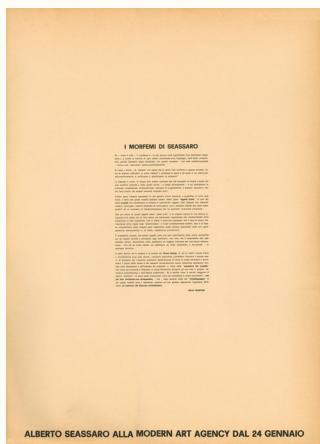
2. *Made In*. Bollettino
della Modern Art Agency,
gennaio-febbraio 1969.

[Documento →](#)



3. Manifesto della mostra
Alberto Seassaro.
Presentato da Gillo
Dorfles alla Modern Art
Agency.

[Documento →](#)



di *Casa Tchou*, gemelli di quelli che avevano invaso lo spazio dell'atrio della XII Triennale di Milano del 1960) [2](#) [3](#).

Morfemi come opere in forma di sculture, che sembrano però modelli di architetture. È lo stesso Seassaro che scrivendo una coltissima presentazione con un tono scientifico parla «del rapporto tra modello strutturale e modello oggetto, l'uno come strumento di conoscenza della struttura dei fenomeni reali, l'altro esprimente se stesso e il suo rapporto con la realtà» (Seassaro, 1968), sottolineando e chiarendo di voler

consentire al fruitore di operare il maggior numero di *letture* possibili e lasciando libero di percepire l'area semantica del *modello in quanto oggetto* e di subirne gli effetti pragmatici, consentendo una costruzione originale, conscia o inconscia, del codice di decodificazione. È come assegnare al modello un codice semantico in cui tutte le valenze sono libere e saturabili con qualsiasi valore: cioè codice *aperto* a tutti i significati. (Seassaro, 1968)

E qui, con la scelta del termine *aperto* (evidenziato dalle virgolette), è inevitabile e forse doveroso collegare questi *Morfemi* al clima (e forse anche ai concetti) di *Opera Aperta* (Eco, 1962), che pochi anni prima Umberto Eco aveva teorizzato con il suo celebre saggio, testo che avrebbe accompagnato (e legittimato) molte delle ricerche artistiche di quegli anni. [4](#)

Il grande Gillo Dorfles, sempre attento alle nuove sperimentazioni, e sempre generoso nel sostenere l'opera dei giovani artisti, presentava quelle ricerche di Seassaro partendo proprio dalla titolazione scelta:

Se – come è noto – il *Morfema* è la più piccola unità significativa d'un complesso linguistico, e quindi la matrice di ogni valore concettuale d'un linguaggio, sarà facile comprendere perché Seassaro abbia battezzato con questo vocabolo – non solo metaforicamente – alcune sue costruzioni plastico-architettoniche. (Dorfles, 1969)

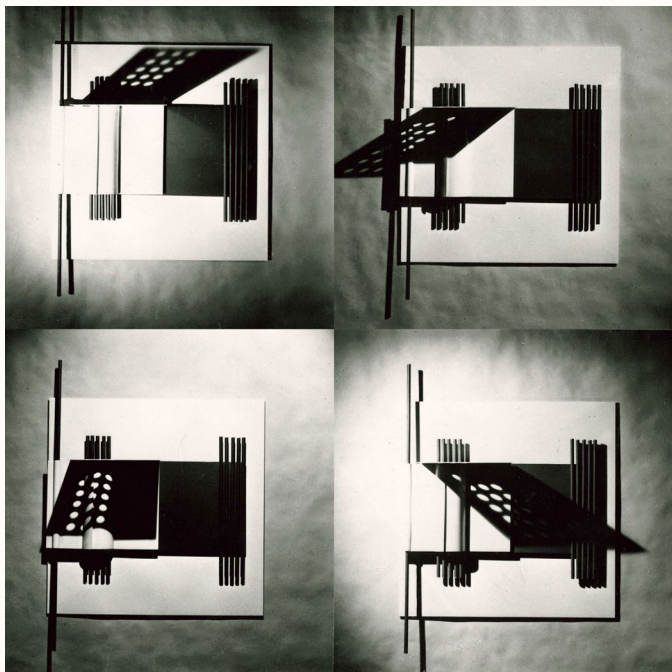
Dichiarando così, sin dalle prime parole, come questi modelli fossero contemporaneamente scultorei e architettonici. Ma non evitando di interrogarsi sull'essenza di quegli stessi oggetti, presentati come «*modelli*», nel senso che di solito viene conferito a questo termine: ossia di schemi costruttivi in scala ridotta? O piuttosto di opere a sé stanti il cui valore plastico-architettonico è sufficiente a giustificarne la presenza?» (Dorfles, 1969). Per rispondere, comprendere e per proporre la lettura più logica ed onesta di queste opere, Dorfles non divaga, non sorvola, anzi entra in profondità analizzando e sviscerando ancora le dichiarazioni dell'autore, che «confessa che (ad esempio) la messa a punto dei suoi *Morfemi* sottostà a tutte quelle norme – a quegli accorgimenti – a cui sottostanno le consuete progettazioni architettoniche (disegno di progettazione e disegno esecutivo, studio della pianta, dei singoli elementi modulari ecc.)» (Dorfles, 1969).

E sottolineando così come dal punto di vista progettuale e realizzativo queste opere siano ascrivibili al mondo dell'architettura. Certo, aggiunge Dorfles,

l'essere presentati in una galleria d'arte sancisce, e giustifica, in certo qual modo, il fatto che questi modelli possano essere intesi come *oggetti d'arte*, al pari dei molti multipli che attualmente si trovano in commercio: oggetti, cioè, eseguiti con materiali moderni (plexiglas, materie plastiche di varia specie, ecc.) secondo metodi che sono sottoponibili a un processo di industrializzazione. (Dorfles, 1969)



4. Alberto Seassaro,
Morfema n. 467.
[Documento→](#)



perché nonostante

alcuni di questi oggetti siano *pezzi unici* che si valgono ancora di una manifattura artigianale, ciò non toglie che la loro natura sia totalmente rispondente alle caratteristiche della produzione di tipo industriale. Tale è infatti il materiale impiegato, tale il tipo di colore (decisamente privo d'ogni nota *pittoristica* e d'ogni compiacimento tonale), tale è la stessa composizione delle singole parti costitutive, quasi sempre elementari nella loro configurazione stereometrica, e di solito, rigidamente simmetriche. (Dorfles, 1969)

Così, pur leggendo queste opere come modelli plastici, come possibili riflessioni scultoree, Dorfles sottolinea in più passaggi che l'universo di riferimento debba soprattutto essere cercato nell'architettura e nella progettazione (anche industriale). E addirittura arriva a prospettare, e auspicare, che queste opere di Seassaro possano diventare nelle scuole d'arte e di architettura (*così carenti!*) delle

utilissime testimonianze di come si possa stimolare e accrescere il senso della forma e del rapporto forma-struttura anche attraverso operazioni limitate nelle dimensioni e nell'impiego dei materiali; e come dalla *semantica del modello* che viene qui proposta e utilizzata, si possa facilmente giungere ad una vera e propria *semantica architettonica o dell'intorno ambientale*. (Dorfles, 1969)

Perché secondo Dorfles

è questo forse il merito maggiore di questi *Morfemi*: di porsi quali precettori d'una complessa e ampia operazione – non più solo morfemica ma sintagmatica – che dopo essersi valsa del *meta-linguaggio* di cui questi modelli sono depositari conduca ad una globale operazione linguistica all'interno dell'universo del discorso architettonico. (Dorfles, 1969)

Sì, emoziona pensare che il preveggenete Dorfles avesse colto in quelle opere anche un potenziale *didattico*, sapendo noi, oggi, del percorso

che avrebbe portato, 30 anni dopo, Alberto Seassaro a fondare una scuola di design (e dove, secondo Dorfles, questi *Morfemi* avrebbero potuto diventare *utilissime testimonianze!*).

Opere oggettivamente intriganti, mai banali, che avevano spinto a interrogarsi anche uno sperimentatore libero come Ettore Sottsass, che nel presentare la mostra allo Studio 2B ne aveva colto il valore della ricerca (anche scientifica):

Mi pare che queste cose bianche e rosse di Seassaro siano i risultati o magari anche soltanto i visibili e tangibili momenti di passaggio e sosta di un lavoro di ricerca (come si dice oggi), e quindi – queste cose – si possono sistemare soltanto nella categoria della ricerca e in nessuna delle categorie tradizionali con le quali si sistemano le cose per liberarsene. Non va bene dire che sono sculture e non va bene dire che sono architetture [...]: sono quello che resta attaccato lungo le sponde della ricerca. La quale poi è un modo speciale di mettersi di fronte all'arte o all'architettura o queste storie, come dire che all'arte ci si arriva attraverso processi e metodi che dovrebbero assomigliare o essere quelli della scienza... (Sottsass, 1968)

E ne aveva sottolineato il valore formale:

Nel mio studio appoggiate contro ad un muro ci sono queste cose di plastica bianca e rossa fatte da Seassaro che si è messo alla ricerca, per se stesso, ma anche per gli altri, di modelli elementari, di elementari raggruppamenti di forme semplici, di prove di incontri e incastri di elementi rugosi con elementi lisci, di tubi con superfici, di figure con manufatti, di canali di luce con riflessi eccetera, eccetera, tutte queste cose che si fanno per capire meglio che cos'è la natura del mondo delle forme... 52 (Sottsass, 1968)

Morfemi quindi come modelli di possibili (elegantissime) architetture, e suggestioni plastiche che indagano il primato della geometria, accelerandolo con giochi di pieni e vuoti, di negativi e positivi, di affioramenti e slittamenti, in un continuo rimbalzo di chiaroscuri. Opere che rilette oggi offrono ulteriori spunti di riflessione. Le fotografie zenitali,



con ombre nette che aggiungono segni grafici agli elementi del modello, sembrano rimandare ai quadri astratti di Bice Lazzari, luminosa autrice pienamente riscoperta solo in questi ultimi

anni. Opere che riguardano nella loro ritmata composizione sembrano dialogare con alcuni progetti di tappeti della leggendaria Eileen Gray, dove i segni grafici e l'uso del colore diventano i fondamenti di un momento davvero originale nella storia delle arti applicate del Novecento.

Opere che evidentemente indagano il significato delle forme, e che rimandano a una stagione in cui la grande scultura ricercava libera, senza avere ambizioni da piedistalli nei musei, come dimostrano alcune opere dif-

ficilmente catalogabili di artisti unici come Katarzyna Kobro, Georges Vantongerloo a Naum Gabo.

Qualcosa che l'autore aveva e avrebbe mostrato (e fatto emergere) anche in alcuni progetti degli stessi anni, tra architettura, architettura degli interni e design, raggiungendo altri significativi traguardi, spesso in coppia con un altro progettista difficilmente inquadrabile come Ugo La Pietra. Come nel progetto *MIA 2*, elaborato con Benedetto Resio e Ugo La Pietra per il *Concorso I.S.E.S.* (Istituto per lo Sviluppo dell'Edilizia Sociale) nel 1965, una ricerca urbanistica e morfologica, una proposta di edifici a gradoni dove modularità rima con economicità, per una soluzione di edilizia residenziale che sembra poter dialogare con il progetto *Libertà nell'ordine* elaborato come *una ricerca su prefabbricazione e arte programmata* da Bruno Morassutti ed Enzo Mari per il *Primo Concorso In/Arch Domosic* (1965).

Come in un piccolo intervento urbano, la *Fontana* a Caiazzo (Caserta, 1966-1969, con Ugo La Pietra), austera costruzione realizzata



attraverso la moltiplicazione di un solo tipo di elemento modulare prefabbricato (coppelle per il rivestimento di pilastri in silicalcite) sovrapposto a scalare, in un profilo complessivo che sembra un omaggio alla *Cromostruttura speculare a elementi quadri* (1964) di Getulio Alviani, configurata però dai due progettisti non come un gelido Donald Judd, ma piuttosto come un brutalista Vittoriano Viganò!

Come in due gallerie d'arte, sempre progettate con il socio La Pietra: la galleria *Il Cenobio* (Milano, 1966), «un grande oggetto unitario» con pareti, pavimento e soffitto rivestiti di lamiera di alluminio, uno spazio con un sapore industriale, quasi high tech, dove «la grecatura della lamiera, che approfondisce prospetticamente le distanze e moltiplica e diffonde i riflessi, fa della parete una sorta di continua superficie luminosa, che investe omogeneamente di luce tutto lo spazio» (Domus, 1967) [6](#), e la galleria privata *Walter Spaggiari* (Milano, 1965-1966) [7](#), ancora una volta un progetto di evidente carattere, con un programma ben definito – «galleria per guardare opere d'arte, grande *gabbia* per contenere un magazzino di opere, uno spazio per stare» (La Pietra, 2000) – e articolato in due distinte zone: una superiore per la raccolta delle opere d'arte (realizzata con pannelli verticali scorrevoli e roteanti in lamiera forata), l'altra sottostante dove alcune opere selezionate erano esposte per essere ammirate in un ambiente ideale alla conversazione, con sedili, piani di appoggio e contenitori disegnati attraverso «lo stesso elemento unificato di base» (Domus, 1968) [8](#), cubico, elemento che contraddistinguerà anche alcune abitazioni private.

Come *Casa Rizzi* (Camogli, 1967, con La Pietra) [9](#), caratterizzata da elementi d'arredo integrati a strutture orizzontali e verticali che sembravano voler cercare un dialogo ideale con le opere di Julio Le Parc, quelle che Nanda Vigo avrebbe integrato negli stessi anni nella celebre *Casa Meneguzzo* (Malo, 1966-1969); e dettaglio identitario che si ritrova, con un'ulteriore ed eccezionale elaborazione, nella *Casa Paola Seassaro* (Milano, 1968) [10](#) dove definisce una proposta «fra le più nuove e promettenti dei giovani architetti di oggi» (Abitare, 1968) [11](#), mentre ancora una volta l'insieme dialoga idealmente con l'arte coeva, in quel caso le *Sotomagie* di Jesús Rafael Soto,



6. Ugo La Pietra, Alberto Seassaro, *Il Cenobio*, in *Domus*, n. 451.
[Documento →](#)



7. Ugo La Pietra, Alberto Seassaro, Galleria d'arte privata Walter Spaggiari, Milano
[Documento →](#)



8. Ugo La Pietra e Alberto Seassaro, Galleria privata Walter Spaggiari, in *Domus*, n. 465.
[Documento →](#)



9. Alberto Seassaro, *Casa Rizzi* a Camogli, in *Interiors '70*.
[Documento →](#)



10. Alberto Seassaro, *Spazio abitativo a Milano*, in *Interiors '70*.
[Documento →](#)



11. Alberto Seassaro. Progetto di interno domestico. In *Abitare*, n. 71.
[Documento →](#)



che il maestro venezuelano avrebbe poi sviluppato in forma di ambienti *penetrabili*.

E come in alcuni sistemi di arredamento, come il tavolo *Addition* [12](#) e la scrivania *Leader* (Acerbis, 1969) dove le diverse possibili combinazioni degli elementi superiori, vassoi o coperchi, sembrano un ulteriore rimando e declinazione dei modelli presentati allo Studio 2B e qui lungamente ricordati.

Dopo quei record artistici, che seducono ancora oggi per eleganza ed enigmaticità, e quei progetti tra architettura di interni e design, originali come raramente accade, negli anni successivi l'impegno artistico e progettuale di Seassaro, come detto, inizia a diminuire e la sua visione e la sua energia si spostano e si posano completamente sull'impegno didattico, ma non solo nella totalizzante definizione di un intero corso di laurea in design, ma nei suoi stessi corsi, nei suoi stessi programmi, per i suoi stessi allievi, per i quali non dimentica le sue *scientifiche* riflessioni dei lustri precedenti, accelerandole però grazie agli occhi aperti che l'arte praticata di prima mano gli aveva lasciato.

Così, mentre un altro maestro transdisciplinare come Corrado Levi, suo amico e collega carissimo, faceva lavorare gli studenti sulla *compresenza di diverse logiche progettuali*, Alberto Seassaro aveva proposto ai suoi *discepoli* di progettare un *caleidoscopio*: sì, proprio «l'apparecchio fatto con due o più specchietti disposti ad angolo entro un tubo, dove si trovano alla rinfusa piccoli oggetti colorati: le riflessioni multiple formano immagini spesso simmetriche che mutano in modo imprevedibile e variabilissimo a ogni movimento» (Devoto, 1967-1968).

Una descrizione che sembra la didascalia di alcune opere d'arte degli anni di cui sopra, tra i '60 e i '70, nelle orbite dei vari Yaacov Agam, Carlos Cruz-Diez, Joël Stein, e dei nostri Giovanni Anceschi, Davide Boriani e Gabriele Devecchi. Un invito a progettare un oggetto così eccezionale, sorprendente e che chiede interazione, coinvolgeva gli entusiasti discenti, invitati finalmente a sognare, proponendo visioni. Come ricorda Paolo Tinelli, il caleidoscopio era per Seassaro una

macchina per manipolare la luce. Non una macchina per produrre luce ma per modellarla. Una cosa mai sentita prima... [...]. Un oggetto però straordinario per la didattica del design capace di spaziare tra molteplici argomenti e di dare, se ben compreso, notevoli aper-

ture mentali. Un *oggettino* tanto semplice quanto complesso che permetteva immediatamente di far emergere l'anima e la personalità di chi lo stava progettando. (Tinelli, 2024)

Un oggetto che produce immagini intriganti e stupefacenti che possono sembrare quelle dei quadri degli anni 2000 di Maldonado (nel periodo del suo ritorno alla pittura, come *Cenrifugo-centipeto*, 2008), e di alcune *rotazioni* degli anni '70 dell'inarrivabile Max Bill. Un oggetto che scomposto per parti sembra rimandare (per l'ennesimo gioco di affinità) alla *Lampada triangolare* a schermi colorati intercambiabili, che Poggi aveva prodotto nel 1966-1967 su disegno del solito La Pietra.

Un tema di progetto come stimolo per una ricerca sul colore, sulla forma e sulla luce, dopo i tanti cimenti già provati da Seassaro su questi argomenti ma in altri ambiti professionali, e perfettamente coerente con un'altra delle *aperture* importanti che Seassaro avrebbe poi portato in università: l'avvio del *Corso di perfezionamento in Progettazione illuminotecnica* (1985), che diventerà negli anni un *Master in Progettazione e Tecnologie della Luce* per continuare a riflettere e a ragionare su questo sempiterno argomento, e che determinerà anche il *Laboratorio Strumentale di Luce & Colore*.

Nomi di occasioni didattiche e accademiche che sembrano i contesti scientifici per definire l'orizzonte di riferimento di alcuni grandi artisti che hanno contribuito a rinnovare il linguaggio dell'arte contemporanea, come i tanti già citati e come Bruce Nauman e Olafur Eliasson, veri maestri che proprio con la luce hanno realizzato opere imprescindibili per la cultura delle arti visive.

Così, con una serie di continui rimbalzi, dall'arte praticata in prima persona arrivando all'architettura e al design, per poi stabilizzare il proprio impegno nell'attività didattica (dove non ha mai fatto mancare l'apertura del suo sguardo, formata e alimentata negli anni vissuti come artista), Seassaro non ha mai dimenticato i suoi primi cimenti, tra luce, forme e colore, elementi fondanti di ogni opera d'arte e che lui ha introdotto in modo programmatico nel mondo universitario del design, fino a trasformarli in ambiti di studio e di ricerca, ben consapevole (dall'alto della sua esperienza personale) che spesso è proprio l'arte la disciplina che indica in anticipo dove andare: «Non so bene come abbia fatto, ma è sempre stata l'arte, per prima, a modificare

il nostro modo di pensare, di vedere, di sentire, prima ancora, certe volte cento anni prima, che si riuscisse a capire che bisogno c'era» (Eco, 1962).

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7. Immaginare lo spazio dell'abitare tra sperimentazione e sistema

Giampiero Bosoni

Dipartimento Design, Politecnico di Milano

Si conoscono solo poche opere di Alberto Seassaro nel campo degli interni e del design del mobile. Tuttavia, la sua ricerca è stata molto ampia e articolata (purtroppo, com'era nel suo stile, da lui ben poco documentata e conservata), e siamo fiduciosi che altri progetti, realizzati o meno, possano ancora affiorare per permetterci di ricostruire un quadro più chiaro dell'interessante e meritevole lavoro di ricerca di Seassaro come architetto e designer a cavallo degli anni '60 e '70, in particolare come progettista d'interni e di elementi d'arredo.

Va subito ricordato che già nel periodo universitario al Politecnico

Nota 1.

All'epoca le tesi di laurea non avevano uno specifico relatore, ma il tema di tesi veniva scelto dagli stessi studenti tra i lavori di ricerca svolti durante il percorso di studi.

Seassaro e La Pietra scelgono un lavoro iniziato nell'Istituto di Architettura degli Interni, che vede fra gli altri come docenti Gio Ponti, con assistente Vittoriano Viganò, e Carlo de Carli, già assistente di

Gio Ponti.

di Milano, dove si iscrive nel 1959, nasce tra Alberto Seassaro e Ugo La Pietra, allora studenti, un intenso sodalizio – sempre abbastanza burrascoso, ma evidentemente stimolante. Questo rapporto si consolida e trova una significativa espressione nella loro tesi di laurea cofirmata del 1964, *La ricerca morfologica. Proposta di lavoro per gli Istituti della Facoltà d'architettura* ¹, un'impegnativa elaborazione teorica che rappresenta molto bene il clima di rinnovamento epocale che sta vivendo la Facoltà, nei confronti con le sempre più forti istanze sociali del

periodo. I contenuti della ricerca, ispirati al principio della *sintesi delle arti*, affrontano in maniera inedita l'intreccio tra le nuove culture artistiche, le arti visive e le teorie della forma con l'impegno politico-istituzionale volto a definire le finalità scientifiche dei rinnovati Istituti della Facoltà di Architettura, intesi come luoghi di esplorazione dei rapporti profondi tra ricerca e didattica. Questo lavoro di tesi riceve una valutazione, all'epoca rara, di Centodieci e lode con bacio accademico. Del periodo universitario sono arrivati a noi anche alcuni progetti *ex-tempore* di Alberto Seassaro studente al terzo e quarto anno. Fra questi, si apprezzano un sorprendente e affascinante progetto intitolato *La casa sopra il tetto* [1](#), tema che anticipa di molto l'idea di organismi parassiti sui tetti, chiaramente ispirato alla correalista suggestione della biomorfa *Endless House* (1959-1960) di Frederick Kiesler, che viene proposto al corso di Architettura degli Interni condotto dal prof. arch. Gio Ponti (con Vittoriano Viganò come assistente). È altrettanto apprezzabile il coraggioso progetto di *Museo Archeologico* a Milano in corso Magenta [2](#) realizzato, per la ricerca storica, nel corso di *Architettura degli Interni II* condotto da Carlo De Carli e, per la parte architettonica, nel corso di *Composizione II* tenuto dal prof. arch. Cassi Ramelli (1962-1963).



1. Alberto Seassaro, *La Casa sopra il tetto*.
[Documento →](#)



2. Alberto Seassaro, *Museo Archeologico in Corso Magenta*.
[Documento →](#)

Negli anni della laurea, Seassaro lavora come abile e riconosciuto prospettivista presso diversi studi milanesi. In particolare, collabora con Vittoriano Viganò, conosciuto proprio all'università come assistente di Gio Ponti nel corso di *Architettura degli interni*, a cui si legano sia *La Pietra* che Seassaro durante il corso di studi.

Appena laureato, inizia un'intensa attività di progetto con Ugo La Pietra. Mentre entrambi intraprendono un appassionato lavoro nell'ambito della ricerca artistica pura, correlata alle coeve esperienze dell'arte concreta, programmata e cinetica, la loro ricerca progettuale si manifesta negli interni con dei progetti provocatori e d'avanguardia. La prima realizzazione dal forte e per certi versi *aggressivo* carattere dato agli interni è la galleria d'arte privata Spaggiari (1965-1966) [3](#), realizzata per Walter Spaggiari, che pochi anni dopo affiderà a Nanda Vigo l'incarico di realizzargli la propria casa, la famosa Casa Blu (1969). In questi interni la composizione degli elementi è fortemente geometrico-astratta, con texture tridimensionali, lamiere forate, piattaforme con sedute imbottite, dal particolare motivo a greca, che *galleggiano* e si interseca-

3. Ugo La Pietra, Alberto Seassaro, *Galleria d'arte privata Walter Spaggiari*, Milano.

[Documento →](#)



no in ambienti neri dove risaltano le opere esposte, e con tutte le tubature e le canaline degli impianti tenuti a vista, scelta progettuale che era stata anticipata solo dalla famosa birreria

Splügen realizzata a Milano nel 1961 dai fratelli Castiglioni.

È evidente in questo progetto, come lo sarà negli interni di case progettate poco dopo dal solo Seassaro, una ricerca compositiva tridimensionale dei modelli formali espressi in quel periodo anche nella sua ricerca artistica pura e definiti *Morfemi*: microstrutture architettoniche composte di plastiche e lamiere tagliate, piegate e forate, nella più

classica tradizione dell'arte concreta, quasi una sorta di prototipi di nodi tecnologici. Una passione istintiva e concettuale – quella per le forme tecnologiche incrociate con la ricerca artistica – che ritornerà frequente nelle ricerche di Alberto Seassaro e che sicuramente lo accompagnerà anche nel percorso del disegno del prodotto industriale fino a condurre le origini e lo sviluppo della nostra Facoltà del Design (ora Scuola del Design). D'altra parte, ciò si intuisce molto bene nell'incipit delle *Note semiologiche* scritte dallo stesso Seassaro per la presentazione nel 1969 della sua ricerca artistica sul Bollettino della

4. *Made In. Bollettino della Modern Art Agency*, Gennaio-Febbraio 1969.

[Documento →](#)



Modern Art Agency *Made in* [4](#), diretta da Lucio Amelio: «La produzione dei *Morfemi* (modelli spaziali morfologici) – scrive Seassaro – accompagna dal '66 l'attività di ricerca architettonica di base (teorica, didattica, metodologica e di sperimentazione operativa) che svolgo in sede universitaria e professionale.» (Seassaro, op., cit, p. 10). Nella stessa pubblicazione interviene con un'interessante analisi critica anche Gillo Dorfles che commenta:

Questi oggetti sono una spia significativa della nuova sensibilità per gli aspetti formali e strutturali oggi dominanti; non solo, ma è

auspicabile che essi possano altresì determinare nello spettatore un maggiore interesse per una futura sistemazione – non più su scala ridotta, ma addirittura su scala ambientale e territoriale – di analoghe strutture. In altre parole: se la poetica e la pratica del 'Visual Design', di cui le nostre scuole d'arte e d'architettura sono così carenti, venissero potenziate, potrebbero ricorrere a quest'opera di Seassaro per ricavarne utilissime testimonianze di come si possa stimolare e accrescere il senso della forma e del rapporto forma-struttura anche attraverso operazioni limitate nelle dimensioni e nell'impiego dei materiali. [...] (Dorfles, op. cit., p. 4)

In questo contesto è anche molto interessante leggere alcuni passaggi di un lungo commento critico di Ettore Sottsass Jr. sui *Morfemi* di Seassaro, scritto in occasione della mostra *Seassaro, i Morfemi* allo Studio 2B di Bergamo, nel maggio 1968 [53](#):



5. *Seassaro. I Morfemi.*
Presentati da Ettore
Sottsass Jr.
[Documento →](#)

[...] ci sono un sacco di ragazzi giovani che fanno una cosa qualunque e poi la mettono lì come se fosse il Partenone, come dire che il mondo comincia lì e finisce lì e se ti va così – bene – se no sei un cretino, non capisci niente e buona sera; voglio dire che ci sono ragazzi e non ragazzi che hanno dell'opera d'arte un'idea monumentale, un'idea mitica, cose del genere – credono che l'arte sia un tutto definitivo e assoluto che ci si arriva o no, e poi una volta arrivati nessuno smuove più niente, e invece l'idea di Seassaro e degli altri su questa linea è che l'arte è un continuo atto di avvicinamento a qualche cosa cui in realtà non si arriva mai, perché il qualche cosa stesso è in continuo movimento – mi pare – e allora l'arte è come un momento di passaggio, come un'istantanea che è venuta più o meno mossa a seconda dei tempi di posa: l'arte in sostanza è un contributo a un processo più generale, piuttosto che una affermazione definitiva, totale e assoluta. Mi pare che la faccenda sia un po' così e poi Seassaro ha dalla sua la gioventù, la forza e la felicità di tutte le cellule del corpo che funzionano bene: ha dalla sua la speranza e così tutte queste cose fanno parte del gioco al quale assistiamo, sono trasferite in queste 'cose' bianche e rosse che sono appoggiate qui al muro del mio studio e mi pare veramente che tutto questo valga la pena di provarlo e di continuarlo. (Sottsass, in Seassaro. *I morfermi*, 1968, p. 3)

6. Ugo La Pietra, Alberto Seassaro, *Il Cenobio*, in *Domus*, n. 451. [Documento →](#)



Differente è il progetto, sviluppato sempre insieme a La Pietra, dell'allestimento secco e incisivo dell'interno della galleria d'arte *Il Cenobio* (1966). Dalla presentazione redazionale sulla rivista *Domus* n. 451 del giugno 1967 [65](#), si comprende il carattere più assoluto e omogeneo di questo progetto:

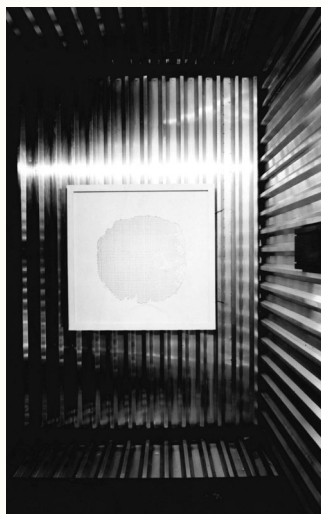
[...] L'ambiente stesso è un intero grande 'oggetto' unitario, in cui si penetra, e in cui l'uso continuo e totale di un solo elemento per l'allestimento, la lamiera grecata di alluminio applicata su piani verticali e orizzontali, fa sì che i riferimenti abituali (parete, soffitto, pavimento), scompaiono, nella impressione di un luminoso spazio unico, spazio omogeneo. La grecatura della lamiera, che approfondisce prospetticamente le distanze e moltiplica e diffonde i riflessi, fa della parete una sorta di continua superficie luminosa, che investe omogeneamente di luce tutto lo spazio. [...] (Per una galleria d'arte a Milano, 1967, p. 47)

7. Ugo La Pietra, Alberto Seassaro, Galleria d'arte *Il Cenobio*, Milano. [Documento →](#)



Questo progetto in particolare richiama il lavoro di Nanda Vigo, in quegli anni dedicato alla ricerca di quelli che lei chiama oggetti o spazi cronotopici – pensiamo alla casa *bianca*, denominata anche significativamente *casa Zero*, 1959-63, alla già citata *casa Blu*, 1967-1971, alla *casa Gialla*, 1970-1971, e alla *casa Nera*, 1970-1972 – (Bosoni, 2025; Cattiodoro, 2022-2023 e 2025; Pastor, 2006), dove lo spazio e il tempo interagiscono dilatando la dimensione percettiva, generalmente monocromatici e tendenzialmente mirati a creare percezioni inattese e incerte, e dove il coinvolgimento dinamico dell'intero corpo nell'ambiente provoca un ricercato fenomeno esperienziale [75](#).

A questi due progetti d'interni per spazi espositivi seguono, come abbiamo già accennato, due interni d'abitazione, molto particolari per la complessa trama di telai plurifunzionali che si incrociano nello spazio, entrambi progettati dal solo Seassaro: l'appartamento a Milano per la sorella Paola Seassaro nel 1968 [85](#), e una casa di vacanza a Camogli del 1969 [95](#). Per quanto in due contesti molto diversi, questi interventi su edifici preesistenti mirano a costruire uno spazio diagrammatico assolutamente autonomo dove una griglia modulare determina un



8. Alberto Seassaro, *Spazio abitativo a Milano*, in *Interiors '70*. [Documento →](#)



elaborato sistema di elementi di servizio che permea tutta la casa. Pubblicata su *Abitare* nel dicembre 1968, accompagnata da un'interessante assonometria alla cavaliere dove si spiegano tutti gli aspetti dinamico-funzionali, viene così puntualmente descritta:

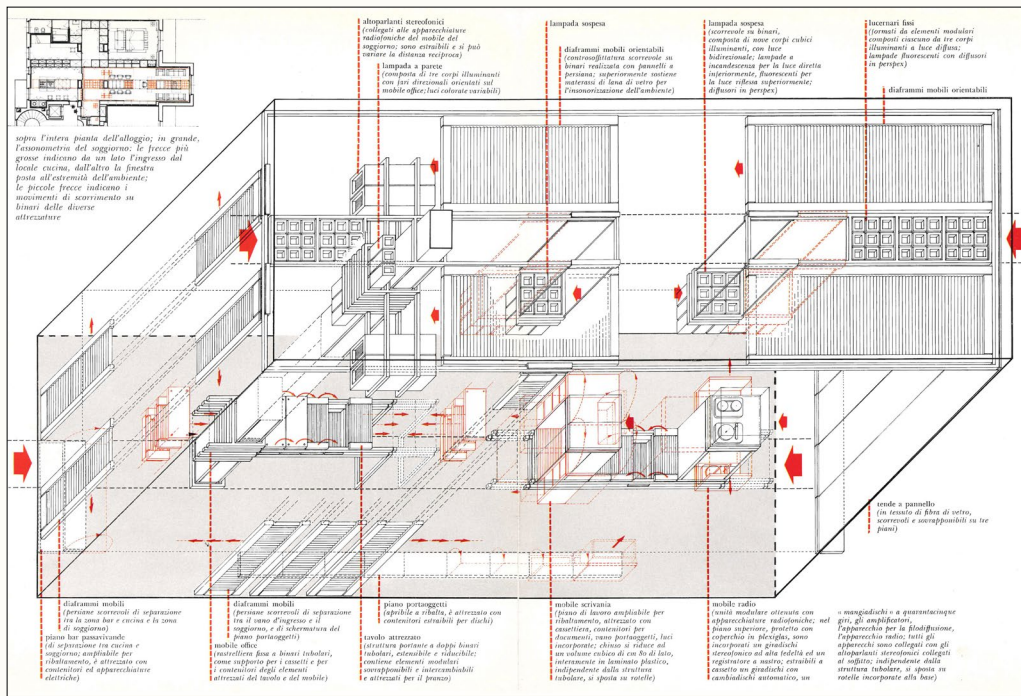


9. Alberto Seassaro,
Casa Rizzi a Camogli, in
Interiors '70.
[Documento →](#)

Lo spunto che da questa proposta si può trarre consiste appunto nel fatto che non si è 'ammobiliata' una casa, introducendo semplicemente dei pezzi, ma si è compiuta l'operazione esattamente inversa: vale a dire si è preliminarmente studiato e integralmente costruito l'intero volume abitato, intervenendo su tutte le superfici, soffitti compresi, attrezzandole con elementi fissi o mobili, progettati in base alla massima flessibilità delle funzioni e quindi del loro uso. Solo due elementi di serie sono stati introdotti ad integrare l'impianto già completo della casa: sedia e poltrona. Nella concezione utopistica del progettista questo esempio potrebbe configurarsi, nella sua globalità e negli elementi che lo costituiscono, come un prototipo artigianale di una possibile industrializzazione degli elementi stessi, che dovrebbe essere estesa a coprire con una modularità costante tutte le possibili esigenze per la formazione di attrezzature, mobili e in genere 'strumenti per abitare', fino a coordinarsi con una parallela modularità dell'industria edilizia [10 ▸](#). (Geppetto '70 sul sentiero dell'industrializzazione, pp. 8-11)

Analogo il progetto per la casa di vacanze a Camogli, dove si distinguono il colore blu del soffitto, l'ampia finestra aperta sulla terrazza che guarda il mare e anche le sedute e la chaise longue, disegnate dallo stesso Seassaro, composte da strutture portanti in telai ortogonali di tubi quadri a cui si appendono elementi cilindrici imbottiti di colore arancione. Anche qui il tema dei suoi Morfemi appare ricorrente, e in tal senso si riconoscono delle strutture luminose a muro molto simili a uno dei suoi *Morfemi* più conosciuti [11 ▸](#).

Per quanto appaiano molto evidenti dei rimandi o delle citazioni esemplari, soprattutto sull'idea dello spazio aperto neoplastico cartesiano, da Frank Lloyd Wright a Theo Van Doesburg e Gerrit Rietveld, passando anche da Joseph Hoffmann e Charles Rennie Mackintosh, senza dimenticare il suo maestro in università, Vittoriano Vigano, con



10. Progetto di interno domestico. In *Abitare*, n. 7. [Documento →](#)



11. Alberto Seassaro, Casa Rizzi, Camogli. [Documento →](#)

il suo approccio brutalista, come negli interni della galleria Apollinaire o della sua celebre casa in via Crivelli (1956) o ancora nel progetto quasi coevo del Mollificio Bresciano (1967-1982), bisogna riconoscere che il segno di Alberto Seassaro si ritaglia una sua specifica riconoscibilità e autonomia.

A questi progetti d'interni seguono alcune interessanti ricerche nel campo del design di sistemi per l'abitare, il programma di tavoli componibili *Addition* per Acerbis del 1969 e, nello stesso anno, un *elemento da centro componibile e trasformabile* in stratificato print ABET, firmato insieme a Casertelli e Valota, con il quale vincono il concorso MIA (Mobile Internazionale Arredamento Monza) [12](#) con in giuria fra gli altri Joe Colombo, Giotto Stoppino, Gianemilio Monti e Carlo Pagani. A seguire, nel 1970, viene pubblicato su *Domus* n. 489 il prototipo di un suo progetto (1968) di un monoblocco concentrato [13](#), plurifunzionale e articolabile, sempre realizzato con il sostegno dell'azienda Acerbis, chiaramente pensato per nuovi spazi abitativi a pianta totalmente libera, pubblicato poi in seguito nel 1972 anche sul catalogo della celebre mostra al MoMA di *New York Italy: the New Domestic Landscape* con il titolo *Central Block, containing bed, table, wardrobe, toilet, shelves* (Ambasz, 1972, p. 132) [14](#) [15](#) [16](#) [17](#).

In questo periodo (1966-1969) un'altra interessante esperienza progettuale, iniziata con Ugo La Pietra, è la consulenza per l'azienda di sistemi prefabbricati Silicalcite, per la quale progetta, anche in forma di concorsi, diversi studi: ricordiamo il progetto *Tuberie* cofirmato con La Pietra, nel quale viene coinvolta anche Nanda Vigo, e la realizzazione, sempre con La Pietra, di una fontana pubblica a Caiazzo, costruita con moduli prefabbricati di Silicalcite, e ancora delle tipologie di unità abitative sempre con lo stesso sistema costruttivo. Per altro nel 1965 progetta anche un coerente e ben controllato piccolo padiglione per la Silicalcite-Montedison alla Fiera di Milano [18](#).

Alberto Seassaro vede nel modulo prefabbricato la speranza di un'edilizia democratica e, in tal senso, la progettazione modulare e le tecnologie industriali di prefabbricazione del componente edilizio costituiscono una parte fondamentale della sua ricerca progettuale anche in ambito professionale. Già solo con queste poche ma significative tappe emerge un percorso di Seassaro designer decisamente



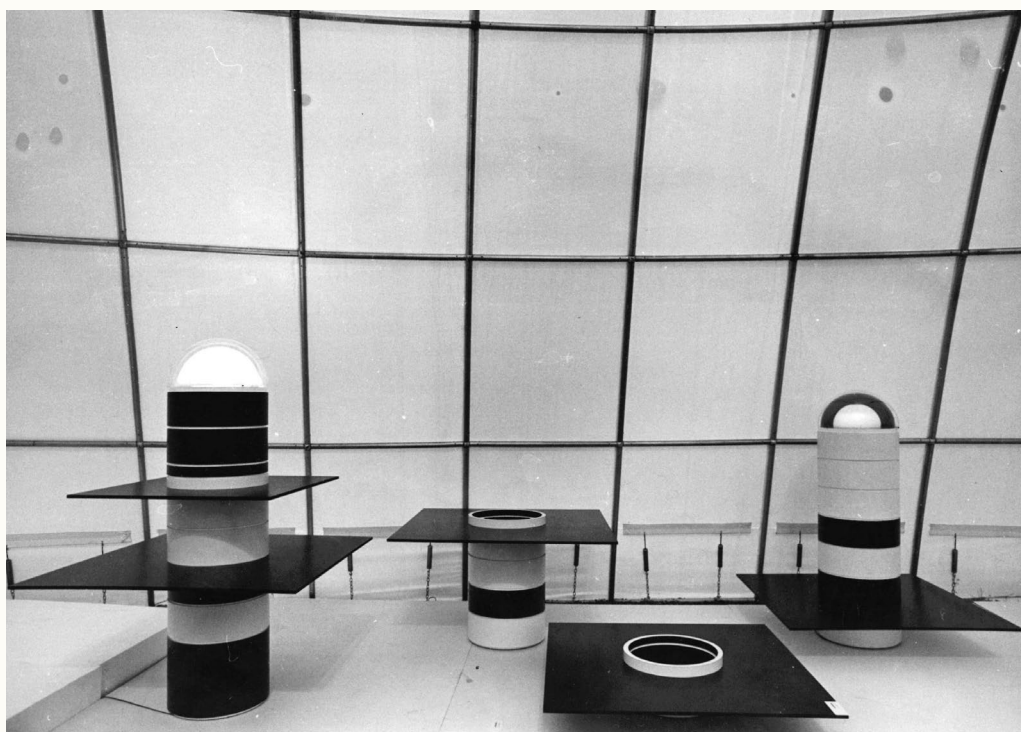
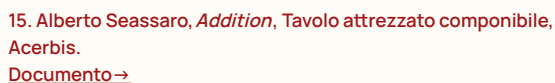
12. *Diploma 1° premio MIA-Abet Print, Monza 1969.*
[Documento→](#)



13. *L'intero mobile corre su rotaie, Alberto Seassaro, in Domus, n. 489.*
[Documento→](#)



14. Estratto del Catalogo della Mostra *Italy: The New Domestic Landscape*, MOMA.
[Documento→](#)





interessante per la forte vena sperimentale, portata a confrontarsi subito con il progetto reale, con lo stesso spirito manifestato con grande efficacia anche da alcuni suoi amici milanesi di quegli anni, quale il gruppo De Pas, D'Urbino e Lomazzi, con i quali incrocerà in quel periodo anche un'esperienza lavorativa presso l'azienda Acerbis.

La sua visione dello spazio abitato aperto, relazionale, interagenti, diagrammatico, flessibile e mobile interpreta con forte personalità i temi delle avanguardie storiche, soprattutto costruttiviste e neoplastiche, ma quasi sicuramente questo percorso prende spunto anche dalla ricerca sui temi della prefabbricazione edilizia di Alessandro Mangiarotti e Bruno Morassutti, spesso da loro incrociata con il design del mobile, la ricerca sui sistemi tecnologici di Marco Zanuso e gli studi teorico-disciplinari di Giuseppe Ciribini, dalle ricerche degli anni Sessanta sul rapporto colore/struttura di Ettore Sottsass, e pure dalle coeve esperienze di Joe Colombo a partire dal 1963, come pure delle prime manifestazioni del pensiero Radical in Italia e all'estero, ma anche per le evidenti assonanze s'incrocia con le sperimentazioni di Liisi Beckmann con la poltrona Karelia (1966) per Zanotta, e di Fabio Lenci per la Comfort Line nel 1967.

In questa complessa ricerca progettuale di Alberto Seassaro si riconoscono complessivamente alcuni tratti che rimarranno sempre al centro del suo pensiero metaprogettuale (poi riflesso anche nel suo importante lavoro di docente universitario e di progettista di strutture didattiche), ovvero la passione per un elaborato concetto di paradig-



17. Alberto Seassaro,
Monoblocco per arredo
integrale.

[Documento →](#)



18. Alberto Seassaro,
Stand Silicalcite,
Montecatini Edison, alla
Fiera campionaria di
Milano.

[Documento →](#)

ma/metafora della tecnologia da assumere anche come principio etico ed estetico, l'interesse per le diverse e più innovative forme della percezione ambientale (colore, luce, suono, nuovi materiali industriali) e un'idea di progetto tanto programmatico e sistemico, quanto aperto a una continua verifica, secondo una sua visione anarchica ed eterodossa dell'approccio metodologico razionalista.

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Nelle pieghe della cultura tecnologica: premesse alla nascita del Sistema Design

8. Il ruolo sociale della formazione e della ricerca

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8.1 I suoi maestri

Figlio delle manifestazioni studentesche del '63, portatrici di una rivendicazione identitaria sulla necessità di integrare la ricerca progettuale con la formazione dell'architetto, Alberto Seassaro, subito dopo la Laurea, costruisce immediatamente le occasioni per *metter radici* al Politecnico di Milano, avanzando proposte di ricerca finalizzate a rinnovare i contenuti della didattica progettuale ed iniziando, da subito, attività di assistenza alla didattica che lo vedono impegnato non solo a Milano ma anche al Politecnico di Torino e all'Università di Pescara.

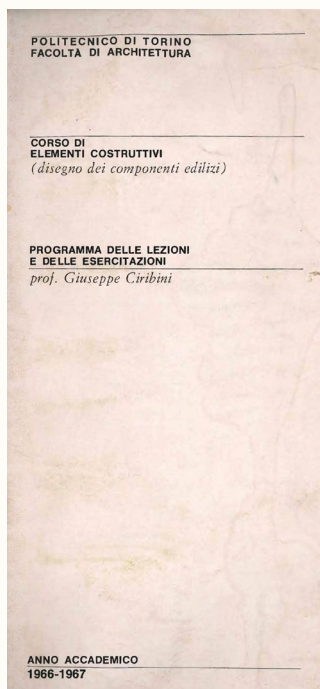
Infatti, l'attività professionale di Alberto Seassaro, di cui abbiamo scritto nei precedenti capitoli, che lo ha portato a realizzare opere di edilizia industrializzata, d'architettura d'interni, di design e d'arte, pur intensa e a tratti frenetica, non lo ha mai distolto dal mondo universitario. È il 1964, Alberto Seassaro e Ugo la Pietra, appena laureati, presentano una proposta per un Progetto di ricerca dal titolo *La ricerca morfologica. Proposta per una sistematizzazione della bibliografia sui problemi della forma. Contributo alla organizzazione della biblioteca*

dell'Istituto di Composizione e all'approntamento degli strumenti didattici per i corsi. La ricerca, diretta emanazione dei contenuti della tesi di laurea, riceverà due successivi finanziamenti ministeriali finalizzati alla definizione di criteri e principi per la costituzione di una sezione della Biblioteca del nascente Istituto di Composizione della Facoltà di Architettura del Politecnico di Milano, dedicata ai temi della forma ad uso degli studenti di Architettura.

I settori specifici delle discipline sull'estetica, sulla semiotica, sulla psicologia e fisiologia della percezione, ecc., sono sempre stati coperti *per supplenza* dall'architetto, senza le basi costruttive necessarie per questa operazione, con una meccanica del tutto analoga a quella delle scienze sociologiche ed economiche nei confronti dell'urbanistica. Quindi, questa bibliografia deriva dall'esigenza di affrontare decisamente il dibattito culturale sui problemi dell'architettura moderna attraverso un'adeguata conoscenza dei problemi della forma e la definizione del livello critico e operativo a cui può intervenire l'architetto stesso. (La Pietra, U. & Seassaro, A., *La ricerca morfologica. Proposta per una sistematizzazione della bibliografia sui problemi della forma. Parte prima - L'approccio deduttivo*, 1964)

Sono gli anni che vedono, al Politecnico di Milano, la costituzione dei primi Istituti di ricerca finalizzati alla didattica (i futuri Dipartimenti) e con essi le prime sperimentazioni sui metodi e sulle modalità di trasferimento dei contenuti della ricerca all'ambito formativo. I rapporti tra ricerca e didattica, negli anni successivi, diventeranno un tratto distintivo nel percorso accademico di Alberto Seassaro. Analogamente, è la tematica stessa del progetto di ricerca – la progettazione delle infrastrutture del sapere e della conoscenza, quale è una biblioteca dipartimentale – a rappresentare già un primo chiaro indizio del coinvolgimento e dell'attenzione verso l'istituzione universitaria e le sue forme organizzative.

Sono gli inizi. Ma le premesse di quel che verrà dopo già si intravedono. Da un lato l'approccio teorico e sperimentale ai problemi della forma derivante dalla sua formazione nelle arti visive; dall'altro l'attenzione alle forme di innovazione e industrializzazione delle tecnologie,



dei manufatti e dei processi edilizi. Ognuno di questi temi, pur presentandosi in forma aurorale, mette le basi agli sviluppi compiuti che caratterizzeranno gli anni della maturità accademica. Oltre alle attività di ricerca, Alberto Seassaro viene subito coinvolto da Ludovico Belgiojoso, Vittoriano Viganò, Cesare Blasi nelle attività didattiche, negli ambiti disciplinari della Composizione architettonica. Nel muovere i primi passi come Assistente Volontario prima e come Assistente Incaricato poi, sono i temi della forma e del suo processo di modellizzazione; del progetto di sistemi e componenti; della sperimentazione didattica, quelli sui quali si appassiona e sui quali inizierà ad organizzare seminari ed esercitazioni in un continuo travaso di esperienze dall'attività artistica e professionale a quella accademica. In questo percorso, la figura di Giuseppe Ciribini, del quale coadiuva a Milano e Torino i corsi di *Elementi costruttivi*, *Disegno dei componenti edilizi* e di *Metodologia della progettazione* ¹⁴ (Ciribini, 1966-67) è quella a cui più si avvicina per interessi tematici e per approccio al progetto. Grazie a questa vicinanza, sposta il suo interesse dalle culture compositive alle culture tecnologiche.

È a Ciribini, inoltre – profondo innovatore del campo disciplinare della Tecnologia dell'Architettura, che lo ha portato ad aprirsi a nuove prospettive di ricerca soprattutto sul fronte della industrializzazione edilizia e sull'impatto che le innovazioni scientifiche e tecnologiche stavano portando nel settore delle costruzioni – che deve il suo avvicinamento al pensiero *sistemico* (sul ruolo di Giuseppe Ciribini alla crescita culturale dell'Area tecnologica, si veda il capitolo di Cristina Tonelli in questo testo).

8.2 L'imprinting alle sperimentazioni didattiche nella Facoltà di Architettura tra gli anni '60 e '70

Alla fine degli anni '60 e lungo tutti gli anni '70, la Facoltà di Architettura vive anni all'insegna della trasformazione, figlia di una particolare



Figura 1.
Copertina del volume *Tecnologia e progetto* di
Giuseppe Ciribini (1984).



Figura 2.
Copertina del volume *Introduzione alla tecnologia del
design* di Giuseppe Ciribini (1979).

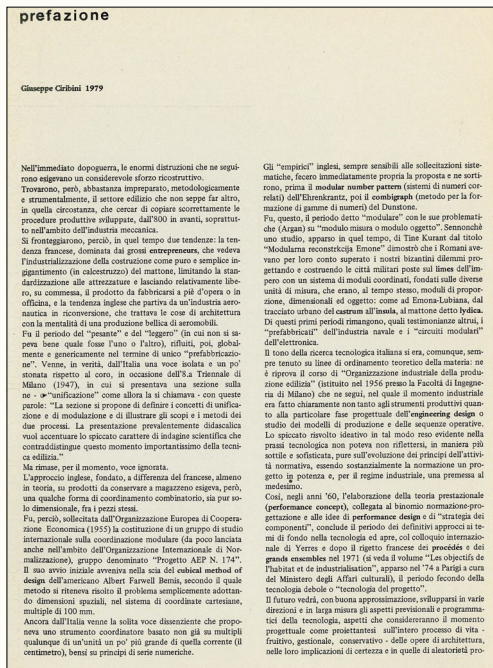
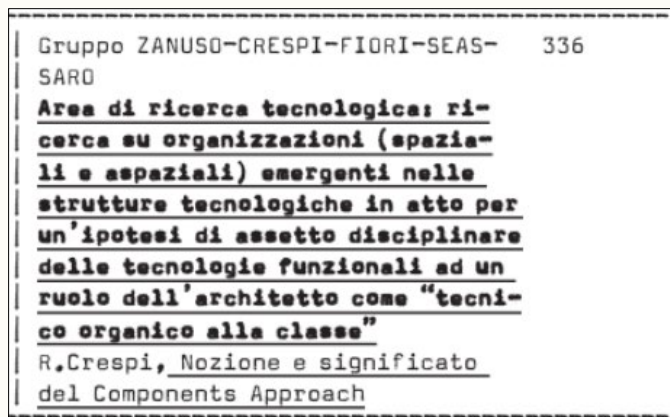


Figura 3.
Prefazione di Giuseppe Ciribini al volume *Progettazione
e gestione del processo edilizio industrializzato*, a cura
di Alberto Seassaro (1979).

Figura 4.
1969-70 con 336 studenti iscritti,
il raggruppamento Zanuso,
Crespi, Fiori, Seassaro è tra quelli,
non appartenenti all'area della
composizione architettonica, più
seguiti dagli studenti (AA.VV. *La
rivoluzione culturale*, p. 51).



tensione sperimentale. Le occupazioni studentesche del 1963 e del 1967 hanno la forza di innescare una revisione profonda dello statuto della didattica per il progetto.

La riorganizzazione delle strutture didattiche passa, in una prima fase, attraverso la messa in discussione dell'impianto

formativo basato sui tradizionali insegnamenti mono-disciplinari, per andare verso raggruppamenti di discipline e di insegnamenti articolati in macro-tematiche; cornici entro cui lo studente viene chiamato a sperimentare le diverse scale della progettazione da quella urbanistica a quella degli interni. Alberto Seassaro, nel ruolo di Assi-

stente Volontario alla didattica, è presente con i suoi programmi di insegnamento in raggruppamenti tematici che aggogheranno, nel corso degli anni, docenti diversi. All'inizio il gruppo è costituito da Marco Zanuso, Raffaella Crespi, Leonardo Fiori ed Alberto Seassaro. Successivamente entra a far parte in forma stabile del gruppo di ricerca-didattica *Laboratorio di produzione del territorio*, formatosi attorno ai temi della casa e dell'abitare e costituito con Giacomo Scarpini, Bianca Bottero e Giorgio Gaetani.

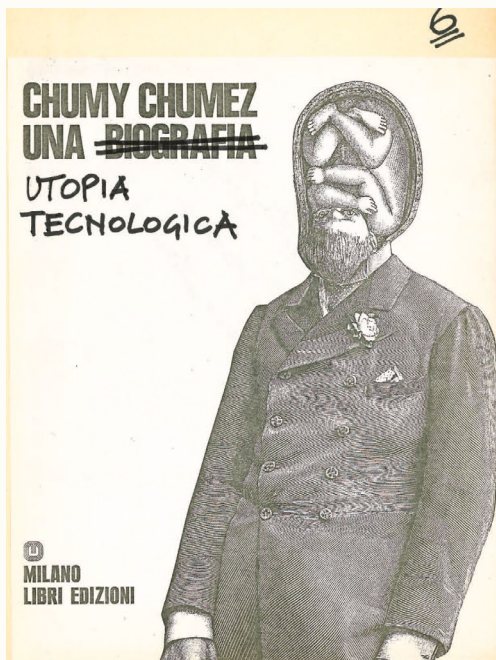
È qui che inizia ad occuparsi del settore edilizio e delle sue trasformazioni. In questo contesto di lavoro didattico, il fulcro tecnologico perde i suoi connotati più convenzionali e si mette a servizio delle problematiche dell'abitare. Il tema della casa, sul piano della ricerca, viene affrontato: osservando ad ampio raggio le questioni economiche e sociali che incidono sulla formazione della domanda abitativa e sulle logiche dell'offerta; rintracciando con uno sguardo politico, più che disciplinare, la relazione tra status economico e qualità della domanda; mettendo in luce l'impronta politica delle riforme sulla casa e delle dinamiche della rendita e del mercato immobiliare; portando in primo piano i problemi politico-economici emergenti nell'organizzazione produttiva del processo edilizio di fronte alla industrializzazione; indagando il

SONHARIO

④ 1984 d. Powell e Bruno Levi
 ⑪ Antonio e fruttu di uovra
 ⑫ città alternativa
 ⑬ ghetto?
 ⑭ Ida Fare ne cristiana
 ⑮ Ida Fare ne cristiana
 ⑯ Ida Fare ne cristiana
 ⑰ Ida Fare ne cristiana
 ⑱ Ida Fare ne cristiana
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**LA CASA
AVVELENATA**

Le testimonianze sono state raccolte da alcune famiglie che il problema dell'abitazione lo hanno vissuto in modo occasionale, al di là delle loro scelte e dei loro desideri.
 Non hanno scelto la casa alternativa.
 Non hanno scelto lo sblancimento delle metropoli.
 Né il tranquillo rifugio di campagna, della collina in Toscana.
 Abitavano la casa più borghese del mondo, la villetta con l'orto.
 Una famiglia tranquilla.
 Solo che erano in Brianza, a Seveso accanto all'Imensa.
 Dunque a loro è toccata una mattina di trovarsi, in un mondo avve-
 lenato.
 Hanno accettato il dialogo con la morte con una tranquillità perfetta.
 Hanno conteso insieme ai soldi che gli toccavano per il risarcimen-
 to i nomi di quelli che si ammalavano e morivano.
 "Il marito della Kina, la mamma della Wanda..."
 Hanno allontanato dimenticandola, la paura.
 Anche noi abbiamo fatto la stessa cosa.
 Leggere queste cose che effetto ci fa?
 Non è una preoccupazione moralista.
 La festa in giardino il giorno dopo lo scoppio della nube, dove ogni
 no senza saperlo si cibava della sua morte o della sua malattia.
 Il residence di Asago dove tutti litigavano, dove nessuno trovava
 le chiavi, gli ascensori, dove i mariti dicevano alle mogli "mi sai
 sempre in giro". Tutti i parametri sono saltati.
 L'accettazione della legge ha prodotto la caduta della legge.
 L'attaccamento alla norma lo sballo di tutte le norme.
 La vita tranquilla, la morte.
 L'inconsapevolezza, la consapevolezza del rischio più drammatico.
 "Mamma buttati via questi zucchini, sono troppo amari!"
 "Ma tu hai preso le zucchine nell'orto." Le parole di quella cena le
 ha ancora in mente. Erano passati quattro giorni da quel sabato neg-
 l'anno ci aveva detto ancora niente. Ma la bocca 'arrapava' tutta nel
 mangiare la verdura.
 Lo scoppio lo ricordo bene. Avevo avuto paura; mi sono detta, ades-
 so l'Imensa parte al completo, o che prende fuoco. E non era la pri-
 ma volta. Il fumo si era subito alzato sopra le nostre case, con un
 fischio. Allora avevo chiuso il balcone. Arriva mio marito e mi fa
 "cosa c'è, c'è odore di metano, forse c'è il gas aperto". Sì, ma è
 stata l'Imensa che ha buttato fuori non so cosa.
 La domenica mattina, che odore, le coperte non si potevano annusa-
 re, le ho infilate nella lavatrice.
 Io sono abbiamo festeggiato il compleanno di mia nipote che abita
 il proprio vicino a me, anche lei a due passi dalla fabbrica. Era-
 vamo in cortile e gli invitati mangiavano frutta e non frutta, tut-
 to raccolto dagli orti. Il giorno dopo tutti questi ragazzi della
 festa stavano male: vomito, diarrea. Pensavamo che i dolci fossero
 guasti. Ma nessuno ci ha detto niente fino al venerdì dopo, sette
 giorni dopo quando c'è stata l'assemblea degli operai ed è venuto
 l'ufficio sanitario.
 Eppure noi che stavamo proprio lì, era tanto che stavamo male. Di
 puzza ce n'era sempre, e proprio di scoppi. Come quello del 13 gen-
 naio del '79, il giorno di Sant'Antonio.
 Io di veleno ne ho respirato sempre. Nemmeno il medico sapeva dir-
 re la struttura di discorso.



**LE ARCHITETTURE DELLA LIBERAZIONE
GLI IPERMERCATI DELLA RICERCA DI SE
IL MERCATO DEL DISAGIO E
I VENDITORI DI BENE ESSERE**

Oggi vorrei cominciare ad introdurre il discorso sulle architetture
 della liberazione, non solo come luoghi fisici ma anche come luoghi
 del pensiero: luoghi, supporti, protesi.

Prima di occuparmi degli ipermercati della ricerca di sé, come Ban-
 len in California e Poona in India, dove la tecnologia della libe-
 razione è più avanzata, dove i laboratori d'incontro si chiamano
 "hora" (ora) (più gioia) come a Banlen, vorrei risalire alle matrici
 prime che hanno segnato la traccia poi seguita da molti dei delusi
 della rivoluzione mancata, prima che si avviassero sulle strade del
 la terapia.

Una serie di punti che sono i punti di un interessarsi di fili che van-
 no dall'antipsichiatria, cioè dalla dialettica di liberazione al mer-
 cato delle sue tecniche. Mercato disomogeneo oscillante fra deferenza
 di strutture di discorso.

Gli antipsichiatri di ieri oggi si chiamano terapisti popolari, psi-
 coterapisti per il territorio, samaritani scalzi impegnati a porta-
 re soccorso alle sofferenze e a schierarsi al fianco di chi "contro
 la nevrosi combatte davvero". Psicoanalisti da combattimento che per-
 mantenersi in vita ha bisogno di essere sempre "più contro". Il fan-
 tasma della reciprocità diventa protagonista nel rapporto analitico,
 mantenuto entro le strette seduttive dell'«hic et nunc». Il rapporto
 inter pares approda alla terapia reciproca.

Psicoterapeuti confessori, ma nella confessione (scrive Freud in "Il
 problema dell'analisi del non medico") "il peccatore dice quello che
 sa", non è chiamato a dire di più.

La relazione analitica non si basa più solo sulla parola, entra in
 gioco lo sguardo, il contatto, lo scambio emotivo e sentimentale, la
 dimensione della intrapsichizzazione, che "accusa ha definito ironica-
 mente della "intraubordizzazione". In nome della cura il dire si tra-
 sforma in atto, il rapporto si fa apparentemente lineare, faccia a
 faccia, diretto dialogico. La parola espediente al lessico.

Le ambiguità, le perate, le astuzie, i giochi di prestigio e di ri-
 versità intessono la relazione analitica: il padrone modernizzato ac-
 cetta di dialogare. Il sapere coincide col portare a conoscenza, di-
 venta saper fare, saper curare: l'ora sanandi campeggia sulla scena.

Ma con le tecniche di importazione americana e d'Oriente i curatori
 d'anime diventano massaggiatori d'anime. L'esaltazione dello sballo
 e della destrutturazione psichica, i flussi desideranti antedipoi e
 i percorsi ricomposti ("dobbiamo perdere la testa per entrare nel
 corpo" ammoniva già dapprima Cooper in "drammatica del vivere") pre-
 parano alla regressione dell'intelligibile al sensibile, al prota-
 gonismo del corpo.

L'esaltazione del non sapere, il trionfo dei valori del corpo avu-
 li delle fatiche della riflessione aprono la strada ai massaggiato-
 ri reichiani, marxionewski, ai guru mostrano di importazione, ai ma-
 nipolatori del corpo, liberato o in via di esserlo.

Figura 5.
 Dalla raccolta di materiali didattici e riflessioni degli studenti del filone
 Abitazioni, classi sociali e territorio - filone 3.

ruolo dei tecnici; la parcellizzazione e dequalificazione del settore fino ad arrivare ad una lettura, anch'essa *politica*, della *via italiana all'industrializzazione* elaborata a partire dalla lettura critica del catalogo dei manufatti prefabbricati della Montecatini-Edison.

Centrali sono le micro-dinamiche dell'abitare osservate con uno sguardo antropologico, etnografico quasi psicanalitico. La dominante politica lo porta ad attivare, in quegli stessi anni, assieme a Ida Farè, Corrado Levi e Adriano di Leo, attività didattiche dal carattere sperimentale (seminari, progetti, gruppi di ascolto e di autocoscienza) che vanno sotto il titolo *Il privato è politico*.

Ricordo in particolare il seminario da lui tenuto con Corrado Levi, dal titolo *Il privato è politico*, nel quale l'inquietudine degli studenti e il loro rifiuto dell'architettura erano affrontati con un metodo che affiancava il percorso progettuale a un contemporaneo riconoscimento delle esperienze e delle sensibilità personali. Il seminario era seguito con entusiasmo da moltissimi studenti che ritrovarono, attraverso questa esperienza, una inedita possibilità di avvicinarsi all'architettura e di scoprirne il fascino. (Bottero, 2024)

Figura 6.
Ritagli, rimaneggiamenti,
ingrandimenti e riduzioni
fotografiche pronti per nuovi
collage (archivio Alberto Seassaro).



Decisamente politico è anche il modo di gestire i temi di progetto nella didattica, cimentando gli studenti sui problemi concreti della città, con un coinvolgimento attivo della società (Unione inquilini, Collettivi e Comitati di quartiere, Comitati di occupazione e di lotta per la casa, coordinamenti operai di fabbrica, gruppi sindacali di base, Movimento studentesco, Gruppi sociali autogestiti, portatori di istanze spontanee di base espresse attivamente a livello politico e sociale, ecc.) per raccogliere e rielaborarne necessità ed urgenze, saldando le lotte operaie con quelle studentesche. Politico e sperimentale infine è questo operare *nel vivo* della società, allontanandosi dalla strada delle esercitazioni accademiche *in vitro*, portando dentro la didattica contributi pluridisciplinari così da affinare l'indagine sui problemi dell'abitare con uno sguardo che lega il privato e il politico della dimensione abitativa 25.

Le attività didattiche sono precedute e seguite da una consistente produzione di documenti scritti. Com'è tipico della Facoltà di Architettura di quegli anni, questi documenti di accompagnamento e supporto alla didattica hanno la forma della *dispensa* – strumento utilizzato per divulgare *materiali grigi* utili alla didattica. Sono resoconti delle attività svolte con gli studenti, bollettini, cronistorie che raccolgono le esperienze precedenti, le commentano, ne individuano gli elementi di criticità, gli scostamenti rispetto agli obiettivi e vengono proposti, come elementi di riflessione agli studenti degli anni successivi, come un punto di avvio delle attività. Anche i programmi della *Guida dello studente* sono cosa seria. Nascono da proposte culturali del gruppo di lavoro che vengono dibattute ed approvate in tavoli di discussione.

Di seguito, abbiamo scelto di riportare la parte introduttiva del programma del Gruppo di ricerca-didattica: *Abitazioni, classi sociali e territorio – filone 3*, di cui Alberto Seassaro è parte, relativo agli insegnamenti dell'anno accademico 1977-78 [3.1](#).

Un vero e proprio saggio, anche dai toni dissacratori, capace di restituire il clima culturale, la libertà di pensiero, la connessione tra insegnamento e problemi sociali, la sensibilità politica presente nei programmi dei corsi, l'importanza del linguaggio e dei riferimenti terminologici a un sistema culturale in trasformazione.

Nello stendere il programma, il primo atto del gruppo di ricerca è cancellare il titolo ufficiale dell'insegnamento chiocciando, nel testo che segue, le ragioni per le quali ciascun termine che compone il titolo risulti superato e politicamente inaccettabile.

L'indice che articola la presentazione mostra, già dai titoli, una chiara vocazione dei programmi di insegnamento alla sperimentazione di modi alternativi di pensare la didattica (ricerche condotte assieme da studenti e docenti; termini come *sedute di autocoscienza*; programmi seminariali serali fuori dagli orari canonici della didattica, ecc.) ma soprattutto propone contenuti delle attività di progetto innovativi. Nell'insieme, sono un vero e proprio manifesto di contro-cultura.



2. Aiuto, Corso di Tecnologia dell'Architettura II, prof. Alberto Seassaro, Facoltà di Architettura, A.A. 1978-79.
[Documento →](#)



3. Programmi 1977-78 Ambito n. 1, Abitazioni, classi sociali e territorio.
[Documento →](#)

Figura 7.
Copertina della dispensa didattica prodotta con la tecnica del collage da Alberto Seassaro.



Figura 8.

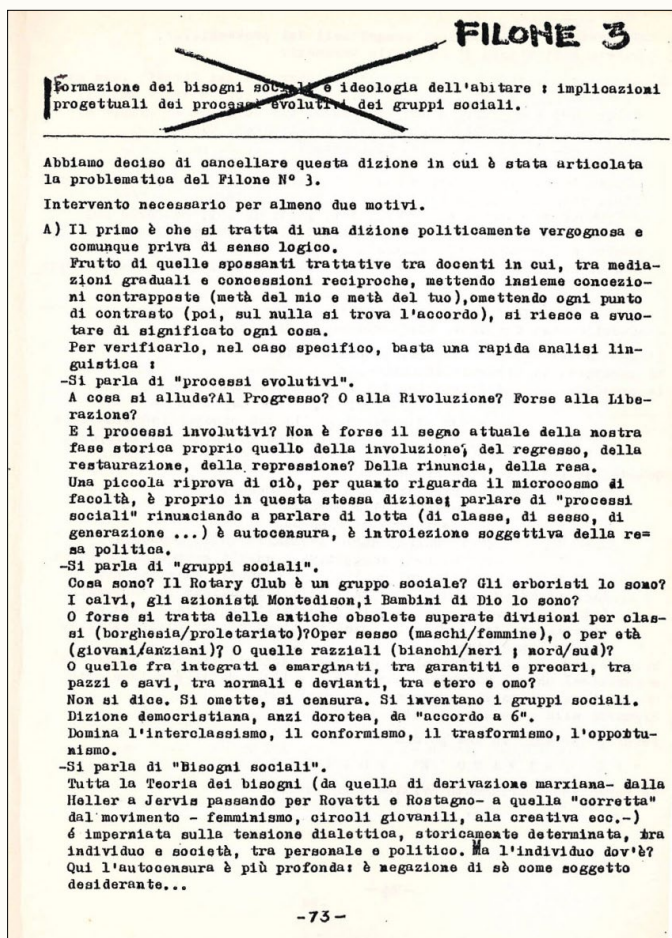
Estratto dei Programmi 1977-78,
Ambito n. 1, *Abitazioni, classi sociali
e territorio*, p. 73.

Nel 1980 con l'assunzione in ruolo presso il Politecnico, prima come Professore Associato e poi, nel 1990 come Professore Ordinario di Tecnologia dell'Architettura, diventerà titolare

delle cattedre di Unificazione edilizia e prefabbricazione; Tecnica ed economia della produzione edilizia; Tecnologia dell'architettura; Organizzazione della produzione. Porterà nella didattica le ricerche teoriche ma anche e soprattutto le sperimentazioni nel settore della industrializzazione edilizia e prefabbricazione condotte presso il Centro Progetti della Montecatini.

Nelle sue proposte di ricerca-didattica a fini seminariali o di esercitazione progettuale, alcune parole chiave emergono per la loro forza anticipatrice rispetto a temi che diventeranno centrali quando sarà chiamato a progettare l'impianto formativo del Corso di laurea di Di-

segno industriale: il meta-design come metodologia interdisciplinare; il design di sistemi e componenti; la merceologia e l'analisi degli indotti produttivi; l'attenzione alla dimensione processuale del progetto e non solo al prodotto finale. All'interno degli insegnamenti, tenuti presso la Facoltà di Architettura, porterà le sue esplorazioni giovanili nel mondo dell'arte, introducendo il tema della luce e le sperimentazioni progettuali di artefatti luminosi di cui il caleidoscopio è stato, per noi che in quegli anni eravamo studenti, l'oggetto emblematico che ancora oggi tutti noi ricordiamo (Tinelli, 2024). La vocazione a riformare la didattica, l'interesse alla progettazione di attività innovative dal carattere speri-



«Si parla di "implicazioni progettuali dei processi..."»
Questo è il titolo di un Giallo Garzanti.

B) Il secondo motivo è che, nella "lottizzazione dei filoni" (uno ai "progettuali" e uno ai "scientifici" e uno a te), il filone N°3 è capitato - non richiesto, non cercato - al gruppo di docenti dell'ar subito "il privato è politico". Ciò è noi.

Dovrà essere il filone dei "biologici"?

Può anche andarci bene, una etichetta vale l'altra se non la si rubisce. Tanto più che noi siamo anche, alla stessa stregua, scientifici, progettuali, tecnologici, economisti, sociologi.

Ma poiché dobbiamo organizzarlo noi, gestirlo noi, condurlo noi ci metteremo dentro i nostri contenuti, le nostre problematiche, la nostra metodologia e la nostra scienza.

Non ci sentiamo pertanto vincolati alla vecchia formulazione, compreso, almeno, e sociale.

A cancellazione eseguita, cos'è adesso il filone?

L'oggetto del lavoro: la casa, la città. OK.

La tematica: il bisogno. OK. OK.

La problematica: la dialettica tra bisogni dell'individuo e bisogni del capitale passando attraverso quella tra bisogni individuali e bisogni sociali e quella tra i bisogni contrapposti degli antagonisti sociali. OK?

Questo per noi significa riconoscere:

- la riduzione dei bisogni a domanda di merci,
- la lotta alla domanda
- del desiderio al bisogno
- (originario) della sessualità alla economia
- dei bisogni soggettivi a quelli economico-politici
- dei bisogni qualitativi a quelli quantitativi

la contraddizione tra la spinta alla liberazione dei bisogni (cioè il bisogno come necessità, costrizione) e la spinta alla liberazione del desiderio (cioè il bisogno come contraddizione che sviluppa l'uomo).

Riconoscere la contraddizione, i sedimenti depositati nelle nostre coscienze dal potere borghese, maschile, adulto e dalla sua ideologia che ci impediscono di sapere ciò che vogliamo.

Riguardo alla casa come a tutto il resto.

Perciò, per noi, in una parola

"IL PRIVATO È POLITICO"

in forma necessariamente critica e dubitativa

"MA COSA È IL P.?"

-74-

Il ciclo didattico del Filone 3 viene organizzato come "attività di ricerca collettiva" tra docenti e studenti, tenuto nella forma di Seminario Permanente, ogni mercoledì pomeriggio alle ore 15.

Il lavoro è tenuto dai docenti:

Anna Alderuccio (collaboratore aereo.), Maria Antonietta Aragona (collaboratore aereo.), Edoardo Baraldi (collaboratore aereo.), Nives Ciardi (collaboratore aereo.), Ida Parè (prop. inc. di Igiene Edilizia), Corrado Levi (inc. stab. di Composizione Arch. V), Gaetano Macchia (prop. inc. di Igiene Edilizia), Argia Marani (collaboratore aereo.), Meri Pignatari (prop. collaboratore aereo.), Alberto Sansano (inc. stab. di Tecnologia dell'Arch. II).

Nel seminario si prosegue la ricerca iniziata negli anni passati sulla analisi critica dei ruoli privati e politici del rapporto casa/famiglia ("LA CASA / I RUOLI FAMILIARI / IL CORPO").

La nostra tematica di lavoro

Il nostro programma è quello di sviluppare la conoscenza, scientifica e politica ad un contenuto, dei fenomeni territoriali attraverso l'assunzione della contraddizione tra le classi sessuali; in dialettica a quella strutturale, tra le classi economiche.

A partire dalla sua emergenza tematica più evidente ed elementare, ma anche più complessa e associata.

Il rapporto tra CASA E FAMIGLIA, esplorato attraverso l'analisi dei RUOLI, quelli emergenti dai vissuti dell'esperienza personale e privata dei suoi membri, nelle loro connotazioni di classe sessuale, uomo o donna, e sociale. L'esperienza dell'abitare, a partire dall'esperienza del CORPO che esprime l'immediata realizzazione nelle collocazioni sessuali.

E le mediazioni istituzionali, culturali, ideologiche e simboliche profonde che cambiano nell'uso del CORPO e nell'uso della CASA attraverso il CORPO.

L'ideologia della casa come "luogo del privato" e della famiglia - come "istituzione del privato", e le norme, sancite dai ruoli, che si sono costituite in essa.

Per documentarsi sul lavoro dell'anno accademico passato vedere la diapositiva dell' "AMBITO PROBLEMatico IL PRIVATO È POLITICO" (MA COSA È IL P.?)

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Il programma del seminario

Ogni incontro del Seminario Permanente sarà basato su un problema specifico definito all'interno di una tematica generale. Il problema "di giornata" sarà introdotto a cura dei docenti (e dei gruppi di studenti che lavorano con loro) responsabili di quella tematica.

All'attuale fase di elaborazione le tematiche individuate sono:

- 1) "RUOLI DI CASA" (responsabili Aragona, Baraldi, Pignatari)
- 2) "LA CASA ALTERNATIVA" (responsabili Alderuccio, Macchia, Marani, Sansano)
 - Critica (privata) alla politica della casa
 - critica (politica) all'ideologia dell'abitare
 - Comportamenti, individuali e collettivi, di rifiuto, di rottura della norma e di riappropriazione delle deleghe istituzionali.
 - La scelta comunitaria: esperienze storiche e realtà attuali.

- 3) "MAL DI CASA" (responsabili Ciardi, Parè)

La fase di avvio del Seminario Permanente riguarderà la rilettura critica e collettiva dell'esperienza dell'anno passato, con esposizione della metodologia seguita, e la messa a punto delle modalità di partecipazione degli studenti.

Il Seminario è affiancato da Gruppi operativi (di studio, di divertimento, di lettura, di autocoscienza...) che preparano e sviluppano i medesimi temi del seminario, o temi ad esso complementari.

L'attività dei Gruppi operativi sarà messa a punto dopo la fase di avvio del Seminario. Alcuni gruppi sono già definiti, altri si definiranno sugli interessi che emergeranno nel seminario. I gruppi possono durare tutto l'anno o estinguersi quando hanno esaurito la loro funzione.

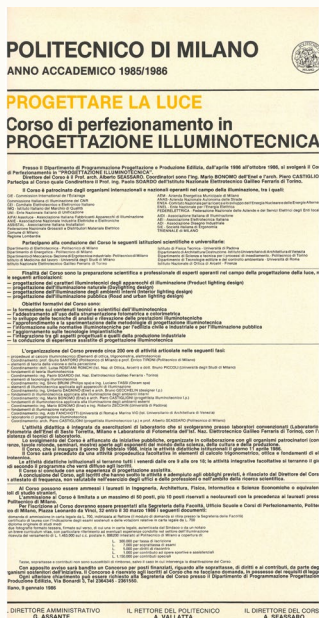
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UNITÀ DIDATTICHE DEL FILONE 3

- U22 - La casa alternativa (GRASANO/MACCHIA/Marani/Mazzocco)
- U23 - Il suicidio e l'architettura (LEVI)
- U24 - Fuori di casa (Aragona/Baraldi/Pignatari)
- U25 - Mal di Casa (PARÈ/Ciardi)

Figura 9.
Estratto dei Programmi 1977-78, Ambito n. 1, *Abitazioni, classi sociali e territorio*, pp. 74-77.

4. Progettare la luce. Corso di perfezionamento in progettazione illuminotecnica, Politecnico di Milano. Documento →



mentale lo impegnano anche sul fronte dell'Istruzione Permanente. Dal 1984 al '93 è infatti Direttore del Programma di Istruzione Permanente della Facoltà di Architettura.

Suo è il primo Corso di perfezionamento in *Progettazione illuminotecnica* (1985), corso che coltiva, appunto, uno dei suoi ambiti di interesse didattico e di ricerca scientifica e progettuale e che diverrà, in seguito, Master in *Progettazione e tecnologie della luce*, da lui diretto fino al 2010 ⁴.

Dal 1987 fino al 1989 è Co-direttore del Corso di perfezionamento in *Metodi e tecniche della progettazione e del controllo ambientale. Ambiente e tecnologia* (Direttrice Maria Bottero) e, negli stessi anni, è Coordinatore del Corso di perfezionamento in *Progettazione energetica dell'ambiente costruito. Energia e architettura* (Direttore Gianni Scudo).

8.3 La cultura tecnologica e la ricerca

Siamo a cavallo tra la fine degli anni '70 e gli inizi degli anni '80. Mentre è impegnato attivamente nei laboratori didattici sui temi dell'abitare, della casa e del territorio, Alberto Seassaro

avvia al contempo una attività di ricerca intensa che alimenta, completa, approfondisce queste tematiche ed utilizza poi il momento didattico come banco di prova. Il binomio didattica-ricerca è un ulteriore tratto distintivo che ben descrive il suo modo di intendere lo stare nell'università e che vedremo caratterizzare i suoi anni di Preside alla Facoltà del Design quando proprio questo binomio diventerà paradigmatico del suo mandato istituzionale.

Le radici di questa impostazione, che contiene anche una precisa visione politica dell'università e del suo ruolo nella società, le troviamo, in forma aurorale, già in questi anni di continuo travaso tra i contenuti della ricerca e quelli dell'insegnamento.

Sul versante della ricerca, in particolare, Alberto Seassaro attiva linee tematiche innovative, trasferendo le esperienze maturate negli anni '60 nell'ambito della prefabbricazione, unificazione e industrializzazione edilizia, condotte con Giuseppe Ciribini e Marcello Grisotti. Sono esperienze e contenuti elaborati sul fronte della attività di pro-

getto per l'industria delle costruzioni, svolte per conto di ANCE Associazione Nazionale Costruttori Edili, CRESME Centro di ricerche economiche, sociologiche e di mercato per le costruzioni, ASSOMARMO, ANDIL Associazione Nazionale degli Industriali dei Laterizi, ASSOARREDO ecc.; per la SPRED SpA (Società per la razionalizzazione dell'Edilizia costituita con Montedison e Finsider SpA, Milano) e soprattutto per la Montecatini Edison.

È proprio grazie a queste concrete attività di progetto che Alberto Seassaro è in grado di portare, nel mondo universitario, i moltissimi rapporti maturati nella sua attività professionale mostrando anche una spiccata capacità di costruire sinergie e di tessere importanti reti di relazioni.

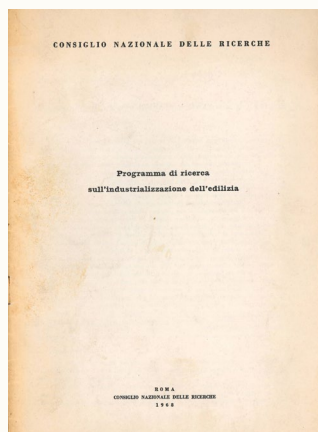
Quando agli inizi degli anni '70 viene incaricato per la Ricerca CNR *Programma di Ricerca per la Industrializzazione Edilizia* (PRIE, Direttore Romani) e diviene coordinatore del Gruppo *Progettazione funzionale del componente* con Raffaella Crespi e Guido Nardi, Alberto Seassaro trova l'occasione per avviare importanti relazioni tra il Gruppo di ricerca del CNR e gli Istituti di ricerca universitari che, nel volgere di qualche anno, lo porteranno alla costituzione del *Gruppo Nazionale CNR – Produzione Edilizia*.

Se nella costituzione del Gruppo di Ricerca Nazionale CNR intravede l'opportunità di strutturare il sistema della conoscenza scientifica e della ricerca nel settore dell'edilizia, non fa tuttavia mancare la sua visione critica rispetto al potenziale uso distorto della conoscenza prodotta da questo sistema di ricerca, a causa dei rapporti di dipendenza del CNR dall'industria e a causa delle contrapposizioni di potere tra CNR e Università [53](#) [63](#).

Troviamo comunque in questa esperienza, condotta quando Alberto Seassaro non ha ancora alcun ruolo formale nell'università, una impostazione del fare ricerca aperta al confronto. Tutti i suoi scritti di questi anni sono *Atti e Resoconti* di seminari e convegni, spesso da lui stesso promossi e curati, coinvolgendo l'intera comunità accademica nazionale e molti protagonisti del mondo delle istituzioni, delle professioni, del progetto, dell'imprenditoria. Nella forma parteci-



5. Consiglio Nazionale delle Ricerche, Programma di Ricerca sull'industrializzazione dell'edilizia.
[Documento →](#)



6. Documenti di lavoro sullo stato della Ricerca C.N.R. nel settore Architettura e Urbanistica.
[Documento →](#)



pativa riconosciamo la cifra che sarà poi propria di tutta la fase più matura di Alberto Seassaro: quella del coinvolgere nel confronto; del costituire gruppi di ricerca nazionali; dell'accostare esperienze differenti attorno al medesimo tema per apprezzarne le sfaccettature e per rendere più completo il quadro tematico; del favorire l'emergere di diversi punti di vista.

La curatela di convegni e seminari è la forma editoriale che più di altre risulta efficace nel garantire la visione plurale.

Su questo possiamo citare volumi come *La produzione del territorio. Settore delle costruzioni e programmazione edilizia o Normative e metodologie di progettazione*. Si tratta in entrambi i casi di atti raccolti nei Seminari *La produzione del territorio* promossi proprio nel quadro delle attività del Coordinamento Nazionale C.N.R. *Produzione Edilizia* di cui Alberto Seassaro è, in quegli anni, Direttore. Occorre precisare che il Coordinamento Nazionale rappresentava la fase aggregativa informale che, attraverso la definizione dei modelli organizzativi, delle tematiche di ricerca, dei metodi della ricerca, precedeva e metteva le basi alla fase formale di costituzione del Gruppo Nazionale di Ricerca CNR. Un lavoro durato più di due anni. I nomi dei relatori (Matilde Baffa, Bianca Bottero, Cristina Cocchioni, Massimo D'Alessandro, Paolo Deganello, Mario De Grassi, Giorgio Gaetani, Franco Lattes, Ezio Manzini, Carlo Olmo, Piercarlo Palermo, Antonio Parisi, Giacomo Scarpini, Edmondo Vitiello, Virginia Gangemi, Enrico Fattinnanzi, Sergio Bracco, Gianfranco Carrara, Valerio Di Battista, Giampiero Donin, Remo Dorigati, Giuseppe Turchini, ecc.) sono un chiaro indizio della pluralità disciplinare, dell'apertura culturale e della molteplicità di Università Italiane e di Istituzioni della ricerca coinvolte.

La natura delle tematiche affrontate (*Condizione abitativa e territorio; Produzione dei servizi sociali e programmazione economica; Connessione dei servizi sociali alle varie scale territoriali; Produzione edilizia istituzioni economiche e governo del territorio; Riorganizzazione del lavoro nella produzione di edilizia residenziale; Comparazione dei fattori produttivi in edilizia; Risorse ambientali e processi insediativi; Ricerca sulla produzione di progetto; Fabbisogni abitativi e programmazione del settore residenziale; Crisi dei meccanismi di produzione del territorio; Struttura produttiva e mercato del lavoro nel recupero edilizio; Domanda di formazione nei processi produttivi e riproduttivi*

del territorio; ecc.) che inquadrano, forse per la prima volta attraverso casi-studio, le dinamiche del settore edilizio, osservandolo dal punto di vista economico e della sua capacità di rispondere ai bisogni sociali, orienta a estendere alle economie del settore edilizio, le analisi inter-settoriali già mature nello studio di altri settori industriali, di altre merceologie produttive e di altri mercati. Il punto di vista utilizzato in questi resoconti risulta innovativo perché concentra l'attenzione sull'osservazione dei cambiamenti in atto in un settore considerato tradizionale e poco propenso ad innovare. I casi studio mettono in luce i primi processi di riconfigurazione della struttura produttiva, dell'organizzazione del sistema-progetto, delle nuove professionalità emergenti a seguito dell'introduzione di nuove tecnologie. Portano in primo piano, inoltre, le specificità locali dipendenti dalle risorse del territorio e i nuovi problemi di sostenibilità economica, sociale e anche ambientale connessi alla evoluzione del settore edile come conseguenza della sua trasformazione industriale.

Questa prospettiva di analisi trova compimento nella pubblicazione, curata da Alberto Seassaro nel 1979, *Storia e struttura del settore edilizio in Italia dal dopoguerra ad oggi*, che sintetizza le risultanze delle ricerche, delle esperienze didattiche, degli studi promossi e finanziati dal C.N.R.

Attraverso i contributi dei diversi autori sull'evoluzione dei caratteri strutturali del ciclo produttivo edilizio; dei cambiamenti nelle dinamiche della domanda e dell'offerta abitativa; della riorganizzazione del mercato del lavoro e dei processi cantieristici; della riorganizzazione dell'impresa edile e delle nuove forme di divisione del lavoro; dell'impatto dell'apparato normativo sulla riconfigurazione dei caratteri del settore; delle nuove modalità di produzione del progetto; delle nuove sperimentazioni tecnologiche in edilizia; del passaggio all'industrializzazione per componenti, Alberto Seassaro arriva a definire le caratteristiche di un Terzo ciclo edilizio. Caratteristiche che soppianterebbero, a suo modo di vedere, le logiche economiche e di programmazione dei due cicli precedenti.

È il punto di partenza di una ricerca, che lo occuperà negli anni successivi, caratterizzata da un approccio originale e alternativo a quelli seguiti in quel momento, più inclini all'astrazione teorica e all'analisi del mondo della produzione edilizia tradotto nella forma del processo decisionale (si veda a questo proposito il 1° Congresso Nazionale dell'Area

della Produzione Edilizia – Atti – Volume II, CNR 3, 4, 5, Maggio 1984).

Alberto Seassaro, sceglie la strada legata alla concretezza delle dinamiche del settore edilizio, pur fondando la sua ricerca su solide basi teoriche, prendendo come riferimento gli studi di Joseph Schumpeter (1971) e di Alfred Marshall (1959). Si riferisce al primo per vivisezionare i processi di innovazione nell'industria edilizia distinguendo, alla Schumpeter appunto, tra tipi di innovazione che investono il mondo dei nuovi prodotti, dei nuovi metodi di produzione, delle nuove fonti di approvvigionamento, dello sfruttamento di nuovi mercati, dei modi alternativi di organizzare un'impresa. E, in modo decisamente innovativo per gli studi di questo specifico settore, segue invece gli insegnamenti di Marshall per avviare un meticoloso e lungo lavoro di ricerca sull'indotto edilizio e sulle logiche di concentrazione geografica e territoriale delle imprese che producono i beni intermedi, al fine di condividere risorse, know-how e forza lavoro, creando economie esterne per favorirne la competitività (1° Congresso Nazionale dell'Area della Produzione Edilizia, Atti – Volume II), 1984, pp. 389-400).

Questa analisi approfondita e minuziosa la ritroviamo l'anno successivo nel testo *Produzione edilizia e tecnologia dei materiali* (Seassaro, Macchia, a cura di, 1985), che prende in considerazione l'evoluzione dei materiali, dei componenti e dei semilavorati in uso nell'industria edilizia (cemento, materiali leganti, materiali siderurgici, strutture in calcestruzzo armato, malte, manufatti in cemento, laterizi, intonaci, tamponamenti, marmi e pietre, tecnologie di assemblaggio ecc.) per metterli in relazione con tutti i processi soft (acquisizione di conoscenza, attività di progetto, processi di riorganizzazione, ecc.) necessari alla loro lavorazione e messa in opera nel manufatto edilizio, ricostruendo così, a partire dalle merceologie di base, le dinamiche di indotto industriale di questo settore produttivo.

Oltre alle pubblicazioni di curatela di interventi a convegni e seminari, nella produzione di Alberto Seassaro troviamo anche la forma curatoriale di *raccolte* di contributi, apparsi in riviste e ripubblicati in volume. Il collettare e accostare saggi distanti, nel tempo e nell'impronta culturale, ha di nuovo il senso di articolare e approfondire alcune questioni relative alla cultura tecnologica, facendone apprezzare le diverse latitudini e la loro evoluzione. È un esempio, di questo modo di raccogliere e mettere a confronto interventi già pubblicati su pagine di rivista, il

corposo Volume *Progettazione e gestione del processo edilizio industrializzato* (Seassaro, a cura di, 1979) con prefazione di Giuseppe Ciribini. Gli articoli, raccolti e catalogati in ambiti tematici, sono estrapolati dai numeri della Rivista *Prefabbricare* negli anni che vanno al 1968 al 1973. Le sezioni tematiche: *Premesse di metodo*; *Il design per l'edilizia industrializzata*; *La normazione e coordinazione dimensionale*; *L'organizzazione del processo edilizio industrializzato*; *I fattori strutturali*, racchiudono contributi che definiscono le nuove frontiere disciplinari e le nuove prassi metodologiche che l'introduzione dei procedimenti industriali determina nel corpus della cultura del progetto architettonico; mostrano interesse per le procedure meta-progettuali per l'edilizia industrializzata; esaltano le connessioni tra produzione del progetto e produzione del manufatto edile con le ricadute che queste producono sulla componente estetica; affrontano i temi della modularità e dei componenti industrializzati e la relazione con la gestione di progetto e di processo. Individuano l'importanza del design del componente edilizio industrializzato e della cura del dettaglio.

In questo percorso, due sono i suoi riferimenti culturali: Giuseppe Ciribini e le tematiche della complessità, dei sistemi, della ricerca dei nessi strutturali tra fattori così come li ritroviamo in *Introduzione alla tecnologia del design. Metodi e strumenti logici per la progettazione dell'ambiente costruito* (Ciribini, 1978) e *Tecnologia e progetto. Argomenti di cultura tecnologica della progettazione* (Ciribini, 1984); Giacomo Scarpini e il suo focus sugli attori di processo e sull'incidenza delle logiche politiche nell'evoluzione organizzativa della produzione.

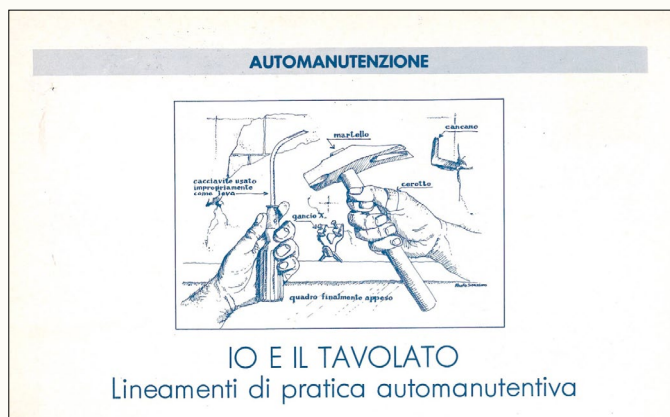
La produzione pubblicistica che ci porta alle soglie degli anni '90 vede anche numerose pubblicazioni su Rivista (*Recuperare*, *Prefabbricare*, *Modo* ecc.) che hanno per tema l'industrializzazione del componente e del sistema edilizio, le politiche del settore edilizio, i temi della casa. Si passa da contributi di cultura tecnologica nei quali traspare la grande esperienza maturata negli anni di progettazione dei manufatti prefabbricati alla Montecatini Edison, a gustosi testi (si veda ad esempio *Io e il tavolato. Lineamenti di pratica automanutentiva*, 1987

[7.5](#)) di supporto all'utente su come gestire i piccoli problemi di *edilizia della quotidianità*, fornendo consigli, nella forma del *vademecum semiserio*, per rendere l'utente, dove è possibile, indipendente dall'indotto delle professioni edili (elettricisti, muratori, idraulici,



7. Alberto Seassaro, *Io e il tavolato. Lineamenti di pratica automanutentiva*, in *Recuperare. Edilizia Design Impianti*, n. 31. [Documento →](#)

Figura 10.
Disegno di Alberto Seassaro
in *Recuperare. Edilizia Design*
Impianti, n. 31, 1987.



serramentisti ecc.). È un'intuizione, che resta in forma embrionale, della necessità di formare l'utente, di trasmettere e condividere esperienza che trova, oggi, grande diffusione in rete.

Queste tematiche lo terranno impegnato fino alla metà degli anni '80. Dalla fine degli anni '80 fino a tutti gli anni '90 le sue ricerche sono rivolte alla Progettazione Ambientale, in collaborazione con ENEA, ANIE, Istituto Galileo Ferraris di Torino, ENEI, AIDI (Associazione Italiana di Illuminazione), ecc. sviluppan-

do, in particolare, la tematica della illuminazione naturale e artificiale. Il tema della luce ripercorre, approfondisce e reinterpreta i primi interessi della sua carriera: l'estetica sperimentale, il mondo delle forme, il ruolo della luce nel plasmare forme e superfici.

La ripresa degli interessi tematici giovanili è da connettere alla sua nuova collocazione accademica nella neonata Facoltà del Design nella quale, a partire dal 1993, svolgerà le sue attività di didattica e ricerca.

Il libro riordina e sistematizza le risultanze del seminario permanente di Tecnologia dei materiali da costruzione, attivato a partire dall'anno accademico '83/'84 nell'ambito dell'Indirizzo tecnologico. Con il nuovo riordinamento degli studi delle Facoltà di Architettura, promosso per legge DPR 920 del 31.10.81, sono state istituite una serie di rilevanti innovazioni [...]. Con il DPR 920, dunque, si costituisce formalmente un'area disciplinare definita tecnologica che appare di latitudine molto vasta comprendendo un ampio arco di insegnamenti che vanno dalle discipline di progetto come il disegno industriale, la progettazione ambientale e la cultura tecnologica della progettazione a quelle programmatico-normative come i Metodi e tecniche della normazione edilizia, quelle di carattere produttivo, fino a quelle più specificamente tecnologiche. Dal nostro punto di vista di studiosi della produzione edilizia, che hanno a lungo lavorato per affermare questo indirizzo di lavoro,

[...], riappare significativamente la Tecnologia dei materiali da costruzione, un insegnamento che, pur appartenendo al tradizionale corpus disciplinare accademico degli studi in architettura, negli ultimi anni era stato ovunque disattivato ed espunto dai piani di studio. Il reinserimento di questa disciplina, in questo contesto rinnovato, ha assunto per noi un significato particolarmente rilevante ai fini dell'interpretazione delle tendenze presenti nell'architettura contemporanea. [...] I materiali da costruzione rappresentano, infatti, per la Tecnologia dell'architettura, in generale, e in modo particolare per le discipline che affrontano questo studio dal punto di vista produttivo, l'elemento centrale della *costruzione dell'ambiente artificiale*, il principio base della *trasformazione dell'ambiente fisico*, il fattore di produzione costitutivo del processo edilizio stesso: la materia a cui sono applicati i flussi di lavoro di informazione, di energia, nel corso dell'atto del produrre architettura. Le innovazioni tecnologiche, che operano implacabilmente ai livelli della produzione di materiali e componenti, della modificazione dei know-how tecnologici, dei procedimenti costruttivi, dell'organizzazione del lavoro nel cantiere, dell'organizzazione aziendale ecc., hanno trasformato nella sostanza il prodotto edilizio modificandone nel profondo la tradizione costruttiva.

Il suo aspetto esteriore resta quello di sempre, ma i materiali e i componenti sono cambiati nel profondo. Tutte le innovazioni tecnologiche portate ai materiali, in questo settore, sono prive di ogni elaborazione morfologica e simbolica, non sono diventate linguaggio. L'immagine della casa nasconde le innovazioni tecnologiche che ha inglobato nel suo processo produttivo; in edilizia l'innovazione è un'innovazione nascosta. Per usare una metafora consueta: se il processo industriale ha fatto diventare il lume una lampada e la carrozza un'automobile, la casa è rimasta ancora una casa aliena sostanzialmente da qualsiasi qualità innovativa.

L'interesse di Alberto Seassaro è quello di trattare la problematica generale dei materiali nel settore edilizio cercando di pervenire a una definizione del concetto di materiale che lo leghi all'evoluzione dei fattori di produzione [...].

L'edilizia, il settore che produce materialmente l'architettura può rischiare di apparire come un'isola separata e tranquilla, appoggia-

ta sulle certezze di una tradizione idealizzata e ideologizzata che, ripudiando la vocazione innovativa espressa storicamente dalle avanguardie architettoniche, si attarda ad elaborare un proprio specifico e particolare discorso postmoderno che non riesce ad essere post-industriale così come il movimento moderno non era riuscito ad essere industriale.

(*Produzione edilizia e tecnologia dei materiali*, 1985, a cura di Alberto Seassaro e Cesira Macchia, prefazione, pp. 1-4)

8.4 I progetti istituzionali

Gli anni '70 e '80 sono per Alberto Seassaro una vera e propria palestra di progetti per l'istituzione universitaria.

Questo terreno rappresenta infatti l'ulteriore luogo della sua *maturatione* dove si saldano gli interessi di ricerca e la vocazione politica.

Appena laureato, siamo alla metà degli anni '60, avanza, con Ugo la Pietra, il progetto di costituzione di un Centro di Arti Visive della Facoltà di Architettura. Progetto che non vedrà la luce ma che è già indizio della sua propensione a progettare trasformazioni organizzative finalizzate alla crescita di specifici ambiti culturali. Negli anni '70, più maturo, ma ancora senza un ruolo formale nell'Università, elabora una serie di proposte finalizzate alla ridefinizione delle *aree disciplinari*, cavalcando il processo che accompagnerà, negli anni successivi, la nascita degli Istituti di Laurea e la trasformazione degli Istituti in Dipartimenti.

Negli anni '70 si realizzano, infatti, le premesse per alcuni passaggi chiave che, nel volgere di poco più di un decennio, porteranno, nei primi anni '80, alla nascita degli Istituti di laurea e in seguito, nei primi anni '90, all'articolazione dell'unico Corso di Laurea in Architettura in più Corsi di Laurea e poi in più Facoltà. Sul versante della ricerca, si assiste invece alla nascita degli Istituti finalizzati alla formazione dell'architetto, forma embrionale di quelli che saranno poi i Dipartimenti come li conosciamo nella loro forma attuale.

Gran parte di queste trasformazioni nascono sulla spinta delle pressioni studentesche.

Entrambi questi versanti, quello della didattica e quello della ricerca, vedono un Alberto Seassaro – alle soglie dei trent'anni – impegnato ad

normativa e metodologie di progettazione

Atti del seminario promosso dal
GRUPPO NAZIONALE C.N.R. "PRODUZIONE EDILIZIA"
tenutosi presso la sede dell'INARCH, Roma, giugno 1979

a cura di Alberto Seassaro

relazione generale di Enrico Fattinanzi
interventi di: Sergio Bracco, Gianfranco Carrara, Margherita De Simone, Valerio Di Battista, Gianpiero Donin, Remo Dorigati, Pietro N. Maggi, Elena Mortola, Antonella Ottai, Giovanni Salvestrini, Alberto Seassaro, Giuseppe Turchini.



la produzione del territorio settore delle costruzioni e programmazione edilizia

Atti del seminario promosso dal
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a cura di Alberto Seassaro

relazione e interventi di: Matilde Baifa Rivolta, Bianca Bottero, Cristina Cocchioni, Massimo D'Alessandro, Paolo Deganello, Mario De Grassi, Giorgio Gaetani, Franco Lattes, Tamara Levi, Ezio Manzini, Carlo Olmo, Piercarlo Palermo, Antonio Paris, Giulio Rizzo, Giacomo Scarpini, Alberto Seassaro.



Ezio ARLATI
Aurelio CORTESI
Paolo DEGANELLO
Valerio DI BATTISTA
Leonardo FIORI
Stefano GARAVENTA
Roberto QUERCI
Riccardo SARFATTI
Giacomo SCARPINI
Fabrizio SCHIAFFONATI
Alberto SEASSARO
Claudia SORLINI
Oliviero TRONCONI
Francesco VANNUCCINI
Edmondo VITIELLO

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STORIA E STRUTTURA
DEL SETTORE EDILIZIO
IN ITALIA DAL DOPOGUERRA A OGGI



progettazione e gestione del processo edilizio industrializzato

a cura di
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Figura 11.
Tratti dalla produzione pubblicitaria di Alberto Seassaro (fine anni '70-primi anni '80).

elaborare contenuti e strumenti tesi a indirizzare l'evoluzione in atto, convinto che le istanze degli studenti avessero trovato, da parte istituzionale, risposte poco più che formali.

Significativa è l'attivazione di un Laboratorio di *idee per il rinnovamento della cultura tecnica in architettura* denominato *Area di Ricerca Tecnologica della Facoltà di Architettura del Politecnico di Milano*. Il documento di proposta, cofirmato da Marco Zanuso, Raffaella Crespi, Leonardo Fiori (1970), contiene una severa critica alle riforme introdotte dalla Facoltà in risposta alle richieste studentesche, ritenendole vuote di contenuto e ridotte nell'impatto sulla formazione, in particolare rispetto al ruolo della ricerca per la didattica; ai temi della obsolescenza disciplinare; al problema della qualificazione tecnica di massa ecc. Il documento chiude con la necessità di rilanciare «l'impegno per la rifondazione disciplinare e la progettazione di una didattica di massa per una committenza alternativa» (p. 28).

Il documento, pur *datato* sia per alcune questioni strettamente connesse al contesto storico, sia per il linguaggio pienamente immerso nello *spirito del suo tempo*, contiene tuttavia molte questioni di carattere generale che il sistema universitario si è trovato a riaffrontare ogniqualvolta i cambiamenti sociali e tecnologici hanno spinto verso progetti di riforma dei suoi assetti formativi.

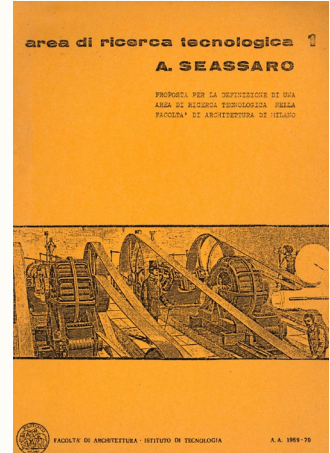
Il Laboratorio di idee si dota di un Bollettino, diretto per anni da Alberto Seassaro, che avrà il ruolo di punteggiare le diverse tappe del processo di ridefinizione disciplinare, facendo da megafono alle iniziative politiche e culturali [8](#) [9](#) [10](#).

Queste iniziative, come anche quelle del CNR condotte a livello nazionale, rappresentano tasselli significativi nello sviluppo di una linea culturale di promozione della autonomia disciplinare della Tecnologia dell'architettura.

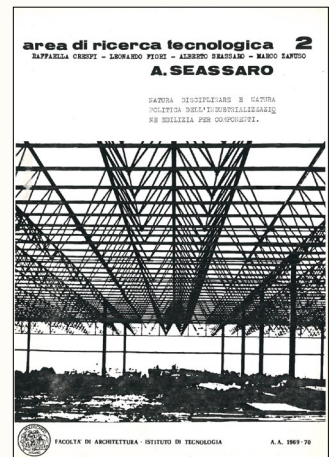
Agli inizi degli anni '80, la maturità nella organizzazione e gestione di programmi istituzionali complessi, si presenta in modo evidente nella progettazione e poi coordinamento (dal 1981 al 1989) dell'Indirizzo di Tecnologia dell'architettura – uno degli Indirizzi del Corso di Laurea di Architettura – punto di inizio di importanti sperimentazioni, di apertura di nuove linee di



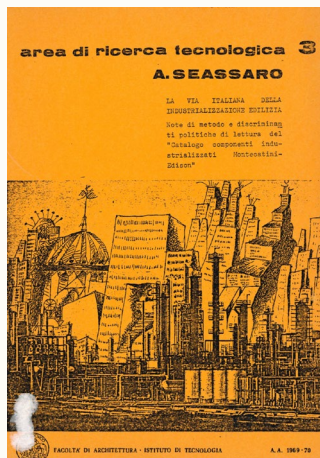
8. Alberto Seassaro, *Area di Ricerca Tecnologica 1, Proposta per la definizione di una area di Ricerca Tecnologica nella Facoltà di Architettura di Milano*, A.A. 1969-70.
[Documento→](#)



9. Alberto Seassaro, Raffaella Crespi, Leonardo Fiori, Marco Zanuso, *Area di Ricerca Tecnologica 2, Natura disciplinare e natura politica dell'industrializzazione edilizia per componenti*.
[Documento→](#)



10. Alberto Seassaro,
**Area di Ricerca
 Tecnologica 3, La
 via italiana della
 industrializzazione
 edilizia, A.A. 1969-70.**
[Documento →](#)



lavoro che risulteranno anticipatrici di quello che verrà dopo. Anticiperanno cioè l'incarico di Presidente di Corso di laurea in Disegno industriale – ruolo assunto informalmente nel '93 e formalmente nel 1995 –, e poi di Preside della Facoltà del Design nel 2000, e infine di costruttore di un grande Sistema universitario: il Sistema Design Italiano.

Il lavoro, che sta dietro all'attivazione di questo percorso di Studi, è sintetizzato in questa tabella scriptografica, da lui stesso redatta, che illustra gli insegnamenti che compongono l'Indirizzo [11](#). Mentre il coordinamento dell'Indirizzo di Tecnologia dell'architettura si può considerare, al contempo, punto di arrivo del lungo percorso trasformativo della Facoltà di Architettura e trampolino di lancio delle sue successive innovazioni, nelle quali Alberto Seassaro avrà un ruolo di rilievo, le risultanze teoriche e politiche delle attività culturali e di ricerca sui caratteri strutturali del sistema edilizio e sul mercato del lavoro tecnico-intellettuale nel settore delle costruzioni, le ritroviamo nel progetto istitutivo del Dipartimento di Programmazione e Produzione edilizia (1979-80). Si chiude così un ciclo che ha fatto da incubatore di esperienza istituzionale e di cultura tecnologica e se ne apre uno nuovo di cui non è difficile scorgerne le ascendenze: è il ciclo del Design universitario, cimento e sfida di un Alberto Seassaro nella sua piena maturità accademica.

11. Progetto di iter
 didattico per l'Indirizzo
 Tecnologico.
[Documento →](#)



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9. Due o tre cose che so di lui

Luciano Crespi

Già docente al Politecnico di Milano

Tutti vi diranno che non sono un musicista. È vero. Fin dagli inizi della mia carriera mi sono subito collocato tra i fonometrografi. I miei lavori sono pura fonometrografia. Si prenda *Fils des Étoiles*, le *Morceaux en forme de poire*, *En habit de cheval*, le *Sarabandes*: si percepisce che nessuna idea musicale ha presieduto alla creazione di queste opere. È il pensiero scientifico a dominare. (Satie, 2010)

Così iniziano le *Mémoires d'un amnésique* di Erik Satie (Satie, 2010). Penso che ad Alberto Seassaro piacerebbe sottoscrivere un'affermazione del genere, di un personaggio innovatore e dadaista irriverente ma nient'affatto sprovveduto, sostituendo soltanto designer a *musicien* e l'illuminotecnica alla fonometrica. Lo racconterebbe sfoggiando, con aria un po' *blasé*, una delle sue inimitabili cravatte sottili all'uncinetto e la giacca dalle tasche così zeppe di matite e pennarelli da sembrare un miracolo delle leggi della statica. Ricordo bene uno dei giovani professori in carriera frequentanti, negli anni '80, le leggendarie stanze di via Bonardi, sede del dipartimento di PPPE – da cui ha inizio la lunga storia destinata a concludersi con la nascita della Facoltà del Design –

affermare un po' sornione che così vestendosi mai l'avrebbero fatto diventare ordinario. E ricordo anche di non aver mai sentito Alberto Seassaro sostenere di essere un designer: per questo non poteva che essere lui a fondare la prima Facoltà di Design in Italia. Senza rinunciare, come Satie, a depistarci, a lasciarci credere di essere anarchico, a usare un tono scanzonato anche nelle occasioni più importanti e mantenendo, al tempo stesso, un sottile senso delle istituzioni unito alla capacità di non perdere di vista ogni piccolo dettaglio del mondo che lo circonda per poterlo inscrivere nel disegno che ha in mente. Per capire meglio occorre fare un passo indietro.

Il 7 settembre 2020 *Domusweb* pubblica un mio breve testo intitolato *In ricordo di Alberto Seassaro, padre della Facoltà del design del Politecnico di Milano* ¹, in cui sostengo che il documento del gennaio 1970 intitolato *Proposta per la definizione di una Area di ricerca tecnologica nella Facoltà di Architettura di Milano* (Crespi, Fiori, Zanuso, Seassaro, 1970) – firmato anche da Raffaella Crespi, Leonardo Fiori e Marco Zanuso, ma certamente scritto da Alberto Seassaro ¹ – contenga *in nuce* molte delle idee destinate a guidare il cammino di avvicinamento alla nascita della Facoltà di Design. Ne sono ancora convinto. A quella data Alberto Seassaro arriva dopo essersi laureato in Architettura nel 1964 e dopo avere svolto indagini su prefabbricazione e unificazione edilizia per conto sia di enti di ricerca nazionali come il CNR sia di aziende di grande prestigio come Montecatini

Edison, per la quale svolge studi e sperimentazioni progettuali sui componenti edilizi. Fondamentale per la sua formazione è la collaborazione con Giuseppe Ciribini, figura di riferimento dell'area tecnologica, di cui è assistente a Torino prima di diventare professore a Milano alla fine degli anni '60.



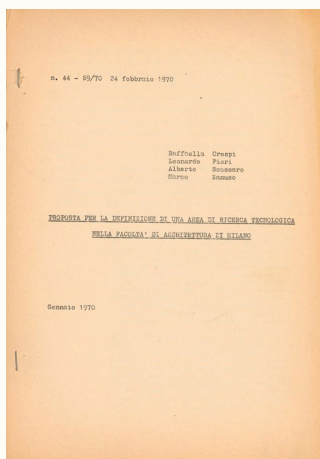
1. Luciano Crespi, In ricordo di Alberto Seassaro, padre della Facoltà del Design del Politecnico di Milano. Documento →



Nota 1.

Il documento, infatti, è preceduto da altri dal contenuto analogo firmati soltanto da Alberto Seassaro (Cfr. Seassaro, 1969 e 1970).

2. Proposta per la
definizione di una area di
Ricerca tecnologica nella
Facoltà di Architettura di
Milano.
Documento→



Nota 2.

Del 1967 è anche il film di Jean-Luc Godard, *Due o tre cose che so di lei*. Lei è Parigi, lo scopo principale del film è capire non come si possa cambiare la società ma come si possa convivere con essa.

Negli stessi anni redige diversi documenti finalizzati alla discussione sul tema della costituzione di un'area disciplinare di Tecnologia nelle Facoltà di Architettura, tra cui appunto questo citato (ibidem) 25.

Il documento inizia con la denuncia della condizione di stallo in cui si trova la *sperimentazione*, il processo di rifondazione disciplinare attivato nella Facoltà a partire dal 1967 25 e imperniato su un modello didattico che prevede la sostituzione degli insegnamenti monodisciplinari con i *Gruppi di ricerca*. Stallo dovuto «non solo alla insufficiente radicalità di applicazione» del modello e «alla mistificazione con cui la docenza ha voluto interpretarlo, ma anche e soprattutto alla superficialità con cui è stato espresso e proposto» (ibidem). Di fronte all'avanzato stato di dequalificazione disciplinare dell'università italiana, e in particolare delle Facoltà di architettura, operare una scelta tra due modelli di formazione: tra una scuola come centro di preparazione della nuova «aristocrazia politica, futura classe di burocrati» e «una scuola di massa, funzionale alla società nel suo insieme, nella prospettiva della lotta di classe» (ibidem). Considero l'ultimo punto cruciale. Nel 1970, per effetto della liberalizzazione degli accessi all'università, successiva alle lotte degli studenti, la popolazione studentesca del Politecnico è aumentata a circa 6500 studenti. Il documento mette in evidenza come questo dato insieme al processo generale in atto di *proletarizzazione degli intellettuali*, sia destinato a provocare, in particolare, la perdita di potere decisionale della figura dell'architetto, grazie anche alla presenza, nel processo di produzione del territorio, di altre figure più funzionali al sistema e destinate a relegarlo sempre più in ruoli marginali. La risposta data dalla sperimentazione al problema viene ritenuta polarizzata su due atteggiamenti speculari, entrambi inadeguati: quello che porta al rifiuto della disciplina, ritenuta patrimonio della classe dominante, e quello votato alla sua *accademizzazione*. Le soluzioni proposte nel documento si dispongono su due piani: su quello politico, con l'obiettivo della creazione di un rapporto strutturale – non *sovrastrutturale* – tra tecnici e classe operaia nella lotta per il disvelamento dell'intreccio che intercorre tra scienza, tecnologia e loro uso capitalistico.

Su quello etico – ma anche funzionale al miglioramento dell'offerta didattica – con il contrasto al professionalismo (inteso sia come uso, da parte del docente, dell'università, al fine della promozione della propria attività professionale, sia come trasformazione della didattica in mezzo di trasmissione del patrimonio tecnico e strumentale proprio del professionismo) e la rifondazione disciplinare attraverso «la negazione della dequalificazione disciplinare e la costruzione di una didattica di massa per una committenza alternativa» (ibidem). Il paragrafo conclusivo del documento, intitolato *Ruolo politico della tecnologia*, parte dall'esame del rapporto tra teoria e prassi architettonica nel dopoguerra; denuncia l'incapacità delle componenti più autorevoli della cultura del progetto di cogliere la «crisi dell'architettura come crisi di fiducia nella committenza che di questa disciplina è generatrice» e propone un esame critico, anche nelle Scuole di Architettura, del ruolo della tecnologia e delle nozioni di *razionalità tecnologica* e *spreco razionalizzante* – di matrice habermasiana³². L'obiettivo è di una revisione generale degli insegnamenti tecnologici, in grado di conferire loro il carattere di *disciplina globalizzante* e di riempire il vuoto lasciato dalla cultura architettonica con la scelta, da una parte di operare prevalentemente alla scala della città, e dall'altra di aspirare a una «pura ricerca formale vuota di preoccupazioni tecnologiche» (ibidem). In questo scenario la Tecnologia dell'architettura viene definita come «studio dei problemi che si riferiscono a tutti i processi tecnici capaci di rendere fisicamente percepibile l'immagine di spazio inteso come luogo delle attività umane alle varie scale» (ibidem). In questa parte del documento si ritrovano concetti esposti in diverse altre occasioni anche da Marco Zanuso (Grignolo, 2013; Crespi, Tedeschi, Viati, 2020; Zanuso, 1987) e presenti nelle ricerche svolte precedentemente da Alberto Seassaro sui componenti industrializzati (Seassaro, 1969; AA.VV., 1971). Il documento si iscrive nel periodo storico 1969-1971 in cui Alberto Seassaro fa parte, con Crespi, Fiori e Zanuso, del gruppo di ricerca tecnologica interno all'Istituto di Composizione di Architettura a Milano ed è professore incaricato a Milano, dopo essere stato assistente di Giuseppe Ciribini a Torino. Non ho occasione di frequentarlo molto, per via delle mie maggiori affinità politiche col gruppo di ricerca *Città fabbrica* di Magnaghi, Perelli, Sarfatti e Stevan, alle cui attività partecipo, e successi-

Nota 3.

Soprattutto nelle parti più politiche di tutti i documenti sono frequenti i riferimenti a economisti dell'area del *Manifesto* piuttosto che alla cultura operaista erede dei *Quaderni rossi* di Raniero Panzieri rappresentata da Mario Tronti e Sergio Bologna, che mi pare di ricordare avere per qualche tempo insegnato ad Architettura.

vamente con il gruppo di Bianca Bottero e Giorgio Gaetani. Quando nel 1974 mi laureo ho come relatore Cesare Stevan, non ufficiale essendo tra i professori a cui è stato revocato l'incarico dal Comitato tecnico. Non ricordo chi abbia firmato il documento di laurea all'ultimo momento al posto suo, il clima era quello.

Gli anni '70 sono quelli della normalizzazione. Nell'anno accademico 1977-1978 la Facoltà assume come tema unificante degli insegnamenti l'ambito *Abitazioni, classi sociali e territorio* ritenuto di grande rilevanza sociale e capace di rispondere alla domanda di formazione di nuovi soggetti sociali destinati a intervenire nelle realtà del Paese.

È strutturato in base a filoni tematici, ciascuno articolato in *Unità didattiche*. Seassaro, professore incaricato stabilizzato di *Tecnologia dell'architettura*, è presente nel Filone tematico 2, *Processi produttivi per l'edilizia* con l'Unità didattica *Cronaca tecnologica degli anni '60* e anche nel Filone tematico 3 i cui docenti, rifiutando di auto etichettarsi con titolazioni nelle quali non si riconoscono (nella lottizzazione dei filoni... doveva essere il filone dei *bisognisti*), preferiscono chiamarsi *Il privato è politico*. La sua unità didattica *La casa alternativa* prevede la critica all'ideologia dell'abitare e la messa in discussione di tutti i luoghi comuni di cui l'architettura si è accontentata per ottenere una pratica rinnovata del progettare.

Gli anni '80 rappresentano il periodo di *incubazione* dell'idea della Facoltà del design. Seassaro è animatore con Fabrizio Schiaffonati di tutte le iniziative culturali e istituzionali che porteranno alla costituzione dell'Istituto di Tecnologia dell'architettura del Politecnico di Milano rivestendo in modo informale i compiti di direzione fino alla elezione nel 1979 di Fabrizio Schiaffonati che, nel frattempo era diventato Ordinario; dal 1979 al 1981 è direttore del Gruppo Nazionale CNR Produzione Edilizia, Roma; nel 1980 promuove l'istituzione del Gruppo Nazionale Produzione Edilizia del CNR, che presiede fino al 1984 partecipando al Consiglio Scientifico fino al 1994. Dal 1981 al 1989 è presidente del Consiglio di Indirizzo Tecnologico del CdL in Architettura del Politecnico di Milano. È in questo *brodo primordiale* che si formano le condizioni per poter istituire prima il Corso di Laurea e poi la Facoltà di Design.

Quando vengo coinvolto da Fabrizio Schiaffonati nella ricerca, all'inizio degli anni '80, l'Area tecnologica stava acquisendo una propria identità, sancita da due congressi, del 1984 e del 1987. Marco Zanuso

diventa, nel 1984, professore ordinario di *Disegno industriale*, dopo quasi dieci anni di insegnamento di *Progettazione artistica per l'industria*. Cesare Stevan afferma:

Il 1984 è stata la tappa finale: passò quindi l'idea di avere un Indirizzo di Laurea per promuovere un Corso di Laurea in Disegno industriale. La realizzazione vide passare ancora dieci anni, dall'84 al '93, e quasi altrettanti per riuscire ad arrivare alla fine da me auspicata di una Facoltà del Design. La cosa era da me auspicata non solo astrattamente, per ragioni culturali, perché vedevo in questa apertura sul design una cultura nuova, aperta, che affrontasse le nuove realtà di progetto, ma ci tenevo anche perché è stata, dalla fondazione del Politecnico, l'unica vera innovazione dell'Ateneo: passare da due a tre Facoltà 3. (Stevan, 2023)

Sono anche gli anni in cui la *Cultura tecnologica del progetto*, coltivata da figure come Giuseppe Ciribini (Ciribini, 1995) e Enzo Frateili (Frateili, 1991), il pensiero dei quali ha grande influenza sulla didattica del design, svolge un ruolo determinante di raccordo tra tecnologia, progetto di architettura e disegno industriale.



3. Cesare Stevan,
Professore Emerito del
Politecnico di Milano.
[Documento→](#)

Quando Alberto Seassaro avvia il processo di fondazione della Facoltà di Design gli studenti sono diventati migliaia, il processo di de-qualificazione della figura del *tecnico architetto* è entrato in una fase avanzata e quello di *proletarizzazione degli intellettuali*, analizzato nel documento del 1970 come possibile condizione per la diffusione di una coscienza anticapitalista, si intossica con il nuovo clima di restaurazione culturale degli anni '90. Anni in cui, con l'entrata in vigore del *nuovo ordinamento*, in risposta alla direttiva 85/384 che definisce le competenze dell'architetto europeo, vengono attivati nelle Facoltà di Architettura i *Laboratori di costruzione dell'architettura*, costituiti da più moduli integrati con capofila i docenti dell'area della *Tecnologia dell'architettura* appartenenti al SSD ICAR/12. Nel mese di settembre 1995 si tiene a Venezia il primo incontro nazionale, coordinato da Nicola Sinopoli, sui risultati dei laboratori (Tatano, 1996), con il compito di mettere a confronto le esperienze condotte nelle diverse sedi. A rappresentare Milano sono i docenti afferenti al Dipartimento DiTec, erede del vecchio PPPE, sono incaricati di *Progettazione di sistemi costruttivi*,

insegnamento caratterizzante il laboratorio, integrato da un modulo di *Progettazione architettonica* e uno di *Progettazione strutturale*.

Sono dell'idea (fondata solo su elementi indiziari) che Alberto Seassaro avesse valutato inopportuno inserire *Disegno industriale* nei Laboratori di Costruzione, per scongiurare il pericolo di finire a svolgere un ruolo di *servizio* alla Tecnologia dell'architettura, nel momento in cui aveva già in mano le carte da giocare per avviare il processo di riconoscimento del Design come settore scientifico disciplinare autonomo dall'ICAR 12 [43](#).

Ciò che accade alla fine del secolo è cosa nota. Se ripensiamo al contenuto dei documenti del 1970 viene facile pensare che il progetto del *Si-*

stema Design, costituito da Facoltà, Consorzio e Dipartimento, rappresenti un'offerta formativa destinata a rispondere ai problemi, dalla dequalificazione della figura dell'architetto alla necessità di cambiamento radicale di competenze richieste al progettista, allora già individuati, e a istituzionalizzarne gli embrioni di proposte. Si tratta di un'idea di design che va molto oltre quella comunemente intesa di disegno del prodotto industriale e nella quale si ritrovano, a darle il carattere di disciplina ad alto contenuto di innovazione e di suggestioni transcultu-

Nota 4.

ICAR 12 e ICAR 13 rimangono associati nel settore concorsuale SC08/1.

Figura 1.

Presentazione di libro di Ugo La Pietra (2009). Da sinistra, nella foto: Beppe Finessi, Gillo Dorfles, Ugo La Pietra, Arturo Dell'Acqua Bellavitis, Luciano Crespi, Alberto Seassaro.



rali, le sperimentazioni progettuali condotte con Ugo La Pietra negli anni '60, gli studi sui *Morfemi*, le ricerche sul rapporto arte e scienza, i progetti di installazioni, la conoscenza del mondo dell'arte.

Un mix di componenti che entrano nel disegno di una Scuola di progetto, un luogo di formazione affatto originale rispetto a quelli esistenti nel mondo nel campo del design e nel quale la tecnica è vista come supporto a un pensiero critico, impegnato a cambiare il nostro modo di vivere, lavorare e abitare.

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10. Catalizzare energie e idee. Il ruolo di Alberto Seassaro all'origine del Corso di Laurea in *Disegno Industriale* al Politecnico di Milano

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Ci sono momenti che segnano importanti evoluzioni istituzionali. Problemi da lungo tempo latenti trovano sbocco per un insieme di convergenze e opportunità in grado di pervenire a sintesi. Così studi, teorie, istanze sociali e soggettive, precipitano in una soluzione come in una reazione chimica che dà luogo a un nuovo prodotto. Questi repentini cambiamenti sono quasi sempre legati a figure in grado di catalizzare energie e idee. La funzione del leader, come dell'imprenditore con la capacità d'innovare, secondo l'accezione di Schumpeter. La capacità cioè di progettare sull'ordine delle cose nuovi processi organizzativi e tecnologici.

Accingendomi a scrivere questo contributo, Schumpeter mi è tornato alla memoria non casualmente. Mi ha ricordato un Convegno tenutosi a Roma nei primi anni Ottanta, presso il CNR, promosso dal *Gruppo Produzione Edilizia* che associava docenti di *Tecnologia dell'architettura* e alcuni di *Composizione architettonica* di diverse facoltà. Ci univa già da un decennio un diverso approccio, rispetto a un redivivo accademismo, per analizzare la complessità del processo progettuale nelle sue fasi, coi diversi attori, il contesto normativo, l'organizzazione

produttiva e le innovazioni tecniche, nell'ottica economica dei cicli edilizi e delle problematiche del cantiere.

Il CNR aveva riconosciuto questo nostro raggruppamento che annualmente presentava richieste di finanziamento di ricerche tra loro coordinate. Finanziamenti che ci consentivano di promuovere seminari, incontri e convegni come quello di Roma.

Durante il Convegno si resocontava sull'avanzamento delle varie ricerche che presentavano anche diverse interfacce con imprese di costruzioni, istituzioni ed enti del settore. Di quelle due giornate di lavori i contributi dei diversi colleghi a distanza di anni sfumano, mentre spicca ancora nella mia memoria l'intervento di Alberto Seassaro.

Alberto Seassaro affrontò il tema della innovazione tecnologica, non tanto con riferimento ai processi in atto, ma in termini generali e proiettivi richiamando il pensiero di Schumpeter, penso ai più sconosciuti. Una vera e propria relazione, articolata e approfondita che ci lasciò stupiti perché di questi suoi studi tutt'altro che imparaticci non ne avevamo avuto sentore, né ne aveva fatto cenno a noi milanesi quando ci incontravamo per coordinare l'attività didattica e di ricerca.

In quella sua relazione, che spero non sia andata persa, Alberto Seassaro intuiva che di lì a poco l'innovazione tecnologica avrebbe determinato un repentino salto rispetto ai metodi già evoluti della produzione edilizia e progettuale, per evolvere verso uno scenario del tutto nuovo. Il che comportava il superamento di logiche e metodologie codificate, per aprirsi alla cultura pragmatica e sperimentale del design. Detto oggi sembra scontato, noi tecnologi eravamo sì a conoscenza del *component approach* anglosassone ma eravamo attestati su l'economicismo e l'operaismo dei nostri riferimenti ideologici sessantottini. La nostra forza ma anche il nostro limite. Alberto Seassaro diceva che bisognava andare oltre, che il valore aggiunto incorporato nei nuovi prodotti che arrivavano in cantiere mutava radicalmente la concezione e le modalità della progettazione e della costruzione dell'architettura.

Per quelle associazioni mentali che rimandano al nostro vissuto, mentre scrivo faccio un altro salto indietro che mi ha visto con Alberto Seassaro protagonista, in occasione della Biennale di Architettura di Venezia del 1980 diretta da Paolo Portoghesi. Il programma contemplava le due mostre *La presenza del passato, Venezia e lo spazio scenico* e il lavoro del nostro Gruppo Produzione Edilizia intitolato *Lavorare in*

architettura, di cui Portoghesi mi affidò la direzione. Una sorta di laboratorio, in controtendenza alla spettacolare *Via Novissima* del rampante effimero Postmodernismo, che ci consentì di documentare le nostre idee in diversi seminari, incontri, dibattiti.

In quell'occasione ebbi l'idea, memore della mia giovanile passione cinefila, di proporre alla RAI un filmato dallo stesso titolo, appunto *Lavorare in architettura*. Stesi una accurata sceneggiatura, di ferro come si diceva in gergo, con i luoghi, le figure da intervistare, i testi delle voci fuori campo. Fu accettato e messa a disposizione una *troupe pesante* per le riprese. Un lungometraggio di più di un'ora che andò in onda in prima serata su Rai 3, visto da molti perché sulle altre reti si discuteva di risultati elettorali.

Avevo previsto una figura che funzionasse da legante tra le scene, le interviste e i contesti che documentavano i diversi approcci alla progettazione e costruzione dell'architettura, sullo sfondo delle dinamiche sociali che avrebbero dato luogo al processo riformista degli anni '80, con l'urbanistica e l'edilizia pubblica al centro della politica.

Avevo pensato ad un attore, ma subito scartai l'idea perché Alberto Seassaro era la persona giusta, non aveva bisogno di entrare nella parte e la sua figura dinoccolata di moderno cowboy ben si confaceva. Gli consegnai la sceneggiatura con poche parole. Accettò subito. Puntualmente era sul set, per le interviste a braccio e presente nei diversi momenti in cui si snodava la narrazione. Poi con Paolo Luciani procedemmo al montaggio e al commento sonoro.

Ho parlato di questi antefatti perché, tra i tanti che potrei rammentare, mi paiono emblematici di una personalità particolarmente volitiva che ha segnato il processo di rinnovamento didattico avviatosi negli anni '80 e che avrebbe portato a ridelineare i Corsi di laurea della Facoltà di Architettura di Milano, con ricadute anche in altre facoltà.

Il riferimento in particolare è al Corso di Laurea di *Disegno Industriale* e poi alla nuova Facoltà.

L'istituzione del Corso di Laurea in *Disegno Industriale* ha rappresentato infatti nel Politecnico di Milano, sul finire del secolo scorso, un rinnovamento d'una importanza pari alla costituzione nel 1932 della Facoltà di Architettura. Una iniziativa didattica e di ricerca in grado di coinvolgere le Facoltà di Architettura e Ingegneria in un progetto condiviso, superando consolidate diffidenze.

Il principale artefice è stato senza dubbio Alberto Seassaro. Di comune formazione nell'area della *Composizione architettonica*, con Alberto Seassaro appena laureati abbiamo condiviso la propensione per l'approfondimento della *Tecnologia dell'architettura*, attivandoci nel decennio successivo per la costituzione di un Istituto, di cui nel 1979 ho assunto la direzione.

Allievi di Rogers, Belgiojoso, Albini, arrivati in cattedra a Milano a seguito delle nostre contestazioni a un *ancien regime* dell'insegnamento restio a tener conto della ventata del primo Centrosinistra, con l'urbanistica al centro del dibattito politico. Anche l'architettura ne veniva investita e noi con l'improntitudine giovanile radicalizzavamo la contrapposizione ad una professione acritica rispetto la speculazione edilizia.

Una contestazione poi sfociata nelle tensioni degli anni '70, con la sospensione di Portoghesi e dei nostri Maestri, a cui fece seguito la nostra di una quindicina di docenti incaricati.

Dopo il reintegro di tutti i docenti sospesi, noi tecnologi ci eravamo allontanati dalle posizioni estreme di rifiuto del progetto come atto compromissorio e ci eravamo posti in posizione critica rispetto ad un riaffiorante accademismo, sostenendo un approccio al progetto che partiva dagli aspetti strutturali del processo edilizio e da un ruolo autonomo rispetto alla funzione ancillare alla *Composizione architettonica* precedentemente svolta dagli insegnamenti propedeutici degli *Elementi costruttivi*. Rimarcavamo la dizione *edilizia* per segnare la distanza da una posizione idealistica, espressa da Benedetto Croce in *Aesthetica in nuce*, di una gerarchia tra architettura ed edilizia. Un percorso che porterà, appunto, alla istituzione prima dell'Istituto di Tecnologia e subito dopo, nel 1980, del Dipartimento di Programmazione, Produzione, Progettazione Edilizia (PPPE). Una iniziativa in grado di catalizzare molteplici interessi interdisciplinari.

In questa direzione Alberto Seassaro si caratterizzò per una non comune ampiezza di vedute con la curatela, nel 1979, di *Storia e struttura del settore edilizio. In Italia dal dopoguerra ad oggi*, con i contributi dei docenti che nel 1980 sarebbero confluiti nel Dipartimento PPPE. Il primo in Italia d'area tecnologica. Io e Alberto Seassaro redigemmo il documento programmatico, condiviso da Marco Zanuso e poi da lui presentato con autorevolezza al vaglio Commissione d'Ateneo per la successiva approvazione ministeriale.

Fui quindi eletto Direttore del Dipartimento per sei anni, nel corso dei quali ci rafforzammo con la chiamata di Tomás Maldonado dal DAMS di Bologna e Achille Castiglioni da Torino. Il successo della iniziativa, che raggruppava una sessantina tra docenti e assistenti, fece sì che Eduardo Vittoria, componente del Consiglio Nazionale Universitario, il CUN, e amico di Zanuso anche per la comune esperienza olivettiana, mi sollecitasse a promuovere un Corso di Specializzazione in *Disegno industriale*.

La realtà professionale e produttiva milanese era fertile per tale iniziativa, di non facile approvazione ministeriale se non adeguatamente strutturata. Un Corso di Specializzazione postlaurea, riservato quindi a un ristretto numero di allievi che vi potevano accedere previo esame di ammissione. Una ipotesi quindi elitaria e ristretta, ma che per Vittoria avrebbe consentito di aprire una breccia nelle Facoltà di Architettura alla sorda resistenza a più ampie innovazioni disciplinari.

La visione di Vittoria, memore della sua esperienza americana, metteva in luce i limiti degli insegnamenti di *Arredamento* e *Architettura degli interni* sempre più lontani dalla cultura della progettazione degli oggetti d'uso. Così a Milano, con Carlo De Carli che si era spostato su posizioni vicine alla progettazione architettonica con la teoria dello *Spazio primario*, e il ruolo marginale di Alberto Rosselli, poi prematuramente scomparso, che aveva invece ben presente la dimensione anglosassone del design. Anche i rapporti con il capillare retroterra della produzione del mobile in Brianza nel contesto didattico erano venuti meno e la Triennale nata da quella realtà produttiva si era ormai incanalata su altre strade.

La progettazione di elementi di arredo era ormai dominio della professione, in un redditizio mercato che andava rapidamente crescendo per soddisfare nuovi bisogni, cambiamenti di costumi e stili di vita, senza alcuna forma didattica in grado di operare per la formazione dei futuri designer.

Condividendo l'istanza di Vittoria; mi attivai quindi per istruire la non semplice procedura per un Corso di Specializzazione e nel Consiglio degli Ordinari del Dipartimento proposi una commissione coordinata da Zanuso con Maldonado e Castiglioni. Dopo un congruo tempo Zanuso mi riferì delle difficoltà incontrate per la poca disponibilità dei colleghi a strutturare la proposta. Pertanto, l'iniziativa non ebbe seguito.

Ma il tema rimaneva d'attualità. Se ne discuteva e, sul finire degli anni '80, si pensò di riprendere l'iniziativa per trovare sbocco a una domanda di formazione che nel contesto milanese aveva trovato risposta in diverse scuole private anche di successo, valutando invece – in una favorevole fase di revisione degli ordinamenti didattici – l'opportunità di promuovere un Corso di Laurea in *Disegno industriale*. Un'ipotesi non scontata e tutt'altro che facile. Con Alberto Seassaro se ne parlava spesso, assieme a Valerio Di Battista e Antonio Scoccimarro. La matrice non poteva che essere nella impostazione culturale del PPPE, con un orientamento pragmatico e interdisciplinare, aperto alla cultura anglosassone del design.

Agli inizi degli anni '90, decidemmo allora che era necessario impegnarci direttamente. In una cena tra noi quattro, con Alberto cuoco nella sua mansarda sui tetti di Corso Garibaldi, discutemmo fino a notte su chi di noi avrebbe dovuto assumersi il compito di dedicarsi a quel difficile progetto. Convenimmo che fosse Seassaro, anche per la sua frequentazione di designer e artisti, e i suoi importanti progetti giovanili col sodalizio di Ugo La Pietra.

Alberto Seassaro non si dichiarò subito disponibile, non nascondendosi le difficoltà e il grande impegno che tutto ciò avrebbe comportato. Passarono un paio di mesi in cui rivedendolo lo si sollecitava. Meditativo stava maturando la sua decisione. Poco dopo sciolse la riserva.

Un atteggiamento non nuovo. Il suo contributo allo sviluppo delle iniziative dipartimentali si caratterizzava per periodi in cui la sua presenza era latente, a cui seguiva un coinvolgente attivismo in attività didattiche e di ricerca. Allora trascinava, con una sistematicità organizzativa e una non comune conoscenza dei meccanismi istituzionali, altra faccia della sua personalità creativa.

Questo doppio registro è stato certamente alla base di una iniziativa che ha dell'incredibile, in un contesto restio a innovazioni. Probabilmente solo Seassaro poteva riuscire a coinvolgere tanti docenti d'altri settori disciplinari del Politecnico, figure culturali e professionisti esterni al mondo accademico.

Così nel 1993 ha preso avvio il Corso di Laurea in *Disegno Industriale*, a cui è seguito il Dipartimento e la Facoltà. Strada che sarebbe stata poi percorsa da altri atenei italiani. Mentre mi accingo a liquidare questa nota dove fatti oggettivi si intrecciano a ricordi personali, mi chiedo

se questo sia il modo migliore per un contributo ad un testo con lo scopo di delineare la figura di un docente che ha avuto un ruolo rilevante, come di frequente avviene nelle comunità scientifiche. Col tempo ho vieppiù attribuito valore a testimonianze e a episodi apparentemente marginali per mettere in giusta luce il rapporto che intercorre tra fatti noti e le motivazioni che li hanno indotti.

Questo tanto più per Alberto Seassaro che poco ha scritto, diversamente dalla bulimica produzione accademica. Non ne aveva il tempo, anomalo in quel mondo di frequente dedito ad accumulare titoli in una torre eburnea. Gli era chiaro che ogni ipotesi e teoria che alimenta la ricerca ha bisogno di essere messa in atto, per essere trasmessa e cambiare lo stato delle cose e produrre un effettivo avanzamento della conoscenza. Tanto più nella formazione universitaria che dovrebbe sintonizzarsi con i bisogni reali e le istanze della società. I punti di approdo quindi del suo pensiero si dovevano tradurre in fatti tangibili nell'evoluzione degli assetti didattici e dell'organizzazione della struttura universitaria.

Nel mio *Lettera a un aspirante architetto*, del 2021 – con una generosa prefazione di Paolo Portoghesi che ritorna ai momenti di quei rinnovamenti vissuti con Alberto – e in altri miei scritti approfondisco la conoscenza del contesto dove sono generate le iniziative di cui Seassaro è stato protagonista. In epigrafe ho riportato un pensiero di Kader Abdolah:

Quando sei giovane non ti rendi conto che in realtà i sentieri della tua vita sono già tracciati, e che devi semplicemente seguirli. Altri riescono a seguirli fino in fondo, altri si fermano a metà e altri ancora ne vengono allontanati. (Schiaffonati, 2021)

Alberto Seassaro il suo sentiero lo ha percorso fino in fondo, dedito ad un progetto che si è rivelato capace di catalizzare energie, di crescere nel tempo strutturandosi e adeguandosi ai cambiamenti. Come dovrebbe essere delle istituzioni per corrispondere ai bisogni e alle istanze sociali.

Un'ultima considerazione voglio aggiungere. Diverse volte mi sono interrogato su quale e come fosse il nostro rapporto, la nostra reciproca conoscenza. Abbiamo avuto percorsi accademici comuni, in vicen-

de condivise in un arco di oltre mezzo secolo. La nostra amicizia era diversa da come comunemente la si intende. Non confidenziale, come se ci fosse qualche impedimento. Abbiamo fatto viaggi assieme, con le nostre famiglie abbiamo condiviso case di vacanze, le occasioni conviviali e d'incontro erano frequenti. Ma tra di noi c'era sempre una certa riservatezza, più spiegabile la mia che quella di Alberto Seassaro con la sua apertura alle relazioni. Mai uno screzio, né un dissenso su come perseguire e portare a compimento progetti condivisi, frequenti gli scambi d'opinione senza però uno spreco di parole, senza girare in tondo ma venendo subito al nocciolo delle questioni. Un rispetto che ha caratterizzato il nostro rapporto.

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11. La costruzione del *Sistema Design* nel contesto delle discipline tecnologiche in Italia: come tutto partì da un *pinguino* andato a coordinare un gruppo di *pipistrelli*

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Se ripenso a quegli anni fra la chiusura del secolo scorso e l'inizio del nuovo, la figura di Alberto Seassaro si staglia netta e, direi, assoluta nella sua dimensione di *homo faber* del destino della disciplina universitaria del Disegno industriale. Guidato da ferma determinazione e da una visione che avrebbe potuto sembrare impraticabile, con doti di fine stratega, celate dall'ironia e da un atteggiamento *déagé* che non intimoriva il mondo degli architetti né li allertava sulle sue reali intenzioni, è riuscito a creare una realtà prima milanese e poi nazionale, compattando gruppi per loro natura diffidenti e dediti al fine gioco dell'ostruzionismo o dell'inerzia.

Mi trovo, oggi, a spiegare non come ciò sia potuto avvenire ma da cosa esso sia partito e, quindi, di chiarire come mai l'Area tecnologica delle Facoltà di Architettura si sia fatta promotrice di un moto di fiducia nella disciplina del design come materia da valorizzare in un progetto di formazione, portandola alla ribalta dell'Accademia in anni tardi, molto tardi, rispetto al successo che essa aveva già assunto sulla scena della professione, dell'impresa, del mercato e del consumo. Il tema chiede – non solo per la mia natura di storica – di risalire indietro in un momen-

to – gli anni '50 del Novecento –, in cui nelle discipline universitarie non esisteva né il *Disegno industriale* né la *Tecnologia dell'architettura*, ma lo scenario universitario aveva le caratteristiche odierne, seppur semplificate da un numero circoscritto di facoltà di architettura sul territorio nazionale – Venezia, Milano, Torino, Firenze, Roma, Napoli, Palermo – e da un altrettanto circoscritto numero di professori ordinari in grado, quindi, di costruire le loro politiche e i loro accordi con maggior facilità.

Cercherò di tratteggiare questa storia, per non annoiarvi, nel modo più sintetico, anche se fatta di circostanze, di attori e di situazioni che meriterebbero continui approfondimenti per restituirne tutta la temperie culturale. Sarà in parte condizionata dai miei trascorsi, essendomi affacciata allo studio della Storia del design a metà anni '70 del secolo scorso. Allora mi veniva fatto presente l'inutilità di studiare quella materia, con l'eccezione, ovviamente, dei miei mentori accademici: la mia *mamma* universitaria, Paola Barocchi, quando ero borsista alla Scuola Normale di Pisa, e il mio *babbo* universitario, Giovanni Klaus Koenig, quando da Pisa, già giovane ricercatore, mi sono trasferita alla Facoltà di Architettura di Firenze (1981-1982). Gli *altri*, tutti gli *altri*, professori universitari con i quali sono stata in contatto, dopo la morte improvvisa di Koenig nel 1989, accettavano la mia ricerca scientifica – perché, se Dio vuole, era contemplata la libertà di scelta – purché assolvessi le richieste didattiche che non prevedevano chiaramente gli argomenti ai quali mi dedicavo (parentesi necessaria: ho nel contempo studiato altro da me – e approfonditamente – per svolgere onestamente il compito formativo assegnatomi). Però chi con bonomia, chi con supponenza, chi anche a fin di bene, tutti mi indicavano l'assenza di un futuro accademico se continuavo per quella strada, finché, improvvisamente, a metà anni '90 del secolo scorso, io e le mie carte siamo diventati attuali e perfino utili! Vediamo come e perché.

11.1 Primi tentativi di promuovere il Disegno industriale dentro l'Università

In quei primi anni '50, si ha sentore dell'importanza del disegno industriale. È una disciplina nuova che il *soft power* americano cerca di promuovere, ad esempio, già nella IX Triennale (1951) come strumen-

to in grado di definire oggetti in serie, a basso costo, utili e di qualità, attestato dei traguardi di una civiltà democratica, di un modo di vivere liberale e di uno sviluppo tanto economico che sociale. Che l'Italia fosse priva di industrie in grado di assecondarlo, si rivela il nodo che porterà a presentare in sua vece come industriali oggetti realizzati con metodiche artigianali, dai contenuti qualitativamente e creativamente artistici, in una mistificazione fra arte decorativa e industriale che solo Alberto Rosselli, allora, dalle pagine di *Domus*, cerca di arginare, come poi lo farà con maggior autorevolezza, dal 1954, in quelle di *Stile Industria* (Rosselli, 2022).

Nota 1.

Le relazioni presentate al Congresso non ebbero al tempo l'onore di una pubblicazione. Si è rimediato in tempi recenti con la pubblicazione di *La memoria e il futuro*. Al momento la sola relazione di Argan fu pubblicata da lui stesso nella rivista *Aut aut*. Vi sottolineo un passaggio che ritengo altrettanto importante quando Argan propone di modificare i programmi delle scuole a carattere umanistico per "armonizzare la cultura dei 'professionisti' al tipo di cultura che si definisce attraverso le varie specie di design". Penso che Argan alludesse ai licei classici, quelli che davano accesso a ogni Facoltà universitaria secondo la riforma Gentile, affinché il giovane studente, una volta laureato e diventato un *professionista* a qualsiasi titolo, fosse in grado di valutare l'importanza non peregrina del progetto nella definizione di un prodotto, qualora per motivi professionali si fosse trovato in una situazione valutativa. Ricordo, ancora, che una selezione delle relazioni, commentata, viene pubblicata intorno al 1960 da Pierluigi Spadolini nelle sue dispense sul disegno industriale, nella III parte intitolata *Commenti alla critica dell'Industrial Design* e a questo proposito cfr. nel recente libro da me curato sulla figura di Giovanni Klaus Koenig, il mio saggio *Koenig e l'industrial design*.

Come ben sappiamo, il 1954 sarà un anno importante per il disegno industriale: nasce, nel giugno, una rivista totalmente dedicata alla materia, *Stile Industria*, appunto, affidata a Rosselli; viene creato dalla Rinascente un premio, il *Compasso d'oro*, per quegli industriali che nel loro prodotto esprimano valori, tecnici ed estetici, di cultura industriale; mentre la X Triennale, incardinata sulla presentazione dei traguardi, nazionali e internazionali, della disciplina, ospiterà nell'ottobre, un Congresso internazionale che tratterà con respiro i suoi temi, nella speranza di dare rassicuranti certezze da cui partire. Giulio Carlo Argan, che aveva ricoperto ruoli importanti come funzionario delle antichità e belle arti, senza al contempo disdegnare l'impegno sui temi dell'educazione artistica, la prassi dell'insegnamento universitario e il confronto con l'attualità del progetto industriale, vi partecipa con una relazione che resterà un punto di partenza per i cultori della disciplina, nella quale lancia la proposta di creare «una grande Scuola di design [...] a caratteri internazionale»¹⁹.

L'idea non era nuova. In Italia si comincia a discutere il problema dell'insegnamento artistico già alla fine della Prima Guerra mondiale, di fronte all'infelice confronto delle nostre produzioni con quelle straniere che si appalesa con la riapertura dei mercati (Tonelli Michail, 1987). Il dibattito porta a un nulla di fatto e riprende nel secondo dopoguerra: *mutatis mutandis*, se prima era rivolto all'educazione dell'artigiano-artiere, ora alla formazione di un tecnico a servizio dell'industria. Non è solo un problema di materie e di contenuti – che potrebbe

essere risolto mediando l'esperienza delle Scuole estere, ben documentata da Rosselli in *Stile Industria* – ma anche di allocazione (dentro il mondo universitario o all'interno degli Istituti d'arte?) e di terminologia – *industrial design* con il suo spiacevole riferimento ad un'altra cultura; *disegno industriale* con la sua incresciosa opacità evocante i compiti del disegnatore del mondo tecnico; *progettazione artistica per l'industria*, suggerita da Carlo Scarpa 2, con la sua imbarazzante traduzione dell'aspetto creativo in risvolto artistico? È anche un problema di volontà e di accordi. Per cui una scuola organica, con un iter di più anni, di istituzione pubblica, non vede la luce, benché ritenuta utile.

È sorprendente, quindi, che la Facoltà di Architettura di Firenze, Preside Attilio Arcangeli, professore di *Scienza delle costruzioni*, nel 1955 decida in via sperimentale di istituire un corso libero di *Industrial Design* e di affidarlo a Leonardo Ricci, architetto e artista, irrequieto intellettuale preoccupato della sintesi delle arti, con un non trascurabile rapporto con il mondo statunitense. Il corso è organizzato con pragmatica aderenza ai problemi progettuali dell'oggetto – inquadramento storico dell'evoluzione del gusto, tecnica e ricerca espressiva dei materiali usati, esercitazione progettuale dello studente con disegni esecutivi e piccolo plastico 3 –, grazie soprattutto alla presenza come assistente di Pierluigi Spadolini, architetto, sì, ma già inserito operativamente nel mondo del progetto per l'industria, avendo aperto a questo scopo uno studio milanese per seguire le sue collaborazioni con diverse imprese lombarde. Il corso già nel 1956 sostituirà quello di *Decorazione* e avrà una continuità nel tempo, solo con un cambio di docenza e di denominazione: Spadolini dal 1959 ne sarà l'incaricato, dopo che Ricci avrà vinto una libera docenza in *Disegno*, mentre il nome cambierà – per soddisfare l'indignazione ministeriale sul ricorso a termini stranieri – in *Progettazione artistica per l'industria*. Si potrebbe ipotizzare che sia frutto di un esercizio di raffinata baronia universitaria ad opera di Raffaello Fagnoni, suocero di Spadolini e dal 1956 Preside della Facoltà, per preparare il terreno alla carriera accademica del genero, se Spadolini non avesse avuto realmente le doti, l'esperienza e la preparazione per la felice gestione dell'insegnamento 4.

Nota 2.

A detta di Paolo Felli, che ringrazio per l'informazione, fu Carlo Scarpa a suggerirla.

Nota 3.

L'organizzazione del corso è documentata dallo stesso Leonardo Ricci nelle pagine di *Stile Industria*.

Nota 4.

Il profilo di Spadolini designer è stato tratteggiato in molti testi dedicati alla sua opera di progettista: ricordo un breve ma esplicativo saggio di Giovanni Klaus Koenig del 1985 in occasione di una mostra tenutasi ad Agliana, il successivo testo di Giuseppe Chigiotti, e le schede che approfondiscono alcuni dei suoi prodotti nel *database* di MuDeTo-Museo del Design Toscano, a mia firma e a firma di Maria Camilla Pagnini, Umberto Rovelli, Pier Carlo Santini.

Nota 5.

La commissione era formata da Franco Albini, Carlo Mollino, Carlo Scarpa e da altri due commissari di cui si è perso il nome. I candidati dovevano svolgere una lezione, sorteggiandone il tema fra diverse proposte pensate dai commissari, e presentate in busta chiusa. Estratto il titolo, avevano ventiquattro ore per prepararla e poi esporla. Come i commissari intendessero in modo ampio i temi che la materia poteva affrontare, lo attesta la lezione che tenne Spadolini, che verteva sul concetto di modulo. Giovanni Klaus Koenig in un testo dedicato a Spadolini designer, in occasione di una mostra tenuta nel 1985 ad Agliana, ne ricorda la vicenda.

Nota 6.

Non tratto la nascita dei Corsi superiori di Disegno industriale negli anni Sessanta e il proseguo della loro vicenda, perché la loro istituzione è strettamente legata alla realtà degli Istituti d'arte. La loro storia è affrontata in vari testi e dettagliatamente da Anty Pansera (Pansera, 2015).

Nota 7.

Cfr. come delinea la disciplina Fabrizio Schiaffonati, nella prefazione al libro di Luciano Crespi sull'articolazione della *Tecnologia dell'architettura* (Crespi, 1987).

L'episodio fiorentino non ha repliche sulla scena accademica nazionale, neppure a Milano. Si aspetta prudentemente, in qualche modo, la regolamentazione esplicita della disciplina nell'ordinamento universitario che avviene nel 1961 con l'organizzazione del primo concorso di libera docenza della materia, concorso che vedrà cinque vincitori: Carlo De Carli, Roberto Mango, Alberto Rosselli, Pierluigi Spadolini, Marco Zanuso [54](#). E, di conseguenza, l'attivazione di un corso a Napoli nel 1962, affidato a Mango, e a Milano nel 1963, affidato a Rosselli. Seguirà alla fine del decennio Torino con Achille Castiglioni e Palermo con Anna Maria Fundarò. Così limitatamente rappresentato, il Disegno industriale resterà una presenza universitaria dormiente nei decenni successivi, certo amata e seguita dagli studenti, ma senza un ruolo organico e sistematizzato, senza un rapporto stringente con le realtà produttive locali [64](#).

11.2 Giuseppe Ciribini impronta la *Tecnologia dell'architettura*

Nel frattempo, guardiamo all'altro fronte, quello della Tecnologia dell'architettura, che – come dicevo – non esisteva nell'ordinamento universitario. Il corso che la rappresentava allora era quello di Elementi costruttivi, che aveva il compito di descrivere il sistema costruttivo in essere, informare sui materiali e sul loro modo di comporsi, di documentare la realizzabilità del progetto e di presentare l'attività progettuale come estensione

naturale dei modi di produzione artigianale [74](#). Registrava il panorama edile tradizionale, consolidato nelle tecniche e nella prassi costruttiva, quello testimoniato in quegli anni in gran parte dalle realizzazioni del piano INA-Casa (1949-1963) che affronta il problema della ricostruzione, con motivazioni ideologiche e politiche, scartando i metodi della prefabbricazione per garantire tanto il rispetto delle consuetudini costruttive locali e dei caratteri dei luoghi, quanto l'occupazione di un consistente esubero di mano d'opera non qualificata. I contenuti del corso, cioè, non registravano le possibilità di tecniche costruttive basate su logiche industriali che in Francia, in Gran Bretagna o negli Stati

Uniti erano già state sperimentate con successo negli anni precedenti il conflitto, né riflettevano sulle sperimentazioni presentate nelle prime edizioni della Triennale del dopoguerra, basti citare il caso esemplare del QT8, ben documentato dalle mostre organizzate nell'ambito di quella edizione, la VIII (1947), che ne inquadravano lo sforzo, o le testimonianze di industrializzazione edilizia presentate alla IX (1951) e alla X Triennale (1954). Non è occasione di riflessione neppure lo sforzo di aggiornamento sugli aspetti costruttivi implicito negli studi di quel Centro studi sull'abitazione del CNR, fortemente voluto nel 1948 da Alberto Colonnetti, illuminato Presidente di quell'Organo, con la speranza di promuovere l'adozione di sistemi da realizzare in serie (AA.VV., 2022).

Citare questo Centro studi mi dà l'occasione di introdurre una figura fondamentale per configurare i perimetri e i contenuti di quella che sarà la Tecnologia dell'architettura: Giuseppe Ciribini, ingegnere dal 1936, assistente di Architettura tecnica alla Facoltà di Ingegneria del Politecnico di Milano dal 1940 e dal 1949 membro di commissioni governative internazionali sulla standardizzazione, nonché direttore della sezione milanese di quel Centro studi prima citato. Nel fare il punto dei traguardi dei primi tre anni di lavoro del suo gruppo di ricerca, in prospettiva della sua chiusura di lì a due anni, Ciribini prospetta la necessità di riorganizzare il Centro, facendone un organo centrale di indagine sull'industrializzazione della costruzione, con un programma che introduce concetti chiave per la ricerca tecnologica, ispirati anche dalla sua esperienza della realtà estera ⁸⁵.

Benché la sua proposta non venga accolta, è la premessa per fondare nel 1955 il Craper – Centro per la ricerca applicata ai problemi dell'edilizia residenziale, con l'obiettivo di promuovere lo studio dei problemi teorici e degli sviluppi applicativi relativi all'edilizia residenziale, di cui sarà direttore. La compagine che lo sostiene vede come attore principale l'Istituto autonomo per le case popolari della Provincia di Milano, accanto al Politecnico di Milano, l'Ente nazionale di unificazione, il Collegio costruttori, l'INCIS – Istituto per le case degli impiegati statali, cioè un intelligente insieme di eccellenze scientifiche e di realtà operative locali, garanti della qualità dello studio e di possibili esiti applicativi. Inoltre il Craper contempla anche un rapporto di collaborazione con analoghi centri di ricerca stranieri sotto l'egida dell'Aep – Agenzia europea di produttività. Il programma prevedeva quattro te-

Nota 8.

Cfr. per questa e altre notizie su Giuseppe Ciribini, i testi di Daniela Bosia (Bosia, 2013).

matiche articolate in sottopunti: ricerche sui *problemi di popolazione*, ricerche applicative per il conseguimento dei *Minimi Livelli*, ricerche sui problemi economico-finanziari, ricerche sul lavoro e sui materiali, sui prodotti industriali, sulle unità edilizie, sulle apparecchiature, mentre l'attività procedeva dalla definizione di una linea d'azione teorica alle applicazioni nel campo della ricerca sperimentale. In altre parole Ciribini mostra di muoversi con una prassi antesignana del fare ricerca: locale ma inserita nel circuito internazionale, teorica ma con risvolti di validante pratica applicativa, collegata a Enti – pubblici, privati, parastatali – che, pur sostenendola finanziariamente, la lasciavano autonoma nella gestione, attentamente comunicata nella letteratura di settore, trasmessa nella formazione di base grazie a un travaso delle risultanze di quegli studi nella struttura accademica – alludo al corso di *Organizzazione industriale dei cantieri*, creato appositamente nella Facoltà di Ingegneria del Politecnico di Milano e tenuto dallo stesso Ciribini.

Insomma il Craper non si pose come semplice luogo di studi e di educazione intellettuale di giovani architetti e ingegneri, il cui impegno sarà anche premiato in seguito con un privilegiato accesso alla carriera universitaria, ma come articolato nodo di relazioni, utile per creare sinergie fra Enti committenti – pubblici, parastatali, privati – industrie edili, Università e indicare l'importanza – teorica e pratica – degli aspetti tecnico-produttivi della costruzione ad utile sottolineatura di un cambiamento di passo di quel campo disciplinare. In questo senso, viste anche le sue risultanze, il Craper nel 1964 trasferisce la sua esperienza in un nuovo organismo, l'Aire – Associazione italiana per la promozione degli studi e delle ricerche per l'edilizia, senza mutarne obiettivi e metodi, solo implementando gli organismi partecipanti e aumentando di conseguenza la sua committenza, che vedrà il CNR accanto al CER – Comitato per l'edilizia residenziale, il Consiglio superiore dei lavori pubblici, la Regione Lombardia, il Consiglio regionale lombardo degli IACP.

Sicuramente avrà avuto il suo peso la legge 60 del 14 febbraio 1963 che nel chiudere il piano INA-Casa riapriva con altri attori il sostegno a un piano decennale di aiuto all'Edilizia Residenziale e Pubblica, nonché il *piano decennale* per la scuola, elaborato dal governo Fanfani e ripreso nel 1959 dal governo Segni, con i loro impliciti piani di finanziamento, anche in previsione della Riforma della scuola media unica e obbligato-

ria (1962). Comunque sia, il Craper prima e l'Aire poi saranno un modello per altre, consimili strutture che si verranno a creare fra gli anni '60 e '70, utili tra l'altro ad avvicinare i ricercatori coinvolti alle dinamiche e alle problematiche del mondo industriale (ricordo Tecnocasa, una per tutte). Va richiamato anche il ruolo non indifferente svolto da Ciribini nell'improntare il SAIE, la cui prima edizione risale al 1965, come appuntamento non semplicemente fieristico, ma occasione per affrontare tematiche attuali dell'industrializzazione edilizia, con mostre e correlate pubblicazioni – i *Cuore Mostra* – ove coinvolgere i giovani studiosi del mondo universitario e dei ricordati centri studio.

Mi sono dilungata sulla figura di Ciribini per sottolinearne la dimensione di teorico che introduce e sostanzia temi relativi all'industrializzazione della costruzione quali la progettazione integrale, la pratica dello studio collegiale, la codificazione di norme, di criteri di tipizzazione e di unificazione, la determinazione dei livelli minimi, nonché la progettazione di *campioni (industrial design* edilizio) per la fabbricazione coordinata di serie di qualità, una particolare programmazione del cantiere e una nuova impostazione dell'impresa edile. Successivamente mette a fuoco un rigoroso approccio metodologico al progetto fondato tanto sulla corrispondenza fra requisiti e prestazioni, la così detta *teoria esigenziale*, che vede l'utente al centro della riflessione progettuale, quanto su procedure che armonizzino la fase istruttoria, di raccolta dei dati e di analisi, con quella di formalizzazione nella risposta progettuale attraverso un iter codificabile detto metaprogettazione ⁹⁵.

L'attenzione al rapporto tra tecnologia, uomo e ambiente lo porta poi a ulteriori proposte sul recupero, sulla manutenzione, sulla necessità di una progettazione partecipe del sistema ambientale, nonché a preconizzare, con grande anticipo temporale, le possibilità dell'informatica e della telematica nel rinnovare i metodi e gli strumenti della progettazione.

In altre parole, Ciribini, da intellettuale e da tecnico, indica i contenuti della disciplina tecnologica dell'architettura e tutte le sue possibili uscite di ricerca e di formazione accademica, qualificando un'area e innervandola di contenuti culturali che saranno recepiti, seguiti, approfonditi dai molti colleghi con i quali era in contatto e che li vaglieranno con altri giovani ricercatori che formeranno. Avviene, in questo, un generale cambio di passo perché, a differenza di Ciribini, che non

Nota 9.

Alberto Magnaghi, dopo la laurea nel 1965 al Politecnico di Torino, godrà di una borsa di studio CNR, avendo come referente Giuseppe Ciribini, grazie alla quale si occuperà di codificare la metaprogettazione.

si *contamina* direttamente con la progettazione, tutti sono, oltre che coinvolti nell'Accademia, progettisti operanti, che interfacciano il progetto alla scala dell'edificio e talvolta anche dell'oggetto, e instaurano la prassi di un vivace scambio fra ricerca speculativa, applicazione fattuale e trasmissione del sapere.

Seppur è difficile ricostruire questi legami nella loro singolarità, si può ipotizzare, ad esempio, un rapporto con Spadolini già precedente al 1962, quando Ciribini fu coinvolto dal Ministero della pubblica istruzione nell'istituzione di quei corsi di Disegno industriale all'interno degli Istituti artistici, che vide presente Spadolini fra i suoi sostenitori e fautori. Spadolini è docente e professionista nel campo dell'oggetto e dell'architettura, attento ai valori della composizione – seppur da intendere con gli opportuni distinguo nei due ambiti – a questa data partecipa dei problemi dell'industrializzazione in entrambi i settori, avvertito nel riportare la propria esperienza progettuale nella riflessione teorica e in modo concomitante quest'ultima nella precedente, mentre entrambe diventavano linfa per l'attività didattica. Un suo testo del 1963 – *Pierluigi Spadolini esperienze e studi 1952-1963* – lo attesta in modo chiaro e indica come nel decennio considerato l'esperienza condotta da designer – dal lavoro di gruppo alla componibilità – abbia influenzato le scelte dell'architetto – la coordinazione modulare, la meccanizzazione del cantiere, la produzione per componenti – nonché quelle del docente. Nel 1963 edita delle nuove dispense per il corso di *Progettazione artistica* per l'industria a integrare quelle di qualche anno prima, totalmente dedicate alla progettazione e realizzazione dell'oggetto di serie, dove affronta il tema della prefabbricazione. Le perfeziona dopo due anni circa con una nuova versione, dove mette insieme i due campi,

Nota 10. indicando le similitudini di approccio e di metodo **10x**.

Entrambe le dispense sono senza data, che però si può desumere dai riferimenti bibliografici.

Ed in entrambe i riferimenti alle posizioni di Ciribini sono frequenti. In altre parole, si intuisce che il corso presentava almeno dal 1963 a tutto tondo il problema della progettazione industriale, lasciando poi alle esercitazioni degli studenti quale campo singolarmente affrontare. È interessante annotare anche, in tema di didattica, una sperimentazione a durata biennale, attivata nel 1963 con l'abbinamento della cattedra di Spadolini a quella, di Composizione, di Domenico Cardini. L'obiettivo era di completare le conoscenze dell'allievo architetto, prima della laurea, nel vasto campo delle nuove tecniche

costruttive che fanno capo all'industrializzazione e alla prefabbricazione, con un'esercitazione applicata a un caso reale previsto dal Piano regolatore di Firenze 11. Ed è l'inizio di pratiche, riflessioni teoriche, ricerche, incarichi nel parastato 12 che Spadolini coordinerà, ad innervare la disciplina, con un gruppo di studiosi, giovani laureati fiorentini come Mario Zaffagnini, Paolo Felli e Romano Del Nord 13, o altrettanto giovani studiosi, temporaneamente ospiti, come Nicola Sinopoli o Giuseppe Turchini. Quest'ultimo può essere preso come esempio della *mobilità* dei soggetti più brillanti: assistente volontario di Rosselli, collaboratore dell'Aire con Ciribini, entrerà in contatto con Spadolini attraverso una sua laureanda e lo seguirà poi nelle ricerche della sua vivace Scuola fiorentina 14.

In questi stessi anni '60 sono Edoardo Vittoria e Marco Zanuso a confrontarsi con la dimensione progettuale alle due scale e a portare la loro ricerca nella formazione universitaria 15. Così come Alberto Rosselli, professionista misurato nel campo dell'oggetto e dell'architettura, ma soprattutto figura di intellettuale di forte spessore, che già in *Stile Industria* aveva affrontato con vigore le problematiche dell'industrializzazione edilizia. Dal 1963 il suo Corso di *Progettazione Artistica per l'Industria* affronta, in linea col pensiero di Ciribini, la questione del metodo *come indirizzo sistematico di progettazione*, che prenda in considerazione il processo edilizio in rapporto a quello progettuale, senza tralasciare il contesto sociale.

Nel nuovo scenario dell'edilizia industrializzata, l'intervento dell'architetto, per Rosselli, «non poteva essere più il gesto singolo e finale di un operatore artistico, ma doveva affiancarsi a quello di altri tecnici in un susseguirsi di fasi che trascendessero il momento limitato della progettazione» 16. Lezione determinante per gli studenti, che si arricchiva del concetto di sistema, del sistema delle esigenze e di quello delle funzioni, in una fiducia verso la soluzione industriale quale risposta ai problemi collettivi. Ma ugualmente determinante per i giovani ricercatori, ai quali indicava un percorso che sarà ripreso dai gruppi di ricerca dell'Aire e del CNR.

Nota 11.

La notizia è riportata da Anna Maria Talanti.

Nota 12.

Mi riferisco al lungo rapporto di collaborazione di Spadolini con l'Italstat.

Nota 13.

Romano Del Nord riconosce un debito formativo nei confronti di Ciribini. Emerge sia in una sua testimonianza riportata nel testo di Daniela Bosia su Ciribini (Bosia, 2013), sia nel libro a lui dedicato, curato da Roberto Bologna e M. Chiara Torricelli (2021).

Nota 14.

Il rapporto di Giuseppe Turchini con Ciribini è da lui ricordato nel testo di Daniela Bosia (2013); quello con Spadolini è testimoniato nel convegno in memoria di Spadolini a dieci anni dalla scomparsa, gli atti del quale sono stati curati da Eleonora Trivellin (2013).

Nota 15.

Cfr. ad esempio un saggio di Zanuso su "Prefabbricare" (Zanuso, 1967) dove tratta il problema del rapporto con l'industria alle due scale.

Nota 16.

Adriana Baglioni, sua assistente negli anni Sessanta, così lo ricorda in occasione della di lui scomparsa.

11.3 L'affermazione della *Tecnologia dell'architettura* nella realtà universitaria

Uno scenario, quindi, dinamico e propositivo che si innerva, nelle sue possibilità di valorizzazione della disciplina, grazie al Decreto 995 del 31 ottobre 1969, detto *Riordinamento degli studi delle Facoltà di Architettura*, che aggiorna l'ordinamento didattico del Corso di Studi di Architettura e ascrive all'Area tecnologica tredici nuove discipline attivabili tra cui *Tecnologia dell'architettura*, *Cultura tecnologica della progettazione*, *Progettazione ambientale*, *Sperimentazione di sistemi e componenti*, *Unificazione edilizia e prefabbricazione*, nonché *Disegno industriale*, a sostituire la vecchia Progettazione artistica per l'industria, giustamente allocato in quell'ambito per il suo stretto rapporto con gli aspetti sia tecnici che produttivi della definizione progettuale. Come si può facilmente desumere, le nuove materie rispondono a tutti quei suggerimenti che la riflessione di Ciribini aveva già teorizzato. Se fino a quel momento il corso di *Elementi costruttivi* aveva fornito l'informazione sulle principali, e tradizionali, tecniche costruttive a supporto del corso di *Composizione*, da questo momento la posizione ancillare dell'aspetto tecnico nei confronti di quello compositivo viene meno e la Tecnologia acquista un ruolo che sottolinea l'importanza sia di un approccio metodologico al progetto sia della risposta alle esigenze espresse in termini di requisiti e prestazioni, rivendicando, grazie alle nuove possibilità dell'industrializzazione, la gestione della progettazione in un'ottica di integrazione fra ideazione, progetto e realizzazione. In sostanza, grazie al possibile cambiamento delle modalità produttive dell'edificio, la preparazione tecnologica dell'architetto diventa sostanziale rispetto alla sempre più complessa realtà della professione, facendo assumere alle materie tecnologiche pregnanza nella formazione, nella ricerca e nella risposta compositiva.

La situazione poi si rafforza con la promulgazione della Legge 910 del 11 dicembre 1969, che titola *Provvedimenti urgenti per l'Università* e passata alla storia come legge Codignola, che – emanata per cercare di sedare le pesanti agitazioni studentesche che avevano bloccato negli ultimi due anni l'attività degli atenei nazionali e rispondere ad alcune delle rivendicazioni da esse postulate –, liberalizza gli accessi univer-

sitari e prevede il diritto di presentare piani di studio individuali; inoltre per Architettura abolisce lo sbarramento biennio-triennio e riduce il numero degli esami. Ciò permetteva allo studente di scegliere un piano di studi diverso da quello contemplato dall'Ordinamento didattico, andando a valorizzare ambiti disciplinari fino ad allora rimasti marginali per un lavoro di tesi. Chiaramente, nella nostra ottica, si può ben prevedere che l'Area tecnologica sarebbe diventata oggetto di approfondimenti nei tanti filoni che prospettava.

11.4 L'Area tecnologica milanese e la figura di Alberto Seassaro

È indispensabile richiamare questo scenario per introdurre, fra gli studiosi che gravitavano intorno ai docenti prima ricordati, la figura di Alberto Seassaro.

Seassaro si era laureato in Architettura al Politecnico di Milano nel 1964 con una tesi, in collaborazione con Ugo La Pietra, svolta presso l'Istituto di Composizione, dal titolo *La ricerca morfologica. Proposta di lavoro per gli Istituti della Facoltà di Architettura*, che affrontava i modi della ricerca di un Istituto universitario, distinguendo fra il suo obiettivo e la sua direzione, per lasciare ampio margine, privilegiando quest'ultima, sia all'autonomia del ricercatore sia alla comprensione delle problematiche del campo di indagine dell'Istituto. Una tesi, quindi, colta, che già individua nel giovane allievo posizioni tanto critiche quanto idealmente costruttive. Gli anni subito successivi ci narrano un Seassaro che alterna sperimentazioni artistiche ed estetiche al lavoro di disegnatore – come si confaceva al tempo – in quotati studi d'architettura milanesi, senza dimenticare l'attività universitaria, a cui si dedica come assistente volontario. Insomma, percorre – come la sua tesi di laurea indicava – una direzione che non prevedeva immediati riscontri ma lo apriva a uno scenario di possibilità. La possibilità che coglie, con entusiasmo e quasi subito, nel 1963, è quella di seguire Giuseppe Ciribini a Torino, dove questi è dal 1963 ordinario di *Elementi costruttivi* alla Facoltà di Architettura del Politecnico. Il fascino del pensiero di Ciribini lo conquista, lo assorbe; ne approfondisce i suggerimenti, sposando, con la vitalità frenetica e irrequieta che sarà il suo tratto morale, il tema

Nota 17.

È quanto Seassaro afferma nell'*Introduzione*, al testo sul settore edilizio italiano, da lui curato nel 1979.

Nota 18.

Cfr. a proposito dell'esperienza della Montecatini Edison nel campo delle costruzioni quanto scrive Seassaro in *La ricerca e la sperimentazione tecnologica in edilizia dal dopoguerra fino al P.R.I.E./C.N.R. del '70*, nel libro da lui curato e già citato in nota 20, dove anche spiega cosa sia la Silicalcite e i problemi, inaspettati, della Montecatini Edison per avere un materiale idoneo.

1. Alberto Seassaro. Il demiurgo.
[Narrazione →](#)



dell'industrializzazione edilizia nell'attività di supporto didattico, nell'esperienza professionale e in incarichi di ricerca per il CNR [17](#) e per l'industria delle costruzioni. Attiva un rapporto di ricerca con la Montecatini Edison, durato alcuni anni dal 1965 al 1969 e preceduto, nonché accompagnato, dalla verifica progettuale di un sistema di prefabbricazione basato su pannelli di Silicalcite per case unifamiliari [18](#). La ricerca verteva sulla elaborazione di un catalogo di elementi prefabbricati in Silicalcite [19](#), ed essa, se attentamente letta, rivela un Seassaro consapevole della lezione di Ciribini, perfettamente allineato sulle posizioni teoriche di quest'ultimo, edotto del quadro generale dei problemi di industrializzazione edilizia.

In modo equilibrato, propone diverse fasi progressive fino alla definizione di un prototipo, alla sua ingegnerizzazione, produzione e commercializzazione. L'obiettivo intermedio era la messa a punto di un *modulo oggetto* con infinite possibilità combinatorie, per ogni possibile tipologia edilizia, distinguendo fra *moduli oggetto strutturali*, *moduli oggetto sovrastrutturali* e *moduli oggetto accessori* che garantissero una soluzione progettuale data dalla scomposizione delle tipologie funzionali in sommatorie di tipologie elementari standard, cioè in *moduli oggetto*. Lo scopo finale era la messa a punto di un catalogo di elementi architettonici che appagassero le necessità di tutti gli attori coinvolti – dal consumatore all'imprenditore-committente, al progettista – e risolvessero il maggior numero possibile di problemi costruttivi, per consentire alla Società di fare una politica di anticipazione della domanda, per ribaltare i tradizionali rapporti di committenza e imprenditoria, che erano una remora all'effettiva industrializzazione dell'edilizia, per mettere l'architetto nella condizione di espletare una *progettazione integrale per l'industria*. Il metodo adottato, in parte teorico e in parte caratterizzato da verifiche progettuali, è stringente, collima con quello tipico di un rapporto con il mondo industriale nella misura in cui era già stato espresso da un Rosselli, tanto per fare un nome.

Il lavoro è premiato con la continuazione del rapporto con la Società: Seassaro nel 1971 entra a far parte del Centro Ricerche Montedil del Gruppo Montecatini Edison come responsabile dello sviluppo, coordinamento e integrazione dei prodotti edilizi e della supervisione

delle realizzazioni degli interventi dei diversi complessi edilizi realizzati dall'Ufficio Tecnico Montecatini Edison e da progettisti esterni.

In questi anni, quindi, Seassaro si rivela omologo agli altri giovani ricercatori che abbiamo visto impegnati per i vari centri ricerche, come loro parteciperà anche ai programmi CNR sull'industrializzazione edilizia, anche se – a differenza di loro – si misura pure con l'industria dell'arredo. Per Acerbis, infatti, mette a punto alcuni felici prodotti basati sul concetto di componibilità, nonché un prototipo particolare, che sarà presentato alla mostra, tenuta nel 1972 a New York, *Italy: the New Domestic Landscape*: un anticonformista volume cubico articolabile da inserirsi liberamente in uno spazio-casa e da usarsi a discrezione dell'utente per la parte notte o per la parte giorno, visto che comprendeva un letto estraibile, armadi, un tavolo anch'esso estraibile, un carrello bar, ripiani illuminati e cassettiere 19 2 3.

Come gli studiosi ricordano, comunicherà le sue riflessioni – e le sue esperienze – sull'industrializzazione edilizia sulle riviste di settore, benché in quel periodo non esista quella veemente rincorsa alle pubblicazioni dei ricercatori che ha caratterizzato gli ultimi decenni. Publica, ad esempio, nel 1968 un lungo articolo, praticamente un saggio, sul *Component Approach* e le modificazioni che determina sulla metodologia e la pratica operativa progettuale. La sua riflessione, da cui ancora una volta traspare l'importanza del pensiero di Ciribini, è guidata dalla preoccupazione per la frattura esistente tra architettura ed edilizia e per «il progressivo disimpegno di gran parte della cultura architettonica verso le problematiche del design industriale e, in particolare, verso l'industrializzazione edilizia [...] avvertibile nella pratica professionale [...] nella didattica e nel dibattito critico e teoretico». Il quadro che delinea, ben documentato delle diverse posizioni, con casistiche e riferimenti anche internazionali, rivaluta la prefabbricazione aperta purché il componente «sia significativo in quanto prodotto di design finalizzato alla costituzione di un linguaggio architettonico», «sia destinato ad una produzione industrializzata» e sia compatibile con l'insieme dei repertori di componenti. Ovviamente, con un avvertimento finale, sui parametri di giudizio estetico che la critica deve elaborare di fronte al nuovo modo di procedere dell'architettura industrializzata, come dell'industrial design (Seassaro, 1968).

Nota 19.

Il prototipo è pubblicato su *Domus*, n. 489, nel 1970, e nel catalogo della mostra newyorkese.



2. *L'intero mobile corre su rotaie*, Alberto Seassaro, in *Domus*, n. 489. [Documento →](#)



3. Alberto Seassaro, *Addition, Tavolo attrezzato componibile*, Acerbis. [Documento →](#)

È interessante annotare che, a conclusione del suo articolo, Seassaro riporti l'esperienza didattica del corso di *Elementi costruttivi* di Cibrini, dell'anno 1966-1967, dedicata al *Disegno dei componenti edilizi*, dove le esercitazioni date agli studenti non fornivano «prefigurazioni di natura tipologica che potessero compromettere l'originalità degli esiti progettuali» (Seassaro, 1968), in modo da valorizzare le possibilità della progettazione per componenti alla riformulazione integrale del tema dell'involucro edilizio. Accenno a questo per introdurre la posizione che Seassaro assume come professore incaricato – prima di *Unificazione edilizia e prefabbricazione*, poi di *Tecnologia dell'architettura* – al Politecnico di Milano dal 1969.

Ricordiamo che il 1969 è l'anno che prevede, in sostituzione di *Elementi costruttivi*, l'ingresso della disciplina di *Tecnologia dell'architettura* nell'Ordinamento delle Facoltà di Architettura come materia attinente «alla morfologia e all'impiego dei materiali nell'Architettura per il raggiungimento di risultati figurativi anche in relazione ai nuovi pro-

Nota 20.

Tale definizione appare in una circolare ministeriale ed è riportata in Crespi (1988).

cedimenti industrializzati» (Crespi, 1988) 203. Ma ricordiamo altresì la compagine della Facoltà di Architettura del Politecnico di Milano a quel tempo. Già dal 1963, in largo anticipo sulla contestazione studentesca del 1968, gli studenti avevano cominciato ad avanzare le loro richieste di riforme e a occupare; i Presidi si alternavano senza capacità di risolvere la situazione di crisi, mentre la polizia era diventata parte dello scenario universitario. La legge Codignola arresta per un breve periodo la protesta, aprendo una stagione di didattica sperimentale con ricerche di gruppo, alle quali Seassaro aderisce creando nel 1969-1970 con Marco Zanuso, Raffaella Crespi, Leonardo Fiori un'Area di ricerca tecnologica che si occupava di organizzazioni (spaziali e aspatiali) emergenti nelle strutture tecnologiche in atto, per un'ipotesi di assetto disciplinare delle tecnologie funzionali ad un ruolo dell'architetto come *tecnico organico alla classe*. Nei successivi anni accademici l'ambito tecnologico propone agli studenti ricerche sui temi dell'illusione tecnocratica, della progettazione per componenti, nonché poi sul settore edilizio e le sue trasformazioni riferite all'argomento casa, mentre Seassaro istituisce a loro riferimento il *Laboratorio di Produzione del territorio* con Giacomo Scarpini, Maria Bottero e Giorgio Gaetani. In altre parole, anche a Milano si delinea un'area di docenti ascrivibile alla Tecnologia dell'architettura, benché il perdurare della si-

tuazione di crisi revisionista, in altre sedi universitarie in parte rientrata, costringa i docenti milanesi a fare i conti con una realtà scivolosa che non permette, ma solo apparentemente, di organizzare in modo pacato lo studio, o di indagare e strutturare i possibili percorsi della disciplina in modo organico, garante dell'acquisizione di un profilo identitario, di Scuola. Mancano a Milano in questo momento docenti intellettualmente aggregativi [21](#), che coinvolgano e indirizzino gli ambiti delle ricerche e diano loro visibilità sulla scena nazionale [4](#). Insomma, manca a Milano uno di quei *pinguini* presenti in altre sedi [22](#) che tanto potevano e tanto facevano.

L'impegno politico, che trasudava nelle aule del Politecnico milanese, informa le proposte di didattica del gruppo di ricerca dell'Area tecnologica negli anni '70. I documenti introduttivi alle ricerche da conferire agli studenti, scritti per lo più da Seassaro, sono ambivalenti nel loro dettato: alcuni fortemente politicizzati, come era nello spirito del tempo, e altri in cui si delinea in modo esemplare lo scenario degli studi tecnologici, le sue principali direttive, gli esiti raggiunti fra momento teorico-metodologico e prassi economica e produttiva, quindi, dal punto di vista disciplinare, informati e colti.

L'obiettivo era spingere lo studente a una riflessione critica che smascherasse i modi con cui capitale privato e statale avevano affrontato il problema dell'industrializzazione edilizia senza un vero interesse per il bene del Paese. Da essi emerge un certo sdoppiamento della figura seassariana: da una parte il professionista che lavora in modo neutrale per quel capitale, spinto anche dalle esigenze di una famiglia in crescita, dall'altra il docente politicamente avvertito, che mette in guardia sui rischi dell'operazione, nell'ottica del *conflitto tra classi egemoni e classi subalterne*.

Se il lavoro proposto agli studenti nell'A.A. 1969-1970 è quello di partire dal suo Catalogo Montecatini Edison dei componenti industrializzati per l'edilizia, in rapporto alle posizioni del *Components Approach*, esso viene strutturato in modo ben diverso da quello proposto da Ciribini qualche anno prima, perché lo scopo era articolare una lettura politica sull'esplicito *uso capitalistico della tecnica*, contraddicente l'intento de-

Nota 21.

Cfr. a questo proposito la lucida analisi che Seassaro fa sulle modalità di ricerca svolte negli Istituti universitari, da cui si evince quella mancanza, almeno nella sede milanese, di un professore di ruolo come figura catalizzatrice e ordinatrice degli studi dei ricercatori dell'Istituto (Seassaro, 1972).



4. Alberto Seassaro,
*La politica della
ricerca in edilizia*,
Facoltà di architettura,
A.A. 1972-73.
[Documento →](#)

Nota 22.

Così i professori ordinari di Tecnologia dell'architettura, che – ricordo – erano al tempo pochi, potenti e fra loro prossimi, erano stati ribattezzati con affettuosa ironia. In una delle loro cene, a conclusione di una delle tante riunioni, a sottolineare la loro vivace mobilità per l'Italia, da un convegno a una riunione, fu cantato uno scherzoso motivetto che riprendeva il personaggio di una canzone del Piccolo Coro dell'Antoniano di Bologna, il pinguino Belisario, che si era offerto volontario per un lancio, leggendario, sulla luna. Nel motivo destinato ai nostri tecnologi, l'originario destino spaziale si era tramutato nei più prosaici percorsi ferroviari che i Nostri affrontavano, così che il ritornello si era tramutato ne "il pinguino Belisario che sta sempre sul binario". Il motivetto fu apprezzato e con esso quella definizione che divenne una sorta di riconoscimento di (potente) consorteria.

Nota 23.

Cfr. i documenti forniti agli studenti riportati in *Design Philology*: A. Seassaro, *Area di Ricerca Tecnologica 1, Proposta per la definizione di una area di Ricerca Tecnologica nella Facoltà di Architettura di Milano*, A.A. 1969-70; A. Seassaro, R. Crespi, L. Fiori, M. Zanuso, *Area di Ricerca Tecnologica 2, Natura disciplinare e natura politica dell'industrializzazione edilizia per componenti*, A.A. 1969-70; A. Seassaro, *Area di ricerca tecnologica 3, La via italiana della industrializzazione edilizia. Note di metodo e discriminanti politiche di lettura del Catalogo componenti industrializzati Montecatini-Edison*, A.A. 1969-70.

5. Alberto Seassaro, *Area di Ricerca Tecnologica 1, Proposta per la definizione di una area di Ricerca Tecnologica nella Facoltà di Architettura di Milano*.
[Documento →](#)



6. Alberto Seassaro, Raffaella Crespi, Leonardo Fiori, Marco Zanuso, *Area di Ricerca Tecnologica 2, Natura disciplinare e natura politica dell'industrializzazione edilizia per componenti*.
[Documento →](#)



7. Alberto Seassaro, *Area di Ricerca Tecnologica 3, La via italiana della industrializzazione edilizia*.
[Documento →](#)



mocratico che l'industrializzazione per componenti presupponeva [23](#) [5](#) [6](#) [7](#).

In un altro documento del 1970, Seassaro, al di là della particolare definizione che dà dell'architetto come «tecnico organico della società nel suo insieme, nella logica della lotta di classe» (Crespi, Fiori, Seassaro, Zanuso, 1970), e delle posizioni politiche che ivi assume, rivela la sua fede nell'importanza della tecnologia – per il suo carattere di *formatività* – nella educazione dell'architetto e nella professione, convinto che solo «la capacità tecnica dell'architetto diventi un *fattore matriciale* della progettazione, per cui l'addestramento all'uso delle tecniche si pone come una delle componenti iniziali del processo attraverso il quale si esprime la progettazione» (Ibidem). Questa convinzione lo porta ad affermare, nel testo, che gli insegnamenti afferenti alla Tecnologia hanno il carattere di *disciplina globalizzante* [8](#). Seassaro ribadirà questo concetto in uno scritto successivo, dedicato alla ricerca in sede universitaria, dove esprime come necessario istituire all'interno dell'università un programma più organico di ricerca, quello che probabilmente vedeva configurarsi in altre sedi e che riteneva indispensabile anche per Milano (Seassaro, 1972). Proprio questa fiducia nella ricerca caratterizza la posizione di Seassaro negli anni '70. La sua attività professionale non si espleta solo nell'esercizio progettuale privato ma anche nella consulenza con Enti operanti nell'edilizia pubblica e nella partecipazione a programmi CNR sull'edilizia prefabbricata. In altre parole, con disincantata antinomia rispetto alle critiche analisi politiche espresse nei documenti universitari prima ricordati, con disinvoltura, porta avanti esperienze che ne arricchiscono il profilo di tecnologo. Quello che emerge da un libro che cura nel 1979, nella cui stesura coinvolge docenti dell'area, dei quali aveva seguito gli studi e le acquisite competenze, da Giacomo Scarpini a Valerio Di Battista, a Fabrizio Schiaffonati. L'operazione sottende l'intenzione di dare una voce e un profilo identitario a un gruppo, che si dedicava con entusiasmo all'impegno universitario senza avere, come lui stesso, alcun ruolo istituzionale stabile e riconosciuto, e di evidenziarne i rapporti con quel Gruppo nazionale CNR Produzione Edilizia, all'interno del qua-

le egli aveva ruoli di coordinamento e di direzione. Scopo della pubblicazione è di ripercorrere le caratteristiche del settore edilizio italiano dal secondo dopo guerra, prospettando e delineando le modificazioni più recenti del suo assetto strutturale. Il saggio che si riserva Seassaro analizza la ricerca e la sperimentazione tecnologica fino al 1970 e rivela un piglio sicuro, privo di qualsiasi carica polemica, analitico e colto, che lo conferma studioso affidabile (Seassaro, 1979). Ma il vero obiettivo era quello di evidenziare il profilo culturale di quei ricercatori raccolti sotto l'egida dell'Istituto di Tecnologia della Facoltà di Architettura di Milano, in nulla inferiori a quelli di altre sedi.



8. Proposta per la definizione di una area di Ricerca tecnologica nella Facoltà di Architettura di Milano.

[Documento→](#)

11.5 Un Dipartimento intraprendente in un Ateneo bendisposto

L'Università italiana nel 1980 viene investita da un cambiamento importante, benché privo di una articolata visione riformista. Esso, infatti, non affronta il problema del numero degli accessi, cresciuto in modo tanto consistente che ormai si parla di *università di massa*, né quello del rapporto fra offerta formativa e mercato del lavoro, ma solo quello della docenza con lo scopo di stabilizzare il gran numero di precari – borsisti, assegnisti, contrattisti, incaricati – con cui si era cercato di gestire l'aumento vertiginoso degli iscritti. La legge 28 del 21 febbraio 1980 – *Delega al Governo per il riordinamento della docenza universitaria e relativa fascia di formazione, e per la sperimentazione organizzativa e didattica*, accompagnata dal DPR 382 del 11 luglio 1980 – *Riordinamento della docenza universitaria* – istituisce il ruolo del professore ordinario e associato, del professore a contratto e del ricercatore, l'opzione per il tempo pieno o per quello definito, il dottorato di ricerca, la possibilità di costituire Dipartimenti per promuovere e coordinare le attività di ricerca, nonché, in modo sfumato, l'eventuale creazione di corsi di laurea.

Grazie a questo, un piccolo *tsunami* riorganizzativo percorre l'università italiana e, nel nostro caso, le Facoltà di Architettura. Una serie di concorsi premiano gli studiosi fornendo le varie sedi di un numero ragguardevole di ordinari, associati e ricercatori, mentre tutte si dotano di un Dipartimento che li raccolga in base al loro profilo culturale. Nel 1981 viene creato al Politecnico di Milano il Dipartimento di Progettazione

Programmazione Produzione Edilizia (PPPE), che annovererà i docenti afferenti alla disciplina tecnologica, tra i quali Marco Zanuso, Raffaella Crespi, Fabrizio Schiaffonati, Valerio Di Battista, Achille Castiglioni e lo stesso Alberto Seassaro, che, diventato associato nel 1983 e avendo optato per il tempo pieno, dedica tutte le sue energie a configurare l'area, con la predisposizione di convegni, stimolando i colleghi a comunicare i propri studi, sviluppando in proprio delle ricerche, per conto del CNR, dell'Ance, del CRESME, dell'AICAR, dell'Assoarredo, sul rapporto fra progettazione e produzione, nonché sulla struttura economica e produttiva dei settori industriali, in particolar modo della costruzione ma senza tralasciare anche quello dell'arredo. Altri campi che affronta sono quelli della Progettazione ambientale, una delle branche che l'Area tecnologica aveva sviluppato, riservandosela, e della Progettazione illuminotecnica. Grazie a tutto questo, nel 1990 vince il concorso di professore ordinario.

L'Area tecnologica milanese, in poco tempo, riesce, quindi, a superare il divario annotato negli anni '70 rispetto alle altre aree nazionali, a

Nota 24.

Un profilo del Dipartimento di PPPE è nel saggio di Elena Mussinelli, Monica Lavagna, Gian Luca Brunetti, Matteo Gambaro, nel testo di Erminia Attaianese e Mario Losasso sulla ricerca nella Progettazione ambientale.

configurarsi e ad acquisire un senso culturale e propositivo 24.

Il cambio di passo era stato incentivato, per tutte, da quei concorsi dei primi anni '80 che, con la disposizione di un gran numero di posti a ruolo, stabilizzando le persone, avevano spalmato, in modo equanime in tutte le sedi, un gruppo consistente di docenti motivati e preparati, permettendo la pre-

senza in ogni Facoltà di Architettura di un Dipartimento di Tecnologia propositivo e intellettualmente vivace. La strategia dei nostri *pinguini* era stata unitaria, guidata dall'obiettivo di consolidare la disciplina nelle tante traiettorie culturali nelle quali si era configurata e di imporla con le sue posizioni costruttive nella ricerca come nell'offerta didattica. Si viene delineando come dato di fatto che la *Tecnologia dell'architettura* – intesa in senso ampio – non debba più essere considerata materia ancillare della Composizione architettonica, ma una disciplina autonoma, forte di connotati e di possibilità tematiche, integrata nella risposta sociale, propositiva in quella ambientale, con un rapporto consapevole e positivamente interlocutorio con il mondo industriale. Inoltre essa rivendica un ruolo progettuale, più costruttivo di quello della Composizione, ben più capace, per la sua struttura metodologica, per i suoi criteri tanto di risposta a esigenze umane espresse in forma di requi-

siti e prestazioni quanto di gestione del progetto edilizio – rispetto alla complessità delle normative tecniche e delle prescrizioni ambientali, o al cambiamento delle modalità produttive dell'edificio – di sovrintendere ideazione, progettazione e realizzazione in modo inscindibile.

Nel frattempo, Alberto Seassaro ricopre la carica di Presidente dell'Indirizzo Tecnologico del Corso di laurea in Architettura. Nel 1982 era stato emanato un Decreto – DPR 806 del 9 settembre 1982 – *Modificazioni all'Ordinamento didattico universitario* – che cambiava il Regolamento per gli studi in Architettura, con il fine di caratterizzare le competenze degli allievi. Prevedeva un'articolazione degli insegnamenti in nove aree disciplinari, con la possibilità di quattro indirizzi di laurea, quelli caratterizzanti di *Progettazione*, *Restauro*, *Urbanistica* e *Tecnologia*. È un riconoscimento per la nostra materia, alla quale sono attribuite ben tredici discipline, fra le quali *Disegno industriale*.

Inoltre, il Decreto consentiva di attivare altri Indirizzi a discrezione delle singole Facoltà. Seassaro si dedica, quindi, con passione alla composizione di un iter didattico per l'indirizzo tecnologico prefigurando, in base alle competenze dei vari docenti presenti, tre diversi filoni, uno di programmazione, uno di progettazione, uno di produzione, ricalcando in qualche modo la denominazione del Dipartimento stesso.

L'ultimo anno, per la tesi, l'uscita ribadiva come imprescindibile la centralità dell'elaborazione progettuale, emancipandola e svincolandola da *Composizione*. L'articolato piano di Seassaro, del 1981, subirà di lì a poco un ripensamento.

L'Area tecnologica milanese aveva una rappresentanza di spicco nell'ambito di Disegno industriale nella sua doppia accezione, di progettazione del prodotto e di progettazione per l'edilizia industrializzata, con due professori ordinari di non poco rilievo sulla scena nazionale: un Achille Castiglioni, da sempre attento alla definizione dell'oggetto, e un Marco Zanuso, che aveva affrontato nella didattica, con assoluta proprietà, tematiche industriali dell'edilizia come del prodotto di piccola scala. Quest'ultimo poteva poi contare su due allievi, Francesco Trabucco e Alessandro Ubertazzi, inseriti nella compagine accademica, da lui formati ad affrontare la tematica. Ne viene l'idea di sfruttare questa *consistente* presenza per proporre una novità, almeno per il mondo universitario, un indirizzo esclusivo in *Disegno industriale*. La posizione è fortemente promossa da Cesare Stevan, Preside della Facoltà di Ar-

chitettura, figura ben consapevole degli aspetti istituzionali e politici e dotata di grande capacità di ascolto, anche delle aspettative degli studenti. Il sempre più consistente numero degli iscritti ad Architettura, ritenuto preoccupante dall'Ateneo perché comprometteva l'equilibrio mantenuto fino al tempo con quello degli immatricolati alla Facoltà di Ingegneria, viene da lui fortemente difeso.

A fronte di ciò, indaga su questo, eccessivo, gradimento, chiedendosi quali ne fossero le ragioni, nonché le attese. Si impegna, quindi, a rendere l'offerta formativa più aggiornata, sottraendo a *Composizione* quella centralità dominante, ritenuta non più conforme al momento. Per fare accettare il nuovo Indirizzo coinvolge, comunque, un'ala della *Composizione*, eliminare, quella di *Architettura degli interni*, seppur nel rischio di relegare il design nel perimetro dell'arredo. Il retro-pensiero che lo giustificava non era solo il contesto produttivo lombardo, votato soprattutto al prodotto d'arredo, quanto le collaborazioni e i possibili sbocchi professionali che poteva aprire o assicurare.

Prende forma così, con l'alleanza di parte dei compositivi, la proposta di attivare accanto ai quattro Indirizzi di laurea ritenuti conformi – in *Progettazione architettonica*, in *Tutela e recupero del patrimonio storico-architettonico*, in *Urbanistica*, in *Tecnologia* – un quinto, sperimentale, in *Disegno industriale e arredamento*.

Ciò avrebbe gratificato tutte le anime di Architettura, permettendo alle varie discipline di valorizzare una loro progettualità autonoma; avrebbe rafforzato sia l'area tecnologica sia il design stesso, non disperso fra le altre possibilità di elaborazione progettuale della disciplina tecnologica; avrebbe lasciato all'Indirizzo in Tecnologia di affrontare i temi cari dell'edilizia industrializzata, della prefabbricazione, del componente, della progettazione ambientale. In più, avrebbe dato un segnale di adeguamento alla contemporaneità, utile all'immagine del Politecnico, per altro attraente e attrattivo per lo studente.

Nel 1984, attivata questa sperimentazione, si tenne un ciclo di incontri al Politecnico di Milano per riflettere sui contenuti didattici, le strumentazioni necessarie, le problematiche. Ed è interessante leggere gli interventi dei relatori coinvolti e gli spunti che ne emergono perché i temi affrontati, i dubbi esposti, gli avvertimenti enunciati saranno quelli che caratterizzeranno di lì a pochi anni la creazione del Corso di Laurea in *Disegno industriale* (Piccinno, Servetto, 1984) [92](#).

La valorizzazione del disegno industriale da parte dell'Area tecnologica milanese non si ferma qui. Nel 1988, richiamando le possibilità espresse dal DPR 382/1980, essa pensa di istituire un Dottorato in *Disegno industriale*, motivandolo con la necessità di affrontare una riflessione sulla progettazione del prodotto in rapporto ai cambiamenti derivati dall'innovazione tecnica in atto, dalla questione ambientale e dalla sfida di un corretto uso delle risorse energetiche, dalla presenza di nuovi materiali progettabili (pensiamo all'interesse che aveva suscitato il testo de *La materia dell'invenzione* di un giovane Ezio Manzini, nel 1986), dalle possibilità comunicative degli strumenti informatici. Si targa, correttamente, la sua organizzazione non solo sull'attualità di queste tematiche ma anche sul profilo culturale dei docenti della struttura, da Raffaella Crespi a Tomás Maldonado, nel 1984 arrivato al Politecnico dal DAMS, da Achille Castiglioni a Ezio Manzini, a Francesco Trabucco, chiamati all'appello per un impegno forse gravoso, dal punto di vista didattico e organizzativo, ma stimolante e gratificante, ripagato dall'esperienza di avere un numero esiguo di allievi motivati, un nulla rispetto a quello dei circa quindicimila iscritti alla Facoltà. È inoltre il primo Dottorato in questa disciplina a livello nazionale che, mentre garantisce al Politecnico di Milano una visibilità di istituto aderente alla contemporaneità, segnala l'Area tecnologica milanese in tutta la sua potenzialità propositiva e la impone, rispetto alle altre sedi, come ambito capace di promuovere tutte le sue voci.

Va detto, per correttezza storica, che a Palermo Anna Maria Fundarò, professore ordinario dal 1977, da tempo si muoveva con disinvoltura, giocando in solitaria, nel promuovere una didattica per il design. Era riuscita a creare un indirizzo di laurea sperimentale in *Disegno industriale* nella prima metà degli anni '80, una Scuola di specializzazione nel 1989 e, più o meno in contemporanea, un Dottorato in *Disegno Industriale, arti figurative e applicate*, in cooperazione con la Facoltà di Lettere e Filosofia di Palermo. In qualche modo, Fundarò anticipa i passi di Milano e, come Milano, intende correlarsi alla dimensione del luogo. Aspirando a ricostruire la vocazione produttiva siciliana e il suo patrimonio di cultura materiale, ne approfondisce gli artigianati per rigenerarli e migliorare la qualità dei luoghi, in un modello didattico che, pur apprezzato da certe frange del progetto milanese – e utile, sicuramente, da riscoprire oggi che molta confusione esiste sull'artigianato



9. Contributi
alla formazione
dell'Indirizzo di Laurea
in Disegno industriale e
arredamento.
[Documento→](#)

e sul rapporto fra artigianato e design – è molto diverso da quello del Politecnico. La sua avventura, quindi, anticipa di poco quella che consideriamo ma prende una strada, seppur esemplare, poco utile nel suo profilo culturale, per essere considerata un proficuo precedente.

Va anche detto che altre sedi italiane proponevano l'insegnamento di *Disegno industriale*, e anche con docenti di provato valore, come a Firenze Roberto Segoni, il cui insegnamento era per di più sostenuto da quello, assolutamente carismatico, di Giovanni Klaus Koenig nella *Storia del design*, ma nessuno di questi poteva contare su una fiducia e una volontà di investimento, da parte dei colleghi del proprio Dipartimento, simili a quelli presenti a Milano. La ragione, probabilmente, stava nella loro incapacità di organizzare uno stretto rapporto di collaborazione con i comparti produttivi locali – peraltro poco indagati dai quasi inesistenti, al tempo, storici del design – che avrebbero potuto essere un interlocutore utile alla causa di un decollo più organizzato della disciplina. Richiamando l'esempio fiorentino, Koenig parlava a questa data dell'opportunità di creare una Scuola di specializzazione in *Disegno industriale*, ma la sua morte improvvisa, nel 1989, privò l'iniziativa della sua notevole esperienza culturale e soprattutto di quei suoi utili contatti nel mondo dei trasporti che, assommata alla sua abilità di ideare e di coinvolgere, avrebbero potuto sostanziarne il progetto. Così, quando essa comunque prese forma agli inizi degli anni '90, si chiuse nel volgere di poco tempo. In altre parole, i docenti italiani di *Disegno industriale* sembravano soddisfatti del loro compito didattico, del gradimento dei loro studenti e non erano mossi dal sacro fuoco di valorizzare la disciplina in modo più integrale. Benché Koenig scherzosamente definisse il designer *un pipistrello, mezzo topo e mezzo uccello* – alludendo alle qualità di intelligenza, di adattabilità, di curiosa concretezza, dell'uno, e a quelle di facilità e di durata di volo, dell'altro – i docenti italiani di design sapevano solo timidamente svolazzare!

L'Area tecnologica milanese è, invece, compatta, benché fatta di anime diverse negli interessi culturali, avvicinata da un rapporto con il mondo industriale di grande prossimità, sebbene anche qui differente da docente a docente, e sinergica con la Facoltà di Ingegneria, sua consorella nell'alveo politecnico, e non istituzione altra e impermeabile alla collaborazione. Entrambe poi avevano un comune denominatore, una stessa matrice intendendo l'approccio formativo quale integrazione-

ne fra conoscenze tecnico-scientifiche e ragioni umanistiche, ad avvalorare la possibilità di progetti didattici che altrove potevano essere ritenuti ad alto rischio di successo.

11.6 Un Corso di laurea in *Disegno Industriale*. E molto di più

Nel frattempo, nel 1989 viene istituito il Ministero per l'Università e la Ricerca Scientifica, autonomo rispetto al Ministero della Pubblica Istruzione, dando all'università un suo proprio centro di governo. Si apre così una stagione di riforme. La Legge 341 del 19 novembre 1990, con l'obiettivo di allineare il nostro sistema agli standard internazionali, riconosce l'autonomia didattica degli atenei ai quali permette di rilasciare, oltre alla laurea tradizionale, il diploma universitario, il diploma di laurea, il diploma di specializzazione e il dottorato di ricerca, a patto che tutti i percorsi formativi siano elaborati con una nuova sensibilità verso il tessuto imprenditoriale dei luoghi, per garantire al laureato occupazione e precise competenze professionali.

La Facoltà di Architettura del Politecnico di Milano si ingolosisce.

Il Preside Stevan, persona illuminata e aperta tanto ad affrontare i problemi di un'università di massa quanto ad interpretare le trasformazioni del tempo, che aveva sempre sostenuto lo sforzo dei suoi colleghi tecnologi di consolidare la propria presenza in nome di un adeguamento dell'istituto universitario alle richieste della contemporaneità, si prefigura la possibilità di istituire un Corso di laurea in Disegno industriale, visto che il design, con tutto il suo corredo di associazioni, enti, riviste, mostre, nonché di imprese, costituiva la specificità milanese.

Riteneva necessario superare l'anomalia che vedeva l'università italiana priva di un percorso dedicato a una figura professionale così significativa per l'immagine del Paese così come basilare che fosse il Politecnico di Milano a farsene carico per il ruolo giocato da Milano nel suo successo internazionale. Al di là del prestigio che il Politecnico ne avrebbe ricavato, la sua creazione avrebbe prodotto due risultati: uno, prosaico, di alleggerire la pressione del numero degli studenti iscritti al Corso di laurea in *Architettura*; l'altro, di servizio culturale, di corri-

spondere alle aspettative degli studenti di un Indirizzo in linea con il mercato professionale.

Stevan ha ormai una grande esperienza dei meccanismi istituzionali: agisce sul fronte del Ministero, utilizzando come leva il parere favorevole all'iniziativa di Tomás Maldonado, ritenendo che il suo punto di vista fosse considerato qualificato, soprattutto per i suoi trascorsi internazionali, in grado di ostare il latente provincialismo della struttura ministeriale. Si rivolge ad Angelo Cortesi, allora presidente dell'ADI, per avere il suo supporto e aiuto nell'affrontare il problema di una copertura professionale ai futuri laureati, indipendente dall'Ordine degli architetti, elemento che avrebbe potuto assicurarli sul loro avvenire. E trova nel Ministro Antonio Ruberti un alleato tanto disponibile nei confronti del

Nota 25.

Con il Decreto 24 febbraio 1993 il Ministero modifica l'Ordinamento didattico dei corsi prevedendo la Laurea in Disegno industriale e allega una nuova Tabella XXX con l'Ordinamento didattico per essa previsto.

progetto da risolvere i problemi statutari che esistevano 25.

A quel punto interpella Fabrizio Schiaffonati, Direttore del Dipartimento di PPPE, docente colto, disponibile, sensibile e soprattutto consapevole delle istituzioni, per fare un'ipotesi di piano convincente. Ottiene la sua ampia disponibilità, benché il problema non sia facile: andavano definiti gli obiettivi formativi e la struttura didattica, ipotizzato il livello di definizione progettuale che imponeva la costituzione di laboratori, per le necessarie verifiche tecnico-produttive, colmati i possibili vuoti disciplinari.

E non solo questo. Il cambiamento in atto nello scenario produttivo individuava nuove figure professionali a fronte della generica etichetta di designer, il profilo delle quali andava precisato e previsto nell'articolazione degli indirizzi di studio, per adeguarsi al mercato professionale. Sullo sfondo poi si poneva la questione dell'appetibilità della proposta, che – ovviamente – non veniva messa in discussione, anzi. Il problema era come organizzare una struttura, concreta, funzionale ed efficiente, rispetto a un numero sicuramente consistente di studenti.

L'area tecnologia garantiva, con il precedente, positivo esito organizzativo dell'Indirizzo di laurea e del Dottorato, la possibilità di riuscita. E Schiaffonati crede fermamente nelle sue possibilità, anche se si trattava di un passo non indifferente: costruire un percorso formativo indipendente da quello dell'architetto, configurare un professionista che avesse una dimensione tecnica, una economica, una sociale, una culturale e fosse capace di collegarle per proporre una sintesi progettuale, priva di cedimenti stilistici, di tentazioni a mode passeggiere.

La concretezza e la serietà dimostrate dai tecnologi nell'approfondimento delle loro tematiche, la loro relazione con il mondo dell'industria – partecipe dei suoi problemi ma priva di qualsiasi deferenza – la loro capacità di dialogo con le realtà statali e parastatali, la loro attitudine a connettere problemi di carattere tecnico con esigenze sociali od umane diventano garanzie per il buon fine dell'impresa. Non è solo quindi la presenza della disciplina di *Disegno industriale* nella loro Area a renderli necessari interlocutori ma è la loro capacità organizzativa, oltre che culturale, dimostrata nella conduzione delle loro ricerche di base e soprattutto in quelle applicate, con la correlata destrezza nel gestire il dialogo con l'industria.

Schiaffonati, però, coinvolgendo in prima istanza Achille Castiglioni, Marco Zanuso e Tomás Maldonado, non ottiene la positiva risposta che si attendeva, non essendosi reso conto di quanto tutti e tre, seppur animati da protagonismo, fossero incapaci di relazionarsi ai meccanismi burocratico-amministrativi della macchina politecnica e provati dall'essere i primi due già fuori ruolo e l'altro in odore di prossima quiescenza. Non potendo far conto sul loro apporto, nomina una nuova commissione interna all'area, che raccoglieva docenti che avrebbero potuto per le loro competenze farsi carico degli insegnamenti da prevedere, che riesce a presentare un piano per il solo primo anno, utilizzando la esplicita Tabella XXX del Decreto 24 febbraio 1993. Era un piano elementare, quasi sbrigativo ma sufficiente per tacitare la pressione di Stevan e per un avvio del Corso di Laurea nell'A.A. 1993-1994. Si può quindi partire ma bisogna assicurarsi un Presidente che affronti il problema: capace, intellettualmente vivace, sicuro e determinato, abile nel muoversi agilmente nelle istituzioni, nello stabilire relazioni, nel prefigurare, convinto della sfida e con la voglia di portarla avanti. Insomma, un *pinguino* con le doti di *pipistrello*, che sappia parlare ai *pipistrelli*!

Schiaffonati sa su chi puntare: Alberto Seassaro. E Seassaro raccoglie, non senza qualche dubbio iniziale, il quanto. Ufficialmente diventa Presidente del Corso di Laurea solo nel 1995, ma molto probabilmente inizia a lavorare qualche tempo prima. Subito mette mano al piano degli studi e la spia è la Guida dello studente per l'A.A. 1994-1995. Confrontatela con l'asciuttezza di quella dell'anno precedente, priva di un *incipit*, di una qualsiasi anticipazione affabulatoria o solo rassicurante. La nuova Guida, invece, presenta, espone, chiarisce, tranquillizza sul

percorso; illustra un programma già completo, chiaro, sinergico con le varie componenti dell'Ateneo, con i profili culturali e professionali ben specificati, con i tre cicli previsti dal decreto espletati, con le materie attivate dettagliatamente spiegate negli obiettivi, nel metodo, nelle richieste d'esame.

La positiva irrequietezza dell'uomo mette poi mano all'organizzazione della struttura muovendosi con abilità dentro l'Istituzione politecnica e, ancora, dentro e fuori di essa, per reperire docenti fra quelli della Facoltà, quelli dell'Ateneo e quei professionisti o esperti necessari per corsi specifici e per i laboratori, nonché aziende disposte ad ospitare i tirocinanti. Per dare senso e peso alla nuova realtà, promuove una configurazione allargata del Dipartimento PPPE che si trasforma, per denominazione e struttura, nel DI.Tec – Dipartimento di Disegno industriale e Tecnologia. Ma è solo un primo passo. Presto sarà costituito un Dipartimento del Design autonomo – IN.D.A.CO. – Dipartimento di Industrial Design, Arti e Comunicazione. Mossa intelligente che gli permetterà di lì a pochissimo di chiedere l'istituzione di una Facoltà del Design, la Terza Facoltà di Architettura del Politecnico, che Stevan gli concederà senza problemi considerandola «l'unica vera innovazione dell'Ateneo dalla sua fondazione» ²⁶. Immagina la necessità di spazi di respiro, dedicati, necessari per ben operare e per dignità istituzionale; tratta con l'amico Stevan e accetta senza perplessità la proposta di una periferia – la Bovisa – che da ipotesi rinunciataria, di sobborgo marginale, si trasformerà in realtà dall'energia vincente, simbolo anche di continuità fra il suo passato, non a caso, imprenditoriale e il suo presente di formazione per l'impresa.

Non pago, da subito, si presenta ai docenti che operano a scala nazionale, a vari livelli, nel campo della formazione universitaria per il *Disegno industriale* come loro elemento di collegamento per ascoltarne le richieste, per coordinare iniziative di ricerca culturale comuni, per riflettere sul futuro di quei concorsi che sarebbero venuti al fine di potenziare, da bravo *pinguino*, il settore disciplinare secondo le urgenze poste dalle varie sedi, ma senza creare dissidi o disorganici assetti. Ricercatore legato al CNR, propone il CNR per la prima ricerca comune – *Innovazione, qualità e ambiente nel Disegno industriale* – alle sedi di Milano, Torino, Genova, Napoli, Firenze, Venezia e Roma, per poi allargarla a Pescara e Palermo, in modo da collegare, unire, fare in modo che

Nota 26.
Cfr. quanto Stevan dice
in un'intervista a *Milano*
Post nel 2024.
[Link](#) →



il confronto muova i dormienti e li spinga a far crescere l'area nelle varie comunità, a prefigurare e a volare. Con lui stesso come assicurante responsabile della rotta.

Seassaro, incalzando, fa tutto questo in una manciata di anni e tutto questo, sempre incalzando, Seassaro continuerà a farlo negli anni successivi, quelli del nuovo secolo, a creare un Sistema Design Milano e poi un Sistema Design Italia. Non pago, costruirà le premesse per spingere i suoi allievi ad accreditare questa realtà a livello internazionale.

Schiaffonati e Stevan avevano scommesso sulla pedina giusta, a cui affidare la loro ipotesi di futuro per l'area del design.

Persona franca e disinvolta, Seassaro aveva dimostrato, quando aveva gestito le sorti dell'Indirizzo tecnologico, di essere un operativo ma non un mero esecutore, capace di muoversi all'interno dell'Ateneo con riguardo misto a lieve impertinenza, così come aveva reso manifeste le sue doti organizzative anche nello strutturare il Corso di perfezionamento in *Progettazione illuminotecnica*, nel 1986, sapendo intercettare figure professionali, esperti, organismi nazionali e internazionali a valorizzare con rigore tecnico-scientifico una materia ancora passibile di convalide. Aveva palesato le doti tipiche del tecnologo – di pragmaticità, di concretezza – mentre i suoi, seppur lontani, precedenti nel mondo estetico figurativo e nel campo dell'arredo assicuravano su una mentalità aperta, fin anche spregiudicata, ma disponibile a quel confronto critico, conforme alla filosofia politecnica. L'uomo aveva doti di pragmatismo e di realismo, di tenacia; il docente aveva chiaro il valore della ricerca, l'importanza del capitale umano, la necessità della selezione per merito, l'obbligo di costruire relazioni; l'intellettuale non mostrava preclusioni né mancanze culturali. Affidargli la configurazione della disciplina all'interno della realtà universitaria non fu quindi un azzardo. E infatti Seassaro è stato aperto all'innovazione, alle nuove tecnologie, a coniugare cultura del progetto e cultura del prodotto, ad ampliare gli ambiti didattici – pensiamo alla moda, al design nautico, ai Beni Culturali – a creare sinergie. In modo illuminato è andato a cercarsi docenti e collaborazioni didattiche fra i tecnologi, fra gli architetti, fra gli ingegneri, fra i sociologi, fra i designer. E mentre strutturava il suo Corso di laurea, ha convinto molti docenti di *Disegno industriale* a giro per l'Italia che potevano fare qualcosa di simile, riconfigurandosi all'interno delle loro facoltà, recidendo il loro cordone dall'area tecnologica,

trovando, con l'alleanza del nostro demiurgo, occasioni di crescita personale e di crescita per i propri allievi. In una parola ha costruito con successo e generosità qualcosa d'impensabile.

Grazie Alberto, grandioso *pinguino*, a nome dei *pipistrelli*!

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12. Alberto Seassaro. La lotta e il libero dibattito

Bianca Bottero

Già docente al Politecnico di Milano

Mentre cerco di tirare fuori dal periodo caldo delle lotte studentesche qualche ricordo, per parlare di Alberto Seassaro, quel che emerge mi fa tenerezza e questa operazione dello scavare nei ricordi mi porta a parlare di fatti che oggi sembrano lunari.

Ho conosciuto e frequentato Alberto quando nella Facoltà di Architettura di Milano tutto era messo in discussione, e le discipline dei corsi tradizionali erano contestate dagli studenti che ne esigevano un rapporto più diretto e consapevole con la società. Era il famoso 1968 e lo ricordo con rimpianto perché allora eravamo giovani e a quelle cose credevamo con entusiasmo. Allora Alberto esprimeva la sua grande vitalità e le sue eccezionali doti organizzative per creare momenti di lotta e anche di libero dibattito, e per formare gruppi di studio mirati a una riflessione sul senso più profondo del progettare.

Alberto e molti di noi, tutti *docenti subalterni*, insieme agli studenti contestammo i corsi di insegnamento e molti professori ufficiali.

E ci organizzammo per fare una didattica alternativa discutendo di case popolari e di *potere al popolo*... E facevamo continue assemblee e manifestazioni cittadine anche in appoggio alle lotte operaie che allora

rivendicavano lo Statuto dei lavoratori. E anche, per sfida, decidemmo di accogliere in Facoltà le famiglie di baraccati che avevano occupato le case popolari di via Tibaldi che erano state sfollate dalla polizia.

Passammo per questo una notte riuniti in una pseudo-assemblea (presieduta peraltro dal preside Carlo De Carli) per giustificare l'attività notturna della Facoltà come *attività didattica*!

La mattina però ci portarono via, ci arrestarono, e passammo un giorno in Questura – uno solo mi pare di ricordare – ma prima ci schierammo, tutti in fila, alzando il pugno e cantando Bandiera Rossa...

Poi ci licenziarono anche, ma questa fu un'altra storia... Ma oltre alla lotta, Alberto possedeva anche la capacità di alimentare forme di libero scambio tra studenti e docenti. Ricordo, in particolare, il seminario da lui tenuto con Corrado Levi, dal titolo *Il privato è politico*, nel quale l'inquietudine degli studenti e il loro rifiuto dell'architettura erano affrontati con un metodo che affiancava il percorso progettuale a un contemporaneo riconoscimento delle esperienze e delle sensibilità personali. Il seminario era seguito con entusiasmo da moltissimi studenti che ritrovarono, attraverso questa esperienza, una inedita possibilità di avvicinarsi all'architettura e di scoprirne il fascino [15](#).

E penso ora che anche le scelte e gli interessi architettonici coltivati in seguito da Alberto, lo studio attento delle tecnologie e l'amore per il design, fossero un modo per decostruire quelle forme stanche e ormai svuotate da qualsiasi vitalità che la tradizione accademica proponeva. Fossero cioè la strada – che si rivelerà fruttuosa nell'ambito del pensiero ecologico, e non solo – per riavvicinare l'architettura alla vita.



1. Manifesto del movimento degli studenti di architettura, *Uniti si vince*.

[Documento →](#)



13. Alberto Seassaro e la costruzione della rete italiana del design universitario

Luigi Bistagnino

Già docente al Politecnico di Torino

La visione frammentata del mondo, come un insieme di fatti, episodi e prodotti separati, dà vita ad un paradigma comportamentale in cui ognuno agisce in maniera indipendente ed autoriferita. Anche la società, la cultura, l'ambiente, la produzione, l'economia sono considerate come indipendenti l'una dall'altra e costituite al loro interno da parti separate che operano in maniera autonoma e che badano unicamente alla propria esistenza.

È ovvio quindi che con tale visione si sia in una situazione di profonda crisi, prima di tutto culturale e di conseguenza sociale e produttiva.

Abbiamo bisogno invece di una visione comune in cui ci vediamo come attori-soggetti che esistono in rapporto relazionale naturale con gli altri e per cui le azioni dei singoli, finalizzate ad un fine comune, si uniscono positivamente a quelle degli altri in un fluire armonico, vitale e duraturo. Una nuova visione non più *individuale*, ma *collettiva*.

Il design, in quest'atteggiamento generale, è un ambito nel quale diverse competenze concorrono per poter sviluppare un progetto come il frutto di un equilibrio che si compone di reciprocità, relazioni, scambi e aiuti vicendevoli.

Alberto Seassaro, nella sua molteplice attività progettuale e di ricerca, ha compreso molto bene che il design non si deve basare solamente sulla propria creatività individuale e di gestione di un progetto; nel momento di fondare un Corso di Laurea in design, con la propria ampia esperienza di lavoro, ha immaginato di creare una rete relazionale composta da diverse competenze e dall'incontro di saperi, dalla tecnologia alla sociologia, dall'ingegneria all'economia, dall'ergonomia alla conoscenza dei materiali, dalla produzione alla cultura materiale, dalla storia alla percezione sensoriale, dall'arte all'informatica. Tutte queste conoscenze, in un dialogo continuo, creano infatti una cultura progettuale ampia con la quale sviluppare correttamente una realtà produttiva che funge anche da stimolo per l'ambito in cui si colloca. Ma come mettere in pratica tutto questo passando dalle parole ai fatti?

È necessario coinvolgere i vari esperti con le loro competenze.

Ecco che allora Alberto Seassaro alla metà degli anni '90, appena fondato il primo Corso di Laurea italiano in design, pensa, con lungimiranza, di creare una rete relazionale di docenti titolari di corsi di design e di corsi ad esso attinenti, operanti all'interno delle Facoltà di Architettura di tutti gli Atenei italiani, e d'invitarli a tenere, a Milano, un workshop o un laboratorio 12 di progetto.

Quest'azione, tutt'altro che banale, dava agli studenti l'opportunità di poter conoscere e mettere in pratica una molteplicità di approcci e di visioni ampliando la propria cultura progettuale. Ma questa stessa azione, parallelamente, generava il primo incontro di tutti i docenti italiani della disciplina, favorendo così la conoscenza reciproca e creando un gruppo multidisciplinare che, con il coordinamento di Alberto Seassaro, ha iniziato ad interagire e ha innescato, negli anni, l'interesse e le condizioni perché, nelle varie sedi universitarie italiane, si avviassero diversi Corsi di Laurea in design.

Questo nuovo fermento culturale ha portato in primo piano il design come nuovo ambito di ricerca e insegnamento, in tutti gli atenei italiani, amplificando la portata di ciò che prima era compresso e confinato all'interno dei Corsi di Laurea in Architettura. Il contatto dialogico dei gruppi di ricerca presenti nelle diverse università, ha poi trovato anche nella SID (Società Italiana di Design) il proprio luogo-strumento di crescita e confronto, sviluppando una

Nota 1.

Nell'A.A. 1996-97 hanno svolto workshop: Luigi Bistagnino (Politecnico di Torino), Gabriella Caterina (Università Federico II di Napoli), Tato Dierna (Roma, La Sapienza), Virginia Gangemi (Università Federico II di Napoli), Ermanno Guida (Università Federico II di Napoli), Tonino Paris (Roma, La Sapienza), Cecilia Polidori (Università di Reggio Calabria), Antonio Quistelli (Università di Reggio Calabria); **Laboratori di Progetto:** Almerico de Angelis (Il Università di Napoli), Giorgio De Ferrari (Politecnico di Torino), Gabriella Peretti (Politecnico di Torino); **Corso di Storia:** Vanna Pasca Raimondi (Università di Palermo).

cultura del design che si è arricchita di un ricco panorama di proposte di ricerca e sviluppo che hanno fatto crescere il settore del design portandolo ad un sempre più vasto pubblico di imprenditori e aziende e rendendo la figura del designer essenziale in molteplici ambiti di applicazione.

Questa, in sintesi, la nascita e lo sviluppo dei Corsi di Studio in design in Italia di cui Alberto Seassaro è stato la scintilla iniziale, lo stimolatore, il punto di riferimento, il coordinatore di un processo culturale e relazionale che si sta sempre più sviluppando. *Grazie Alberto!*

Edificare l'istituzione per far spazio a contenuti nascenti

14. Collage e bricolage. O di come Alberto Seassaro si sia inventato il *Sistema Design* italiano a dispetto di tutti. Anche di se stesso

Antonella Penati

Dipartimento di Design, Politecnico di Milano

14.1 In quella stanzetta in via Bonardi al 3

Eccolo lì, solo coi suoi pensieri. Matita in bocca meditabonda; tra le dita, sigaretta *consunta* fino all'impossibile – rigorosamente Nazionali senza filtro, pacchetto verde morbido –, e mazzo di carte pronte per l'ennesimo *solitario* da giocare in caso di impellenti incombenze da affrontare, come una telefonata istituzionale, o una faticosa consegna in vista di una riunione di Senato Accademico dove *c'è da battagliaire*.

Una *affollata solitudine* nella stanzetta dipartimentale 4x4 di via Bonardi, diventata Presidenza, che condivideva con tutto il personale di segreteria – *le mie ragazze* come le chiamava in modo affettuoso –; con i suoi collaboratori più stretti; con i suoi assistenti a corsi e laboratori (gruppo nutrito perché aveva ereditato anche gli assistenti dell'amico e collega Giacomo Scarpini). È capitato infatti che fosse solo, con le sue idee e le sue visioni che gli altri – addirittura noi che lavoravamo con lui gomito a gomito tutti i giorni – riuscivano a comprendere solo dopo che queste si erano materializzate dando forma concreta al suo pensiero.

Dentro a quella stanzetta si celebravano anche le sedute di Giunta del Corso di laurea (prima della faticosa conquista di spazi dedicati); si tenevano gli incontri con i colleghi, un gran via vai, e incontrava persino gli studenti che accoglieva a tutte le ore senza necessità di appuntamento. Lì, dove tutto è cominciato quando non c'era nulla, ho conosciuto i suoi modi informali e schietti di relazionarsi con gli altri: dall'ultimo degli studenti al Rettore. Si sentiva a suo agio in ogni situazione e metteva tutti a loro agio, senza la necessità di fare l'amicone. Anzi, agli studenti dava rigorosamente del lei, anche se era sempre ben disposto all'ascolto; il che non necessariamente significava che fosse facile strappargli un sì. Con gli studenti, in particolare, era restio a concedere *eccezioni alla regola* perché aveva sempre ben chiaro che per tutti dovevano valere i medesimi principi.

Questa stanzetta della *convivenza costretta* mi ha fatto conoscere un lato ulteriore di Alberto Seassaro. Aveva un'idea del privato tutta sua. Era nel profondo una persona libera e proprio per questo poteva in tutta serenità discutere con colleghi di questioni delicate davanti a tutti i presenti, così come fare telefonate riservate ai familiari senza censure. Un libro aperto. Inizialmente rimanevo turbata da questo privato così pubblico, ma col tempo e conoscendo poi la sua storia umana e politica ho capito che questo era un tratto radicale della sua persona: essere quel che si è senza bisogno di *infingimenti* e ipocrisie.

In quella stanzetta, entrando, ci si trovava di fronte ad un armadio zeppo di documenti ben catalogati e, appiccicata in modo approssimativo sull'anta centrale la vignetta: «*Hai voluto la bicicletta? E adesso pedala!*», omaggio scherzoso dei suoi collaboratori perché lui la bicicletta non l'aveva voluta, ce l'avevano fatto salire più o meno a forza ma da quel momento aveva promesso a sé stesso e a chi lavorava con lui che c'era da pedalare e senza lagnarsi troppo!

L'armadio suddetto fungeva da separatore visivo di un piccolo spazio che ospitava due postazioni PC per la segreteria. A parte queste due postazioni, l'intera stanza era letteralmente colonizzata da grandi tavoli bianchi eccezion fatta per un piccolo passaggio (un *pertugio* più che altro) sufficiente a raggiungere il posto a sedere presidenziale. Un posto del tutto simile a quello delle sue segretarie, personalizzato solo da una piccola vetrinetta, sul muro alle spalle. Sull'anta della vetrinetta, piccole fotine dei nuovi arrivati di casa Seassaro, la nipote Caterina pri-

ma e il pronipote Enea poi; una grande immagine fotografica del Presidente Cesare Stevan con incollato sul petto un ritaglio di cuore umano in versione anatomica con disegnate sotto, con un pennarello rosso, una colata di gocchine di sangue: collage effettuato dallo stesso Seassaro. All'interno, facevano bella mostra di sé alcuni elefantini – suo animale venerato –, regalo dei colleghi di rientro da qualche viaggio esotico; multe da pagare; biglietti aerei; bustine sfuse di Aulin; la Citrosodina che ingurgitava a cucchiariate o versandola direttamente in bocca dal contenitore di latta gialla; la panna spray – antidoto alla citrosodina – che spruzzava in bocca durante le lunghe telefonate, provocando il caratteristico rumore della caffettiera in ebollizione, rumore che noi che gli stavamo attorno, suggerivamo sempre di decriptare all'interlocutore telefonico di turno. Una esigenza che Seassaro non avvertiva minimamente tanto il suo modo di vivere e di comportarsi fosse sereno, affrancato dalla pruderie delle regole di etichetta di un galateo conformista. Su un lato della vetrinetta, il ritaglio de *La Repubblica* di una vignetta di Massimo Bucchi con la frase: «L'ambizione più diffusa è restare fermi un giro», sostituita qualche anno più tardi, nel nuovo ufficio di presidenza dell'Edificio B1 di via Candiani, come segno di un pensiero che si aggiorna col tempo restando sempre uguale, con la vignetta, di Altan: *Vorrei vivere alla giornata, ma mi manca la necessaria visione strategica*.

Piccoli flash di un contesto di lavoro quotidiano che, nell'insieme, divengono una autopresentazione dello spirito seassariano.

Per mettere a fuoco il quale, dobbiamo soffermarci, dal momento che li abbiamo citati, sui suoi proverbiali tavoli di lavoro. Tavoli con cumuli di fogli di tutti i formati (ma in prevalenza fogli A3, *perché sugli A4 non puoi dispiegare neppure il pensiero più semplice*), di tutti i colori (ricordo la sua passione per le risme coloratissime di fogli A3 che ricercava perché il colore fungeva da strumento di classificazione tematica e, di conseguenza, da richiamo visivo nel marasma di documenti che abitavano tavoli e superfici), mescolati a cartellette (altrettanto colorate) di documenti; a ritagli di riviste e di giornale; a immagini fotografiche; a strati di materiali semilavorati; a scarabocchi, locandine, manifesti, posta, biglietti da visita, numeri di telefono; appunti, pizzini e missive di colleghi: raccolta, sedimento e stratificazione di un modo di lavorare dove il lavoro, nessun lavoro, può mai dirsi concluso e dove il tempo non procede in maniera lineare ma viaggia su piani paralleli

multipli, sui quali avvengono più cose contemporaneamente talvolta in forma disgiunta mentre talvolta intersecandosi. Creando anche soluzioni non pensate. Come quella di essere alla ricerca di una determinata competenza da inserire nel quadro didattico e trovare il nome a cui non aveva pensato nel catalogo della mostra lì davanti agli occhi, sul tavolo appunto. Il tavolo è anche il luogo dove convivono problemi pubblici e privati, bollette da pagare e lettere al Rettore in un continuum che è la vita stessa ¹⁴.

I piani, del resto, sono i luoghi filosofici degli incontri singolari e fortuiti, come ci insegna Foucault (Foucault, 1978). Luoghi dove convivono, in forma di materiale distinto, informazioni, dati, problemi, concetti che, proprio in virtù di vicinanze insolite e accostamenti di primo acchito inusitati, possono pervenire a sintesi innovative. Non è tanto la singolarità e la natura disomogenea di ciò che sta sul tavolo a colpire l'immaginazione ma, secondo Foucault, è proprio il potere di contagio, la possibilità di generare misture impensate che derivano dalla «riduzione degli interstizi» che separano una cosa dall'altra (Foucault, 1978, p. 6).

Figura 1.

Ritratto caricaturale di Alberto Seassaro di Paolo Ciuccarelli (1996).

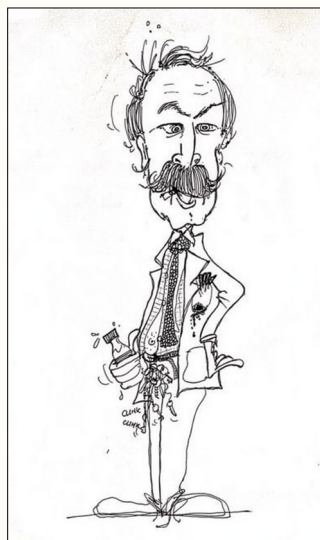
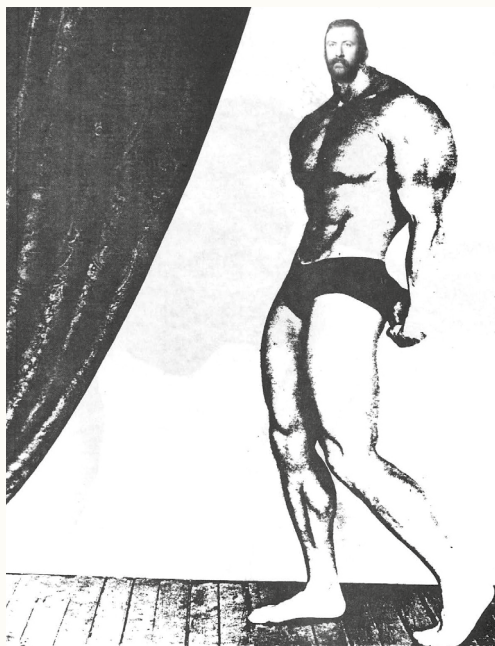


Figura 2.

Collage realizzati da Alberto Seassaro per i materiali didattici (anni '80).





Gli affastellamenti di elementi in origine separati che trovano successivi apparentamenti ci consente di cogliere alcuni modi del pensiero innovativo contemporaneo che lavora su *collage*

e *bricolage*, tecniche del fare e del pensare ampiamente utilizzati da Alberto Seassaro che era solito produrre accostamenti innovativi – talvolta azzardati – partendo da materiali concettuali e talvolta anche da materiali umani che li per li non erano facilmente associabili. Del resto, i criteri che muovono associazioni e analogie sono personali e fortemente connessi alla



storia culturale del soggetto, una storia portata ad includere più che ad escludere. Ed infatti, ci insegna Maffesoli, il collage non discrimina perché «il collage è *stricto sensu* una metafora che trasporta in uno stesso luogo, riunisce» (Maffesoli, 1986, p. 123).

Gli stessi manifesti degli studi possono considerarsi un luogo – il luogo – dove Seassaro ha portato a convergenza pensieri e persone distanti e diverse, «come sul tavolo della sala operatoria, l'ombrello e la macchina da cucire» di Michel Foucault (Foucault, 1978, p. 6).

I materiali più disparati presenti sul tavolo, raccolti nel tempo, ritagliati dal loro contesto di partenza costituivano di fatto un serbatoio di suggestioni da cui attingere per poter essere riaggregati.

Questi elementi, infatti, una volta messi insieme, allora e solo allora esistevano e prendevano corpo diventando reali ma soprattutto realistici, possibili, anzi ovvi. Dietro a quei nomi giustapposti, all'inizio per pura intuizione, seguivano poi ore di dialoghi, discussioni, verifiche, aggiustamenti, cambi di rotta. E così l'intuizione iniziale acquistava pieno senso. In ciò era aiutato certamente da solide conoscenze, dalla sua storia artistica e personale ricca di incontri, amicizie, amori, relazioni, occasioni, esperienze coltivate in quello che soleva chiamare *il tempo del cazzeggio libero* a cui dava notevole importanza e su cui torneremo in chiusura. E, probabilmente, era aiutato anche dall'essere sempre in

un *altrove* cercato e voluto rispetto ai luoghi, ai dibattiti, ai salotti del design il cui *mainstream* per lui, autenticamente popolare, erano sempre da osservare da debita distanza.

Il suo modo di progettare il nuovo consisteva nel procedere per parti e per integrazioni senza farsi imbrigliare da schemi pre-ordinati o da impalcature e perimetri stabiliti a priori, avendo però ben chiaro ciò che il contesto gli metteva a disposizione, compresi i vincoli che era comunque molto abile ad aggirare (mai sottovalutandoli ma cavalcandoli per sovvertirli nel progetto. Del resto, «sparigliare le carte» ovvero cambiare le regole del gioco, creare scompiglio o confondere le idee era tra le sue ambizioni conclamate) e i temi di interesse del sistema che era ben disposto a captare e ad accogliere. Gli stessi fini del progetto istituzionale venivano plasmati passo passo, rivedendoli e adattandoli alle disponibilità e alle esigenze del contesto filtrandoli con la lente di un pensiero sempre politico, mai innocente. Un *modus operandi* che fotografa molto nitidamente la sua forma mentis di fronte alle complessità del progetto.

Come abbiamo detto nell'Introduzione a questo testo «La forza dirompente dell'azione di Alberto Seassaro sta proprio nel prendere ciò di cui il sistema dispone, in termini di risorse umane, di conoscenze, di strumentazioni, di spazi, di usanze organizzative e, attraverso un minuto lavoro di adattamento, di micro-trasformazioni, di tattiche, disegnare un'azione strategica di portata impensabile [...]».

È il meglio che abbiamo; Sono i migliori che abbiamo era solito dire a colleghi e collaboratori ogniquale volta, a fronte di precise necessità, si riusciva a rispondere in termini umani e materiali solo con soluzioni *arrangiate* (altro termine che utilizzava frequentemente). E in quel *sono i migliori che abbiamo* riecheggia «il migliore dei mondi possibili» del Candido di Voltaire – lettura che amava e che aveva eretto a filosofia di vita – e con esso la critica all'ottimismo facile secondo cui *tutto va bene nel migliore dei mondi possibili* (Voltaire, 1950). L'impegno nel quotidiano, il fare i conti con la concretezza e con i limiti della realtà erano invece il suo punto di forza.

Fin dal principio, infatti, aveva chiaro, ed era il suo spirito-guida, che la pazienza e il tempo avrebbero dato una mano a mettere a punto contenuti e mezzi più *acconci* (altro termine che utilizzava frequentemente). Del resto, come ci ricorda Sennett (2009, p. 19) nell'artigian-

no-demiurgo (cfr. l'introduzione in questo testo) «l'uso di strumenti imperfetti o parziali stimola l'immaginazione a elaborare la capacità di riparare, di improvvisare». Così come, la mancata disponibilità di risorse perfettamente rispondenti ai fini costringeva ad entrare a patti con questi, non riducendoli ma adattandoli, aggiustandoli, riorientandoli.

Particolarmente degno di nota pare, qui, il concetto di *contingenza* che l'epistemologo Tagliagambe (1997, p. 48) interpreta come incentivo a cambiare una situazione che si sta vivendo, attraverso esplorazioni trasformative tipiche dell'attività creativa. È un tipo di creatività, quella generata dalla contingenza, che sa scegliere alternative che siano non solo concepibili, ma anche concretamente realizzabili.

De Certeau parla a questo proposito di tecniche *minuscole* (2001, p. 9), di un'inventiva governata proprio dall'arte di arrangiarsi che porta a ricombinare elementi e saperi eterogenei sulla base di una intelligenza pratica che, in modo arguto, inventa procedure, adatta schemi, (ivi, p. 96), trasferisce e riutilizza soggetti, saperi sfruttando le plurime potenzialità implicite in ciascuno e seguendo, allo stesso tempo, il principio che molti elementi/persone sono sostituibili con altri. Sono quelle forme di progettazione che si alimentano dell'utilizzo di ciò che il contesto rende disponibile per produrre risultati che non hanno la pretesa di essere replicati, di diventare modello, ma semplicemente di risolvere delle *contingenze*. Sono processi che le teorie dell'innovazione di stampo evolutivo hanno ben descritto proprio come pratiche di *bricolage* (Levi-Strauss, 1966; Ceruti, 1995), pratiche ingegnose attivate dallo stato di necessità, supportate da un senso intuitivo e pratico, capace di mettere in moto quella nostra intrinseca abilità di saper rifunzionalizzare ciò che è disponibile per prestazioni diverse da quelle per cui sono stati progettati, ricombinandoli o ricombinandone alcune parti o elementi, permettendo di ottenere talvolta risultati originali (Joyce & Craig, 2011). Risultati che, pur derivando dalla casualità degli elementi disponibili che dettano la logica del loro assemblaggio, una volta realizzati, paiono essere «la cosa più ovvia» che si potesse fare (Freeman, 2007). L'azione del *bricoleur* si caratterizza infatti per l'utilizzo di materiali e componenti imperfetti, sub-ottimali rispetto al risultato che intende ottenere e, in questo modo, la stessa finalità, in parte plasmata da ciò che è disponibile per l'uso, è essa stessa risolta in modo approssimativo ma efficace. (Lévi-Strauss, 1966).

Questo procedere per adattamenti successivi, per finalità che riducono la loro portata e si trasformano nel tempo, producendo comunque effetti di grande impatto, ha molto a che fare, come dicevamo più sopra, con i modi del progetto nella contemporaneità dove le grandi narrazioni cedono il passo a elaborazioni di senso locali e transeunti (Penati, 2006).

Si è da più parti parlato di questa impronta, sostenendo che derivasse a Seassaro dal suo spirito anarchico.

Credo che, a dispetto delle sue letture di Proudhon, Bakunin, Kropotkin e degli scritti teorici sull'anarchia che avevano nutrito la sua giovinezza, e a dispetto anche di quanto si diceva di lui, Seassaro non fosse anarchico, pensando soprattutto all'anarchia nella sua accezione culturale. Penso che il modo di pensare e di progettare di Alberto Seassaro, sia nei progetti di portata più limitata, sia nei grandi progetti che ha fatto maturare, prendesse più le mosse da un modo di fare e di pensare dadaista.

Il suo essere dadaista lo si coglie nel consueto uso di modi – del pensiero, del fare, del comportamento – che in analogia al pensiero sotteso alle pratiche del *collage* lo portano a creare significati innovativi, scegliendo e assemblando, secondo una casualità solo apparente, materiali originari che acquistano significato solo nel progetto finale.

E questo suo modo di essere lo si coglie anche nell'uso frequente dell'espressione idiomática dadaista *Il pensiero mi si forma in bocca* che aveva eretto a stile di osservazione, riflessione e giudizio, e che indica un pensiero non pre-costituito ma che prende forma nella parola, nell'argomentare. Nell'argomentare ricerca le ragioni della sua attendibilità. Dadaista, dunque, nel modo di organizzare il pensiero così come nello stile narrativo: perché avere una lezione fissa nei contenuti e nel racconto? Basta la scaletta e poi i contenuti si legano a braccio proprio come nelle partiture del jazz; perché organizzare un racconto, una presentazione secondo una sequenza di slide? La successione di slide condiziona il pensiero mentre tra concetti si possono inventare legami e successioni infiniti. Ecco perché, chi per anni lo ha seguito nelle sue lezioni, sostiene di non aver mai sentito una lezione uguale alla precedente. Ecco perché, nel formulare il quadro didattico, anche quando i risultati si erano mostrati lusinghieri sia per tematiche proposte sia per gruppi di docenti inseriti nel Manifesto degli studi, mai ha prova-

to a cristallizzare la proposta didattica ed anzi il suo motto continuava ad essere: *Ogni anno si cambia!*; *Creare realtà uniche, irripetibili*; *Mai riproporre lo stesso tema, mai mettere il docente nella stessa collocazione. La routine ammazza la didattica del progetto*; *Ma che docenti sono quelli che nel 2000 fanno lezione usando i lucidi del 1965 ed in tanto fuori di qui tutto è cambiato!?*.

Anche i gruppi di lavoro della docenza venivano composti scegliendo spesso personalità, esperienze e visioni del progetto agli antipodi sul piano della riflessione teorico-critica. O, se personalità dissimili non venivano messi nello stesso gruppo, venivano fatti incontrare agli studenti in esperienze didattiche successive tanto aborrisce l'idea del pensiero unico, della *scuola di pensiero*. Non ha mai condiviso le visioni assolute e dogmatiche. Coltivava l'idea dell'antimodello perché ogni studente potesse formarsi, contaminato da poetiche e culture del progetto diverse.

Ma soffermiamoci ancora un momento sul tema del *collage* e del *fotomontaggio* come modo per costruire la realtà, per rettificarla, per reinventarla. Il collage offre modi non convenzionali per inventare nuove realtà facendone percepire sfaccettature diverse, come era tipico dei cubisti ma offre anche modi insoliti di rappresentare la realtà giustappponendo materiali e tecniche differenti, introducendo inserti stranianti in contesti dati o rendendo distopici alcuni elementi attraverso il loro accostamento.

E, il collage per Seassaro è stato anche un vero e proprio strumento di rappresentazione.

Qui ha giocato un ruolo fondamentale il suo essere immerso nella cultura artistica e nel possedere una profonda conoscenza, non solo teorica ma esercitata negli anni degli studi a Brera, delle tecniche pittoriche, dalle più tradizionali a quelle delle avanguardie.

La sua propensione al collage si è sempre e inevitabilmente accompagnata alla mania del ritagliare ovvero del sottrarre dal suo contesto originario ogni articolo, ogni vignetta, ogni copertina di rivista fosse di suo interesse, per renderli disponibili a nuovi contesti d'uso. Questo dalla sua età giovanile fino all'ultimo dei suoi giorni. Ecco allora contenitori colmi di ordinatissimi ritagli: dalle copertine di *Alfabeta* e de *La gola* di Pedrazzini a quelle de *Il male* di Liberatore, il *Frigidaire* di Pazienza, Scòzzari e gli altri, fino alle vignette satiriche di Altan ma anche le Bu-

stine di Minerva di Umberto Eco, gli approfondimenti di Umberto Galimberti sul Venerdì di Repubblica e così via. Il ritagliare è un atto che già di per sé richiama infinite possibilità di riutilizzo.

Un artificio, questo, usato per agevolare un pensiero, mai improvvisato, ma suscettibile di quelle modifiche e approfondimenti che possono emergere di volta in volta riflettendo sulla struttura e sui modi di articolare il dispiegarsi del progetto e che può necessitare di integrazioni, di inserti o anche di rivedere l'ordine e la sequenza degli argomenti. Un modo di pensare e di rappresentare il pensiero che nasce già ipertestuale con segni di rimando, integrazioni fuori pagina, correzioni, cancellature, spostamenti di posizione esibite. Nei molti scritti di Seassaro, coevo ed amico di Isgrò, è subito evidente che anche le cancellature sono un testo che lascia intuire gli scarti e i passaggi del pensiero.

Un artificio accompagnato da un corredo di segni narrativi, figure e simboli collocati nella pagina per rispondere al bisogno di comunicare meglio processi e percorsi mentali, compresa la possibilità di tornare indietro e rimettere ogni cosa al posto di partenza. Una scrittura fatta non solo di parole, ma di spazi, di direzioni che già da soli sono un testo visivo e poi, segni, disegni, schemi, tabelle. Il cosmo incasellato e messo in ordine con perizia sartoriale nelle pagine affastellate di pensieri che a dispetto del loro apparente disordine visivo, nascono già espressi in modo assolutamente compiuto.

C'è almeno un altro percorso che occorre seguire fino in fondo per comprendere le qualità del suo modo di pensare progettando: è l'immersione totale nei linguaggi artistici e più in generale nei linguaggi visivi, nella scrittura per immagini e, tra questi ultimi, in particolare quello dei fumetti ne forma lo stile progettuale. Il fumetto gli fornisce quegli strumenti della cultura visiva che alimentano quel suo modo così peculiare e distintivo di spiegare e accompagnare le fasi processuali del progetto, attraverso racconti scripto-grafici fatti di disegni, tabelle e illustrazioni per supportare o rendere più immediati testi scritti o, viceversa, per contaminare con notazioni scritte le pagine di progetto. Il trasporto verso le forme di testo visivo, gli arrivava anche dai suoi primi e rudimentali strumenti di apprendimento: primi tra tutti le pagine illustrate dell'Enciclopedia dei ragazzi che, dai suoi racconti, aveva avidamente bevuto e da cui diceva di aver imparato tutto l'essenziale in un'epoca in cui l'Enciclopedia aveva ancora la forza di riuscire a racchiu-

dere e catalogare tutto il sapere disponibile mettendolo a disposizione con la ricchezza delle immagini derivate da un'importante tradizione, quella della illustrazione didascalica. Un grande conforto per una generazione che aveva avuto testi scolastici pressoché privi di immagini. Gli stessi libri per ragazzi, raccontava, ne erano privi e quando arrivavano le pagine illustrate, per lui si aprivano mondi immaginativi che andavano al di là del testo. Ed effettivamente le sue conoscenze storiche, geografiche, artistiche sterminate, erano molto vivide e cercava sempre, anche nel racconto orale, di renderle visive.

L'ansia panottica di fissare con la penna sistemi complessi traducendoli in sintesi visive la ricordano tutti quelli che hanno lavorato con lui e che avevano l'arduo compito di trasformare in digitale quel che aveva prodotto a mano. Le sue tabelle, i suoi disegni procedurali e di schematizzazione non si limitavano ad essere forme di semplice rappresentazione dell'esistente ma erano già configurazioni e prefigurazioni capaci di dare un ordine relazionale preciso ai diversi elementi. Erano sempre, in altri termini, atti di progetto che contemplavano plurime alternative. Questi schemi potevano andare dal manifesto degli studi, per il quale aveva definito un format ancora oggi utilizzato: un mondo codificato sul piano visivo di informazioni complesse che definivano il quadro di programmazione didattica di ciascun corso di studi fino ad arrivare a schemi più complessi (come quelli che mettevano in relazione gli studi di ordine superiore con i corsi universitari, con Master, Corsi professionalizzanti, Corsi d'alta specializzazione, Dottorati di ricerca ecc.). Schemi concepiti, per esempio, perché lo studente potesse aver chiaro a colpo d'occhio, senza leggere pagine e pagine della Guida dello studente, l'intera offerta formativa della Facoltà con le molteplici opzioni di scelta che aveva a disposizione nel suo percorso universitario e post-universitario.

Nel produrre lo schema, aveva in mente, sin dal primo tratto disegnato, l'intero canovaccio, la proporzione e la dislocazione delle diverse parti nello spazio della pagina, in virtù delle loro interazioni. Il collage interveniva come *remedium* laddove qualche elemento dovesse essere integrato perché non previsto o subentrato nel corso del progetto. Tutti noi ricordiamo le famose *giunte* di più fogli o intersezioni di fogli nei fogli. Anche il linguaggio verbale di Alberto Seassaro non era banale sia nella prosa scritta sia nel parlato. Un linguaggio dall'umanità calda

A.S. 26/4

VIAIO IN GRAN GARABAGUA

(dalla raccolta intitolata *Ampe*
(EZZOU 1988))

di Henry MICHAUX e di SEASSARO

pittrice infornuata
scrittrice di chiami di viaggio veri (Equador 1923)
o immaginari Viaggio in Gran Garabagua (1912)
Nel paese della magia
Qui Paddeu

Scrive e dipinge in viaggio
o in "trip"
sotto effetto dell'acido (LSD)

Preziosa il senso della quotidianità
nelle sue descrizioni non c'è storia - né tempo
né grandi eventi

è sempre il particolare
il personale
che determina un senso susseguente
del generale
del politico

M. è un antropologo dell'immaginario.
descrive sé stesso nelle infinite possibilità del suo 10.

L'10 diventa mondo, Universo, totalità

"IO è fatto di tutto. Una flessione in una frase, si tratta forse di un altro io che cerca di apparire? Se il sì è mio il no è di un secondo io? Io non è che provvisorio (sembra faccia davanti a qualcuno, io ad ascoltare che si cambia in un'altra lingua, in un'altra parte) e gonfio di un nuovo personaggio, che un accidente, una emozione, un colpo sulla testa libererà per l'esclusione del precedente, e con stupore generale, spesso formato istantaneamente. Era dunque già del tutto continuo. Forse non si è fatti per un solo io. Si ha tutto a volerci attendere. Pregiudizio dell'unità. In una doppia, tripla, quadrupla vita, ci si sentirebbe maggiormente a proprio agio, meno così e paralizzanti dal subconscio ostile al cosciente (ostilità degli altri io spiegati). La più grande fatica di una giornata e di una vita potrebbe proprio essere dovuta allo sforzo, alla tensione necessaria per conservare uno stesso io attraverso le tentazioni continue di cambiare".

M. si identifica con tutti gli oo diversi 10 possibili.

Il suo 10 si oposta, e assume (involontariamente?) aspetti e comportamenti di altre forme di 10 esistenti.

La dinamica degli 10, inattesa per non dover soffrire la realtà, al tempo stesso la rivela.

(Lo stesso procedimento che c'è in *Quattro*)

Il vero 10, è sempre la morte: presente sempre.

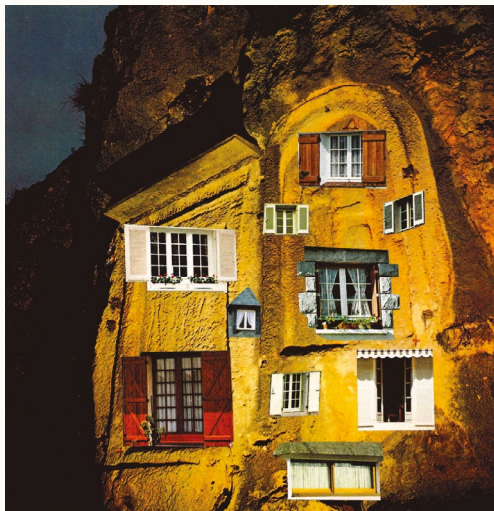




Figura 3.

Traduzioni vive del testo di Michaux *Viaggio nella Gran Garabagna* realizzate con la tecnica del collage da Alberto Seassaro ed utilizzate come materiale didattico per gli studenti di Architettura.

ed empatica allenato dalle letture di François Rabelais tra i suoi autori preferiti. Caratterizzato anche da una grande ricchezza lessicale, con l'uso di termini concreti, colloquiali, popolari ed anche dialettali: un collage anche in questo caso. In questo risentiva dello stile letterario di scrittori come Gadda alla cui lettura lo aveva introdotto Bruna Bianchi fine linguista e traduttrice, sua compagna per lungo tempo. Di Gadda coglieva la pluralità di registri linguistici – dai termini scientifici, filosofici, al ricorso a termini arcaici, ma anche dialettali – che sfoggiava soprattutto nei suoi scritti. Alcuni suoi termini ricorrenti – *alfine*, *vieppiù*, *verboso*, *imperituro*, *acconcio*, *cimento*, *tenzone*, *scalchignato*, *macché*, *sgorbagna*, *cippirimerlo*, *ciau pep* – ma anche alcuni suoi modi di dire – *El püsse san el g'ha la rogn*a (frase dialettale milanese che letteralmente significa *Il più sano ha la rogn*a, ovvero anche chi sembra perfetto ha qualche difetto) – sono proprio testimonianza di un repertorio che spazia dal gergale al colto al dialettale. E, su quest'ultimo versante, non si può non dire l'influenza esercitata dall'amore smodato per i testi di Jannacci a cui avrebbe dato il Nobel per la letteratura.

Era anche facile alla creazione di neologismi: *abluire*, per esempio, termine usato per indicare l'atto di evidenziare al computer le parti di testo (che come è noto divengono azzurrate); *inignatico* una via di mezzo tra enigmatico e stagnante (*qui la situazione si fa inignatica* per dire di situazione complessa e aggrovigliata) dove il digramma *gn* onomatopeico forse deve qualcosa al neologismo «gnommero» inventato da Gadda per dire *intrico*, *garbuglio*. O, *museabile*, come ci ricordano Eleonora Lupo e Raffaella Trocchianesi nel loro capitolo.

Per chiudere due note sul Seassaro-pensiero. La prima descrive il modo di lavorare di Alberto Seassaro con gli altri colleghi.

Alberto Seassaro apparteneva a una genesrazione che Andrea Branzi, parlando di Joe Colombo di qualche anno più giovane di Seassaro e per alcuni tratti suo ispiratore, battezza come «la generazione del jazz» (Branzi, 2011, p. 5). Una generazione che «*ha saputo [...] intuire che l'epoca delle grandi armonie, delle grandi sinfonie stava terminando e al loro posto una creatività sociale anarchica stava occupando la scena*» (Branzi, 2011, p. 5) con la magia della coralità, con l'improvvisazione sapiente fuori da partiture date, con esecuzioni in assolo ma effetti all'unisono. Avendo lavorato per lunghissimo tempo con Alberto Seassaro, non ricordo un solo progetto concepito senza aver alla base

l'attitudine a fare gruppo, a suonare ognuno la sua parte introducendo la componente creativa e di interpretazione individuale tenute insieme da una partitura adattativa; ad accettare i fuori programma – i fuori partitura appunto – come qualcosa da valorizzare; a costruire processi di progetto ferrei nei quali però, la flessibilità dell'intelligenza corale, consentiva di dare spazio all'improvvisazione; ad accogliere la combinazione di ritmi e sensibilità diverse; a rendere il lavorare assieme leggero e coinvolgente. In questo compito, lo swing ce lo metteva lui stesso! Tra i racconti prelevati dal suo passato musicale, il jazz emerge come metafora di un certo modo di intendere l'interazione creativa tra persone e della necessità di cedere qualcosa di personale per far prevalere il gruppo. È così che nacque il suo primo giovane progetto della Jazz band nella quale, Alberto Seassaro fiero sonatore di tromba, rendendosi conto che c'erano troppe trombe nel gruppo, disse: *evabbé io suonerò il banjo altrimenti la band non si fa*. Con buona pace di Charlie Parker! L'anarchia controllata del jazz è una buona immagine di vent'anni di lavoro assieme.

La seconda riguarda il rapporto di Alberto Seassaro con il fare e il rapporto del suo fare con il tempo.

Tergiversare era la parola d'ordine. Perder tempo una conquista della vita. Il successo di Alberto Seassaro è senz'altro frutto delle sue idee geniali e visionarie, dei suoi strappi e delle sue lotte per ottenere l'impossibile ma soprattutto del lavoro continuo, intenso quasi ossessivo. L'intensità è una cifra che ben aggettiva l'essere e il fare di Alberto Seassaro e ne testimonia la passione.

Eppure quel *continuum* era costituito al contempo da una attenzione che non si spostava mai dall'obiettivo ma anche da un operare a intermittenza: pause meditative in un girovagare senza mete apparenti. In quei momenti era imprendibile.

Appena i suoi occhi si accendevano per un nuovo traguardo da rincorrere, e non appena aveva sguinzagliato i suoi prodi dietro a progetti di cui lui solo padroneggiava il senso ultimo, dopo aver movimentato mezzo mondo, creando aspettative, fissando scadenze, ecco che immediatamente il correr dietro alle cose diabolicamente si trasformava nell'essere rincorso dalle cose. Le cose da fare diventavano un'ossessione; le cose da fare lo limitavano, lo angustiavano. Imbrigliarlo diventava il lavoro di tutti.

Queste pause, questi intervalli erano una necessità: all'avvicinarsi della scadenza di una consegna, l'urgenza lo rendeva lucidissimo, produttivo, concentrato: eccolo allora scrivere di getto, quasi senza tentennamenti e ripensamenti e mettere in schema progetti a grappolo che toccavano contemporaneamente la didattica, la ricerca, il progetto. Il perder tempo come arte. Amava molto rivedere l'intervista di Fellini sulla perdita di tempo eretta a stile di vita, anzi come vero e proprio obiettivo di vita. Ma non il tempo perso dei *Vitelloni*, tempo ozioso e alla rincorsa di obiettivi vanagloriosi (altro termine che apparteneva al vocabolario seassariano; termine che aveva ben sottolineato nella lettura di Madame Bovary di Flaubert), ma il tempo speso alla ricerca dell'intervallo perduto, della distrazione, del distacco, della separazione, delle zone di passaggio tra una cosa e l'altra, dei vuoti che vanno coltivati perché lì, proprio lì, possono capitare esperienze che non ti aspetti. Il perder tempo come arte della sosta che aggiunge conoscenza.

Quando si metteva a lavorare a testa bassa, anche in questo caso, il lavoro intenso non coincideva mai con l'ottimizzazione di tempo ed energie. Anzi, potendo si attardava a perder tempo anche nel tempo del lavoro. *Non ottimizzare mai! L'ottimizzazione un fastidio, un peccato mortale dell'epoca contemporanea! Nel progetto l'economia di scala, il fare risicato, non paga; occorre sempre fare di più, debordare.* Perché fare poco quando si può fare tanto? Perché lavorare di giorno se si può lavorare di notte? Perché lavorare nei giorni feriali se si può lavorare la Domenica! Ai lamentanti rispondeva: *siete ligi a norme piccolo-borghesi!* Poi però si faceva perdonare portandoti qualcosa che sapeva piacevoli tantissimo tipo le caldarroste tenute calde nel suo maglione *color blu marin*, per citare *Musical* di Jannacci.

È forse l'insieme di queste sue caratteristiche come il «tono scanzonato anche nelle occasioni più importanti [...] mantenendo, al tempo stesso, un sottile senso delle istituzioni unito alla capacità di non perdere di vista ogni piccolo dettaglio del mondo che lo circonda per poterlo inscrivere nel disegno che ha in mente» come racconta Luciano Crespi nel suo capitolo in questo testo, o l'unione di una «ferma determinazione e di una visione che avrebbe potuto sembrare impraticabile, con doti di fine strategia, celate dall'ironia e da un atteggiamento *dégagé* che non intimoriva il mondo degli architetti né li allertava sulle sue reali intenzioni» come ci racconta invece Cristina Tonelli sempre

in questo testo, o forse ancora perché abilissimo nella «microfisica del costruire» come ci ricorda Flaviano Celaschi nel suo capitolo, ad aver portato Alberto Seassaro a «depistare» (sempre per usare un termine che ritroviamo nel capitolo di Luciano Crespi) un intero sistema caratterizzato da decenni di inerzia, procedendo passo passo, di collage in collage, inesorabile alla meta. Una meta che lui stesso non aveva previsto e forse neppure voluto fino in fondo, tanta era la sua voglia di vita libera. Dal giorno dopo il suo pensionamento Alberto Seassaro non si è più occupato di nulla che riguardasse il Politecnico di Milano. A chi gli chiedeva notizie del Politecnico rispondeva: *Il Politecnico? Era il mio lavoro, l'ho amato e mi ha dato tanto, ma non era la mia vita. La mia vita è altrove.*

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15. Design *momentum*. Genesi e sviluppo di una scuola

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15.1 *Del* design. Tutti i design che esistono e tutti quelli che esisteranno

La Facoltà del Design nasce in un momento in cui convergono trasformazioni culturali e istituzionali favorevoli e in un contesto in cui alcune figure con ruoli di guida nel Politecnico di Milano aprono inediti spazi di cambiamento. È in questa fase che Alberto Seassaro sa tessere le relazioni indispensabili per materializzare il progetto di una nuova scuola che, come molti altri sviluppati nel corso della sua carriera, è espressione della sua capacità di saper cogliere repentinamente opportunità del momento, facendo leva su risorse disponibili e motivando all'azione attraverso visioni spericolate e lucide insieme. La Facoltà del Design inizia pertanto a prendere forma a partire proprio dalla denominazione che Alberto Seassaro le conferisce, da quel *del design*, che ne rappresenta in sintesi il tratto identitario più significativo.

Dopo l'esperienza del Corso di studi in Disegno industriale avviato nel 1993, nella primavera del 2000 per Decreto Ministeriale e in coe-

renza con la misura varata dal Governo per il *Decongestionamento degli Atenei*, viene istituita al Politecnico di Milano la III Facoltà di Architettura. Questa denominazione, ancora agganciata all'architettura, riesce ad insinuare nell'opportunità della legge un progetto di fatto inedito, ma asseconda anche una certa cautela conservatrice nello stesso Politecnico che spinge a ricondurre il nuovo dentro a un perimetro identitario consolidato. Da questo momento Alberto Seassaro inizia un lavoro retorico fine e insistente, fatto di rimbalzi epistolari e lunghi dibattiti ¹, mirando da subito con caparbia puntigliosità a quel *del design* di cui molti, anche tra i più vicini e solidali al progetto, non sono affatto convinti. Questo non tanto per l'utilizzo della parola inglese *design* invece di *disegno industriale*. Quest'ultima definizione italiana è in effetti già canonizzata culturalmente e già utiliz-

zata in Ateneo per indicare la nuova Facoltà; tuttavia tutti riconoscono le potenzialità del termine *design*, ovvero progetto, rispetto al termine *disegno*, più circoscritto nei significati. E riconoscono anche le limitazioni che l'aggettivazione *industriale* potrebbe portare alla comprensione della natura multiforme della disciplina e dei suoi domini applicativi.

È in realtà su quel *del* che tutto il dibattito si concentra e che Alberto Seassaro difende con una tale determinazione, da portare tutti, anche coloro ancora e comunque non convinti, alla resa. Un dettaglio minimo eppure un salto semantico significativo prodotto nel passaggio da una preposizione semplice a



1. Alberto Seassaro, *Lettera Denominazione della nuova Facoltà di Architettura dedicata alla tematica del Disegno Industriale*. Documento →



POLITECNICO DI MILANO FACOLTÀ DI ARCHITETTURA
Corso di Laurea in Disegno Industriale

Milano, 22 maggio 2000

Al Rettore
Prof. Adriano De Maio

Al Preside della Facoltà di Architettura
Leonardo Prof. Cesare Stevan

Al Senato Accademico

Agli uffici competenti

Oggetto: denominazione della nuova Facoltà di Architettura dedicata alla tematica del Disegno Industriale

Caro Adriano,

la presente per fare il punto sulla questione terminologica – questione apparentemente secondaria ma importante –, al fine di adottare un criterio di denominazione riconoscibile, certo, concordato e rispondente alle diverse esigenze di comunicazione, che sia utilizzabile in questa fase transitoria, in attesa di un definitivo, prossimo, consolidato assetto statutario basato sul principio delle Facoltà Tematiche.

Le denominazioni fino ad oggi utilizzate sono state varie e non univoche:

- Nel primissimo documento con cui era stata avanzata al Ministero la proposta di costituire una nuova Facoltà ai fini del decongestionamento degli Atenei, è scritto "Facoltà di Architettura – Design";
- Nella prima comunicazione pubblica ufficiale, all'inaugurazione a Como dell'Anno Accademico 1999/2000, il Rettore comunica: "Facoltà di Architettura – Disegno Industriale";
- Il decreto ministeriale istituisce la "III Facoltà di Architettura – Bovisa";
- La relazione del Preside della Facoltà di Architettura Leonardo, con cui si indice il bando di afferenza alla nuova Facoltà illustra in modo documentato la sua denominazione, approvata dal Senato Accademico e indica:

Via Durando 38/A, 20158 Milano – Tel. 02/2399.5961 – Fax 02/2399.5977

una preposizione articolata: una sfumatura essenziale per raccontare l'identità della scuola che Seassaro ha in mente. Gli scettici interpretano subito quell'articolo come una forma di arroganza intellettuale, il voler identificare la scuola come depositaria de *il design*, l'unico design e quindi come portatrice dell'unica visione disciplinare di design possibile. In definitiva non una scuola di design come le altre, semplicemente la scuola di design per antonomasia.

Amarcord

Ricordo gli estenuanti dibattiti in cui Seassaro, che noi chiamavamo il Sea, si sforzava di spiegare quel *del design*, facendo ricorso a tutta l'abilità dialettica di cui disponeva e ampio uso di metafore, figura retorica che, da vero esegeta di Marcel Proust, considerava uno dei suoi strumenti espressivi più efficaci. Ecco alcune memorie di quella disputa linguistica, che alla fine il Sea vinse, come molte altre. Quel *del design* è più vicino al concetto di *de* (design) alla latina, ovvero individua un luogo dove tutta la conoscenza sul design è raccolta, dove i fondamenti di tutti i modi di progettare presenti e futuri trovano e troveranno una definizione. O anche al senso che si dà alla preposizione articolata per identificare posti come per esempio ... *La casa del-la chiave*, intesa come il luogo dove tutte le chiavi possono essere fatte perché tutto si sa delle chiavi e tutto si continua a imparare sulle chiavi.

È così che la scuola di tutti i design che esistono e di tutti quelli che esisteranno inizia a prendere forma, pronta a farsi interprete dell'anarchismo intellettuale che ispirava la visione di Alberto Seassaro.

15.2 Poli-*Téchne*. Una infrastruttura cognitiva per il progetto

L'esperienza di Alberto Seassaro è strettamente collegata al Politecnico di Milano, alla sua storia e alla sua identità e anche per questo non si sviluppa a partire dalla *Progettazione architettonica* bensì nel contesto della *Tecnologia dell'architettura*. Il Politecnico di Milano appartiene a quella schiera di università fondate in Europa e in nord America nella seconda metà del XIX secolo. Dopo il fiorire delle discipline teologiche, filosofiche e in generale umanistiche nella prima fase dello sviluppo

accademico a partire dal Medioevo, l'avvento della prima Rivoluzione Industriale dà un primo impulso allo sviluppo degli studi scientifici. Le università vengono riorganizzate perimetrando in modo più netto i domini del sapere e attribuendo un'enfasi particolare a questi ambiti disciplinari. La loro importanza cresce ulteriormente con l'inizio della Seconda Rivoluzione Industriale, grazie ai crescenti esiti di applicazione delle scoperte scientifiche in ambito tecnologico e ingegneristico (Cohen, 1994). È precisamente in questa fase che tutti i principali Paesi occidentali si impegnano nella creazione di università a forte orientamento tecnico-scientifico con l'obiettivo di creare una relazione più diretta tra ricerca, sviluppo tecnologico e sviluppo industriale, strettamente interconnesse con i sistemi produttivi locali, spesso coinvolti nella loro fondazione e nel loro finanziamento (Detti e Gozzini, 2009). A questa trasformazione fa capo la creazione dei principali Politecnici in Europa, come Losanna, Zurigo, Monaco, Delft e come Milano appunto. Ma anche di realtà nord americane come il Massachusetts Institute of Technology a Boston e l'Università di Stanford a San Francisco (Baker, 2014).

Questa parabola scientifico-tecnologica non si arresta, investendo progressivamente altri domini disciplinari come accade in particolare nelle scuole di architettura che nascono nell'ambito di queste istituzioni, e come accade nel Politecnico di Milano. Qui la componente di Tecnologia dell'architettura si rafforza nel tempo e offre ad Alberto Seassaro un terreno ideale per sviluppare la sua visione del progetto. Il *Laboratorio di Sperimentazione di sistemi e componenti per l'architettura* che coordina come docente per molti anni è un'anticipazione di quella visione, strumentale e sperimentale insieme, della dimensione scientifica e tecnologica, che sarà un tratto caratterizzante nel progetto culturale della Facoltà del Design. La chimica, la fisica, la matematica, l'informatica sino alle loro applicazioni meccaniche e ingegneristiche sono infatti ricomprese nel progetto formativo della Facoltà, ma a patto che possano essere duttilmente poste al servizio della progettazione.

Praticamente tutti i Dipartimenti di Ingegneria sono chiamati a collaborare, ma tutti cimentati a sviluppare nuovi contenuti, nuovi modi e nuovi strumenti per insegnare, non sempre riuscendo a scardinare quelle logiche di arroccamento spesso presenti nelle comunità scientifiche. In molti casi provando curiosità, mettendosi in ascolto e avviando dialoghi interdisciplinari che ancora oggi nutrono il progetto formativo.

Ma l'infrastruttura *conoscitiva* della scuola ha bisogno di molto altro, di tutte quelle componenti umanistiche e artistiche che completano un'idea di *sinestesia delle arti* su cui Alberto Seassaro lavora a partire dalla sua Tesi di laurea. La comunità accademica dell'Architettura non riesce a dare risposta a queste istanze, accartocciata su un dibattito troppo astratto e ideologico, troppo ancorato a visioni lontane dalle trasformazioni sociali, culturali e tecnologiche del momento. Il progetto educativo prende ispirazione da altri modelli e altri contributi, nella convinzione che il problema della forma debba tornare al centro della formazione dei progettisti e dei designer in particolare, ed essere affrontato compiutamente per governare quelle implicazioni *percezionali, simboliche, psicologiche, di informazione e di comunicazione* che la forma porta con sé. (da Ugo La Pietra e Alberto Seassaro, *La ricerca morfologica*, 1966 – materiale grigio senza numerazione di pagina. Archivio Privato Alberto Seassaro). Per definirne i caratteri è centrale in particolare il riferimento all'insegnamento del *Disegno Industriale* nelle Accademie e il lungo lavoro preparatorio nato nello stesso Politecnico nel decennio precedente per iniziativa di Cesare Stevan e che raccoglie il contributo di Tomás Maldonado e la sua esperienza maturata come Direttore della Scuola di Ulm (1957-1962) (Crespi, 1984). Questi spunti confluiscono in uno scacchiere disciplinare articolato in cui entrano *Estetica, Semiotica, Percezione e colore, Ergonomia*, ma anche declinazioni didattiche più esotiche (per il contesto politecnico del momento) come il *basic design*, che si affiancano ai contributi scientifici e ingegneristici.

Insieme a tecnologia e arti, l'impalcatura cognitiva che deve sostenere la formazione del designer ha bisogno di un ultimo ingrediente che si configura come sintesi tra lo sperimentalismo praticato da Seassaro in ambito artistico e architettonico e la tradizione delle *Werkstätten*, le officine dedicate all'esplorazione di tecniche e materiali, di derivazione ulmiana. Nel contesto fortemente intellettualizzato della Facoltà di Architettura che guarda con sospetto a questa dimensione letta come approccio *Arts & Craft* (Cumming, 1991), Seassaro, con instancabile logorio, conquista progressivamente metri quadrati da dedicare alla fotografia, alla lavorazione legno, alle tecniche di modellistica. L'istituzione della Facoltà del Design nel 2000 e il progetto del nuovo Campus Bovisa sono l'occasione per articolare e strutturare compiutamente

questa visione nei Laboratori Sperimentali per il Design, inaugurati nel 2002 su una superficie di oltre 6000 mq. Non nascono ovviamente con la volontà di formare sarti, falegnami o modellisti capaci di produrre materialmente artefatti, ma di costruire spazi in cui i futuri designer possano sviluppare, sperimentare e verificare *fisicamente* la conoscenza sugli artefatti. La letteratura dell'ultimo ventennio sull'*embodied cognition* ci offre oggi un solido terreno teorico e metodologico per avvalorare questa scelta (Shapiro, 2011; Höök, 2018): i processi cognitivi passano attraverso il corpo e la cognizione sorge dalle interazioni corporee con il mondo fisico [2](#) [3](#).

Amarcord

Avevamo accettato di trasferirci nel quartiere Bovisa nel 1997 in un edificio in affitto in quei margini sfilacciati di Milano che allora era difficile ricondurre alla categoria città. La scelta era stata fatta su promessa che saremmo stati i primi ad avere una nuova sede. Promessa che nei due anni successivi il Sea avrebbe ricordato periodicamente e con costanza a noi (per rincuorarci) e ai vertici dell'Ateneo: *deportati* e *ospedalizzati* (il riferimento era ovviamente all'estetica piuttosto deprimente dell'edificio) avevamo meritato il nuovo Campus. Nel 2000, nel vuoto progettuale e decisionale che l'agosto produce in quasi tutti gli ambienti lavorativi, eravamo lì con lui, in Bovisa, impegnati sul progetto del D.I. Lab: il nuovo Sistema dei Laboratori Sperimentali per il Design.



2. Panoramica degli esterni del campus Bovisa.
[Documento →](#)



3. I laboratori strumentali del Campus Bovisa.
[Documento →](#)



15.3 Esperire la conoscenza. Laboratori per fare e Laboratori per pensare

Il modello di apprendimento che struttura in modo organico i Corsi di studio viene articolato in unità formative di diversa natura che sovrintendono ai processi di trasmissione di conoscenze e competenze. Le dimensioni teoriche-critiche sono affidate ai Corsi mono-disciplinari, quelle interdisciplinari ai Corsi integrati, quelle strumentali e progettuali ai Laboratori. Quest'ultima forma didattica (i Laboratori di progetto), mutuata dalla tradizione della Facoltà di Architettura, è certamente il cuore del nuovo progetto formativo e lo percorre nel suo intero sviluppo. Il modello costruttivista (Piaget, 1970; von Glasersfeld, 1995), che ne ha ispirato l'introduzione negli studi architettonici, viene tradotto in un ventaglio di tipologie di laboratori che alimentano il processo di stratificazione e *riconfigurazione* cognitiva che accompagna gli studenti dall'apprendimento di competenze specifiche, funzionali alla progettazione, all'apprendimento del progettare. L'idea centrale di costruzione attiva della conoscenza si traduce in una struttura formativa che da un lato porta ad accumulare competenze strumentali attraverso laboratori dedicati, come per esempio Disegno e Comunicazione visiva; dall'altro affianca a questi, già dal primo anno, Laboratori di Progetto a complessità crescente che culminano nel Laboratorio di Sintesi Finale dell'ultimo anno.

Far cimentare gli studenti sin da subito con la progettazione, seppure ancora immaturi nelle conoscenze e competenze strumentali, è un obiettivo centrale e ha alla base alcuni fondamenti teorici specifici.

Primo tra tutti la convinzione che la *conoscenza progettuale* per sua intrinseca natura non possa essere affidata a modalità di trasmissione teorica e di apprendimento deduttivo. La progettazione si apprende attraverso processi induttivi, ovvero dalla pratica reiterata del progetto e dalla conseguente autoriflessione che produce (Schön 1983, 1985). Come codificato da molti, Nigel Cross in primis nella sua definizione dei *designerly ways of knowing* (1982, 2006), il design implica specifiche modalità di pensiero che si sviluppano accumulando casi, soluzioni tipiche e principi formali: in termini piagetiani, una progressiva riorganizzazione di schemi cognitivi. Nei Laboratori di progetto lo studente

rilegge ogni nuovo brief alla luce di esperienze precedenti (altri progetti, referenze visive, feedback ricevuti), esemplificando l'idea costruttivista di apprendimento come integrazione e ristrutturazione della conoscenza.

Ma in realtà per Alberto Seassaro l'apprendimento della progettazione richiede di andare oltre il processo induttivo per attingere all'*abduzione* peirciana (Duven, 2011). Come spiega il semiologo Massimo Bonfantini, che contribuisce direttamente al progetto didattico come docente del Politecnico di Milano, l'abduzione supera e integra i processi sia deduttivo, che costruisce conoscenza attraverso l'analisi, sia induttivo, che genera conoscenza attraverso la sperimentazione di casi applicativi concreti (Bonfantini, 1985). Il progettare è la *forma logica dell'inventiva*, cioè del pensare che produce novità e viene messa in relazione con i tre tipi di inferenza peirciani – deduzione, induzione, abduzione –, che Bonfantini associa a differenti operazioni cognitive: analisi, sintesi, astrazione. L'abduzione ha *natura destabilizzante*: introduce ipotesi che rimettono in gioco schemi consolidati, aprendo la possibilità di nuove interpretazioni e nuove pratiche (Bonfantini, 2021). In sostanza il modello didattico è pensato perché gli studenti apprendano a progettare, in un modo che crea la possibilità di far emergere il nuovo. E sulla scorta di questa visione viene introdotto un ingrediente laboratoriale del tutto originale, che non corrisponde a nessun precedente né nella Scuola di Architettura né in quelle internazionali: il Laboratorio di Metaprogetto. Quest'ultimo è forse l'espressione più tangibile dell'incontro tra semiotica e design e del dibattito culturale di una certa fase di sviluppo del progetto didattico della Facoltà, che vede coinvolti non solo docenti interni al Politecnico, come Bonfantini, ma anche designer esterni che elaborano su questo tema un pensiero teorico strutturato, come per esempio Andries Van Onck.

Il Laboratorio di Metaprogetto è concepito come esperienza laboratoriale il cui oggetto di progetto è il processo progettuale stesso, specialmente nelle prime fasi di ricerca e concettualizzazione delle ipotesi. L'obiettivo è sviluppare negli studenti una capacità di *metacognizione* rispetto all'elaborazione del proprio pensiero progettuale, e quindi la capacità di *progettare il progetto*, regolando e guidando i propri processi cognitivi a quell'obiettivo di *produrre il nuovo* che è il manifesto culturale della Scuola.

Il Sea aveva la solida convinzione che fosse necessario socializzare il più possibile e ripetutamente ogni idea, ogni scelta, ogni accadimento oltre la stretta cerchia del gruppo di colleghi e collaboratori a lui più vicini (sapendo perfettamente di produrre in molti un senso di impazienza, talvolta di fastidio – cosa che di solito sortiva l'effetto di prolungare le sue dissertazioni molto oltre il necessario). Alcuni concetti in particolare venivano ripresi e ribaditi in ogni occasione possibile, persino con gli studenti, per i quali era sempre accessibile. Ricordo molti di questi dialoghi eccentrici e surreali con di fronte lo studente di turno (che probabilmente si era presentato con qualche rivendicazione piuttosto pragmatica), che poi se ne andava un po' sopraffatto e confuso, sapendo di non aver ottenuto ciò che chiedeva, ma molto più consapevole dell'importanza dell'abduzione nella formazione del designer.

15.4 *In fieri*. Una Scuola che cambia

Il progetto culturale della Facoltà *del* Design nasce come evidente manifestazione della visione multiforme e lontana da ogni elitarismo intellettuale che Alberto Seassaro vuole rappresentare. La scuola deve dare spazio a tutte le forme espressive, di ricerca teorica, linguistica e tecnica che il design sa produrre nel ricco ed eclettico panorama italiano e da subito con uno sguardo al contesto internazionale. Il Corso di Laurea iniziale si articola prima in Indirizzi e poi in Corsi di laurea autonomi, integrando al nucleo della Progettazione del prodotto industriale, il Design degli Interni e la Comunicazione visiva, cui si aggiunge molto presto anche Moda, vincendo un certo snobismo culturale del mondo dell'architettura e del design.

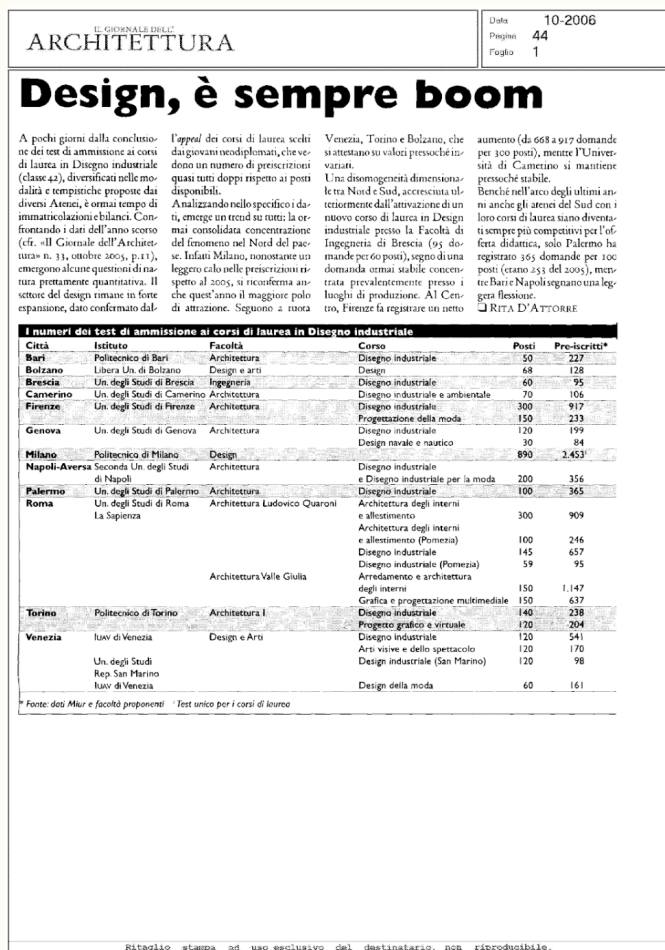
Questa struttura formativa non è affatto granitica ma è concepita come contenitore aperto, capace di dare spazio alla diversità e all'esplorazione tematica: Corsi e Laboratori possono essere connotati liberamente, cogliendo ambiti emergenti e portando in aula esperienze di ricerca e sperimentazione. Accoglie cioè, senza pregiudizi ideologici, la polifonia di voci che caratterizza le molteplici visioni teoriche sul progetto che da sempre caratterizzano il DNA italiano, interpretate nel corpo docente da personalità anche in forte dialettica, tra cui per

esempio Andrea Branzi, Francesco Trabucco ed Ezio Manzini. Così convivono nella scuola approcci che spaziano dalla sperimentazione della dimensione poetica, espressiva e riflessiva del progetto, al nucleo solido del disegno industriale, sino alla tensione all'*attivismo progettuale* che spinge il design oltre i suoi confini più consolidati.

Alberto Seassaro non tenta mai di far convergere queste tensioni verso una visione univoca, anzi approfitta dello sviluppo della Scuola per dare spazio a tutti, sperimentare temi emergenti e, laddove promettenti, far crescere nuovi filoni formativi e nuove iniziative. La legge 509/1999 che introduce il doppio ciclo di Laurea e Laurea Magistrale viene da subito interpretata come occasione per affiancare agli orientamenti consolidati nuovi percorsi che esplorano le potenzialità del progetto verticalmente, con nuove focalizzazioni tematiche, e orizzontalmente, nelle sue relazioni interdisciplinari. Da un lato si creano specializzazioni su settori cardine per l'economia italiana, come nel caso dell'apertura del Polo comasco al centro dei distretti produttivi del tessile-arredo; o come nel caso della nautica (prima come Master e poi come Laurea Magistrale) per cui si crea un'avventurosa triangolazione Milano, La Spezia e Pescara, per valorizzare competenze specialistiche che integrano design, ingegneria meccanica e ingegneria navale. Il secondo livello di laurea è in effetti il terreno ideale per sviluppare in modo più compiuto l'idea di multidisciplinarietà che è alla base del progetto culturale, creando alleanze con altri Dipartimenti, Facoltà e Atenei, come succede anche per il Corso di Studi in Design & Engineering, che vede coinvolti i Dipartimenti di Ingegneria Meccanica e Ingegneria dei Materiali; o per l'indirizzo in Design & Management della Moda, sviluppato in collaborazione con l'Università Bocconi.

Nell'ambito di questo sviluppo Seassaro dà spazio alla spinta verso nuovi terreni applicativi e speculativi, con una notevole capacità di anticipare fenomeni oggi consolidati a livello internazionale. Si materializza in questo modo una vera e propria scuola di pensiero che guarda al design non più e non solo come la funzione *esecutiva* del dar forma agli artefatti, ma come *processo cognitivo*, capace di promuovere l'innovazione a livello sistemico. Trovano spazio in questa trasformazione personalità talvolta anche molto diverse, come per esempio Francesco Mauri ed Ezio Manzini, cui si uniscono presto ricercatori e dottorandi tra cui Giulio Ceppi, Elena Pacenti, Stefano Maffei, Anna Meroni, Fran-

Figura 1.
Design, è sempre boom.
In Il Giornale dell'Architettura,
ottobre 2006.



cesco Zurlo, Roberto Verganti e poi molti altri ancora. I domini del design si ampliano al sistema-prodotto, ai servizi, alle strategie, alle esperienze, alle organizzazioni e alla società: la

visione è dilagante, penetra nei Corsi e nei Laboratori, si traduce in percorsi di Master e poi confluisce nella prima Laurea Magistrale in inglese del Politecnico di Milano in Product-Service-System Design, avviata nel 2005. Una scelta coraggiosa, espressione di una comunità molto dinamica e aperta al nuovo, singolarmente guidata da un Preside decisamente poco familiare alla lingua inglese (che, per inciso, solo parecchi anni dopo, nel 2014, verrà ufficialmente adottata da tutte le Lauree Magistrali del Politecnico di Milano).

L'affermazione della scuola passa anche attraverso quella che potrebbe essere definita una tattica di *occupazione culturale*, che Alberto Seassaro gioca su diversi

piani. Innanzitutto i numeri: contrasta con ogni mezzo la posizione dei molti che vedono tutti i vantaggi nel creare una sorta di *scuola boutique* del design, come molte a livello internazionale, con numeri bassi di studenti (che per altro le altre Facoltà dell'Ateneo sono pronte ad assecondare per arginare la spinta espansionistica del Design).

La scadenza annuale per definire i numeri programmati si traduce spesso per Seassaro in una lotta all'ultimo studente possibile, forzando un percorso, accompagnato anche da aspri confronti, che mira a creare «la più grande scuola del design al mondo».

La visione di fondo è ancorata al suo credere fermamente nel ruolo sociale della formazione che una istituzione pubblica come il Politecnico di Milano deve saper interpretare. Ma è anche strategica, perché l'obiettivo è far crescere velocemente la legittimazione dell'iniziativa, portando un «designer in ogni impresa», e non a caso i Corsi di Design sono i primi di tutto l'Ateneo a introdurre il Tirocinio obbligatorio; ma anche portando imprese e designer professionisti nella Scuola, insistendo affinché il corpo docente non superi mai la soglia del 50% di accademici, con la convinzione che il radicamento nell'economia, nella società e nella cultura non debba essere mai abbandonato.

La Facoltà del Design, oggi Scuola del Design, contiene ancora molte tracce di quel percorso, ma è anche molto cambiata, continuando a esprimere la capacità di interpretare e cogliere lo spirito dei tempi. Un progetto costantemente *in fieri*, una Scuola nata e sviluppatasi cogliendo un *momento* di opportunità, ma anche capace di acquisire *momento*, nel significato che la fisica attribuisce a questo termine: una scuola in continuo movimento.

Amarcord

Non è semplice ricordare tutte le sperimentazioni fatte, le linee tematiche avviate e poi interrotte, tutti i progetti e le trasformazioni attuate. E l'eredità più importante che ha lasciato il Sea credo stia proprio nella sua curiosità intellettuale, nel guardare al nuovo senza pregiudizio accettando anche la familiarità con l'errore e il fallimento e trovando sempre la tenacia di guardare avanti, trasformarsi, cambiare.

Ricordo una sua frase pronunciata di fronte alla mia esultanza per la conclusione di qualche progetto a scadenza impossibile: «Mi piace che ti piaccia finire le cose». Da allora ho coltivato il seme del dubbio, che oggi è diventata certezza, sulla reale importanza dei risultati e dei traguardi; e so che senso, motivazione, gratificazione non stanno tanto nei risultati, piuttosto nel processo per realizzarli e ancora più nel progetto per pensarli.

Alberto Seassaro credeva nel potere salvifico del progetto, unico modo che abbiamo per navigare quel confine tra la profondità insondabile del sapere e le espressioni più vitali del mondo.

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16. La didattica per Alberto Seassaro

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Non sono stata studentessa di Alberto Seassaro alla Facoltà di Architettura, ma ho avuto la fortuna di lavorare per e con lui a partire dagli anni del mio dottorato di ricerca, avendo così modo di osservare i suoi modi di pensare, progettare e attuare sistemi, modelli, approcci alla didattica del design.

La didattica era al centro dei suoi interessi, mai marginale come avviene per molti accademici più inclini alla ricerca.

Come primo Presidente del Corso di Laurea in *Disegno industriale* e, successivamente, primo Preside della Facoltà del Design – III Facoltà di Architettura (poi Scuola del Design) ha avuto il privilegio – caso quanto mai raro nel panorama accademico italiano – di dare avvio ad un insieme di nuove realtà, confrontandosi e valorizzando l'eredità del passato, ma cercando di minimizzare vincoli e consuetudini preesistenti.

Si è trattato di un privilegio non certo fortuito, bensì ostinatamente e instancabilmente perseguito andando a creare le condizioni politiche, tecniche ed economiche perché questi *nuovi inizi* potessero

1. Sistema Design.
Timeline →



avvenire. Basta scorrere la timeline di *Design Philology* [1x](#) per leggere la loro densa sequenza: tra questi figurano, ad esem-

pio, il primo Corso di Laurea in *Disegno industriale* (1993) all'interno della Facoltà di Architettura e le sue successive numerose ramificazioni e gemmazioni; la creazione del Consorzio POLI.design e dei suoi numerosi corsi di master e di specializzazione (1999); l'istituzione della Facoltà del Design – III Facoltà di Architettura (2000), l'avvio di due Poli esterni, di Como (2000) e di La Spezia (2005).

Il tutto grazie a un lavoro instancabile, totalizzante, in termini di impegno e dedizione: basta ricordare le vacanze, i week end e le notti passate in università, i cancelli scavalcati perché ormai il campus era chiuso e, finalmente, il coronamento di un sogno, il possesso ufficioso delle chiavi per potere accedere al proprio ufficio liberamente, senza limiti di orario.

Alberto Seassaro non era un solitario, bensì affrontava tutte queste numerose sfide con il suo gruppo di giovani collaboratori, di cui con orgoglio mi sentivo di fare parte: a turno (ovviamente spesso senza preavviso) ci trovavamo coinvolti in riunioni la cui durata era sempre imprevedibile (o meglio prevedibilmente lunga); altre volte partecipavamo ad incontri più estesi, che potevano poi assumere i tratti di una cena o di una trasferta collettiva.

Ognuno di noi aveva compiti e responsabilità ben identificate e Seassaro coordinava questa squadra con piglio e fermezza. Sotto la sua guida, limitando l'attenzione alla sola didattica istituzionale, sono stati avviati nell'arco di due decenni un numero significativo di nuovi corsi di laurea, specializzazioni, indirizzi ed orientamenti.

Alberto Seassaro affrontava questo lavoro da progettista, cercando qualità e innovazione anche di fronte a risorse sempre limitate e a vincoli procedurali e regolamentari spesso troppo stringenti.

Nel dare forma a questo insieme significativo di percorsi formativi, si muoveva con agilità dalla visione d'insieme al dettaglio, tratteggiando l'impostazione culturale e metaprogettuale alla base dell'intera offerta formativa, per poi forgiare l'unicità dei singoli corsi di studio.

Punto di partenza, per qualsiasi ragionamento, sia a scala macro che micro, era il foglio bianco rigorosamente di grande formato, su cui iniziava a tracciare schemi sempre più ampi, ma anche sempre più approfonditi in un continuo processo di *zoom in* e *zoom out*, di ampliamento del sistema e di definizione dei diversi elementi. Progettava percorsi formativi con un approccio che richiamava la cultura tecno-

logica della progettazione, andando a identificare le diverse componenti e le modalità con cui queste potevano essere combinate dando vita ad un insieme ricco, articolato e coerente.

16.1 Le componenti del sistema didattico

I *mattoncini Lego* della didattica di Alberto Seassaro erano diversi e molti di questi sono tutt'oggi presenti nell'offerta formativa della Scuola del Design (da qui l'uso del presente nella loro descrizione, ad eccezione dei moduli oggi non più attivi).

I *Corsi d'insegnamento monodisciplinari* costituiscono le unità didattiche base, inerenti una sola disciplina, generalmente propedeutici all'attività progettuale, tra cui ad esempio figurano *Disegno, Matematica, Marketing, Fisica tecnica e Materiali*.

I *Corsi Integrati* sono dei moduli costituiti come corsi monodisciplinari, «ma le lezioni sono svolte in moduli coordinati di almeno 25 ore ciascuno e svolti da due, o al più da tre, professori ufficiali che faranno parte della commissione di esame. L'integrazione può riguardare sia la stessa area disciplinare, che aree disciplinari differenti» (AA.VV., 1995, p. 14). L'intento è quello di alimentare un dialogo, non facile, tra docenti di discipline diverse (design e management, design e chimica, design e ICT, e così via) così come di *background* differenti tra cui, ad esempio, accademici con professionisti o manager d'impresa.

Alcuni di questi corsi sono curriculari, altri sono *a scelta* dello studente: lo studente può selezionarli da un numero consistente di diverse alternative sia in ambito umanistico che tecnologico.

I *Laboratori* rappresentano la componente ereditata dalla Facoltà di Architettura anche se viene opportunamente rivista al fine di inserirsi in questo quadro formativo a più voci: «sono strutture didattiche pluridisciplinari che, sotto la responsabilità di un docente di ruolo, hanno per fine lo svolgimento di attività teorico-pratiche» (ibidem, p. 14).

Tra gli elementi di novità si notino la pluridisciplinarietà, la possibilità di affrontare con modalità laboratoriale attività teoriche e non solo pratiche e, indirettamente, il coinvolgimento di docenti a contratto, opportunamente coordinati e guidati dal docente di ruolo. I *Laboratori di Sintesi Finale* sono una versione *large* dei laboratori, con una tematica

individuata con anticipo, chiaramente delineata, ampia e di tipo sperimentale, un numero significativo di docenti (opportunamente combinati in termini disciplinari e di *background*), un numero massimo di partecipanti *limitato a 50* e un numero di ore (e di crediti) maggiore al fine di accompagnare gli studenti verso la preparazione dell'elaborato di tesi finale. «Scopo del Laboratorio di Sintesi Finale è quello di guidare lo studente, mediante apporti pluridisciplinari, alla matura e completa preparazione di una tesi nell'ambito del disegno industriale» (ibidem, p. 14). Il Laboratorio non si conclude pertanto con un voto, ma con l'ammissione all'esame di laurea.

Ad eccezione dei corsi monodisciplinari, emerge da questo elenco di unità didattiche base l'interesse ad attuare in modo esteso e sistematico forme integrate di conoscenze, grazie alla condivisione della responsabilità d'insegnamento tra docenti provenienti da discipline e percorsi professionali diversi. L'integrazione (e non la semplice giustapposizione) di saperi o punti di vista diversi è perseguita, stimolata, in alcuni casi anche forzata, grazie alla prova d'esame conclusiva, prevista necessariamente in forma congiunta. È attraverso questo vincolo che Alberto Seassaro intendeva evitare l'attuazione del modo di insegnamento universitario tradizionale, in cui ogni docente gestisce in modo autonomo le proprie ore e la conclusiva prova d'esame senza confrontarsi con altri colleghi, altri saperi e punti di vista.

I *Workshop*, all'inverso, erano e sono tutt'oggi strutture didattiche caratterizzate da un approccio più di tipo autoriale. Si tratta di moduli didattici intensi, di durata pari a una settimana, full time, guidati da docenti rigorosamente esterni, professionisti del design chiamati a condurre l'aula in accordo con il proprio modo di intendere la professione. I workshop hanno rappresentato il modo per coinvolgere nella didattica i *grandi maestri* del design italiano ed internazionale e per fare crescere culturalmente noi allora *giovani* ricercatori assumendo il ruolo di loro assistenti. Grazie ai *Workshop* gli studenti, negli anni, hanno potuto sperimentare il carattere iroso e burbero di Enzo Mari (che ha dato 18 a tutta la classe); così come l'animo fanciullo di Alessandro Mendini; l'attenzione per il dettaglio di Angelo Mangiarotti (che aveva dato come tema la progettazione di un giunto) o lo humor spagnolo di Perry King e british di Santiago Miranda. Di diversa natura sono invece i workshop in collaborazione con le aziende: queste, oltre a sostenere economi-

camente la didattica, definiscono un tema di progetto, condividono la propria storia e le proprie aspirazioni con gli studenti e li stimolano a sviluppare dei progetti vicini al modo di operare nella professione.

Le *Open Lectures* erano dei cicli di lezioni di design aperte alla città, promosse dai Laboratori di Sintesi Finale. Si tenevano in luoghi volutamente esterni al campus del Politecnico di Milano, *luoghi non convenzionali* di produzione culturale della città (quali musei, showroom, spazi commerciali, teatrali, ex-industriali, ma anche spazi pubblici di diversa natura) con l'obiettivo di portare il lavoro della Scuola a conoscenza della città e alimentare il dibattito sul design [23](#).

2. *Milano Design Open Lectures 2002*. Lezioni di design aperte alla città, promosse dai Laboratori di Laurea della Facoltà del Design.
[Evento →](#)



Si scrive al passato perché oggi questo modo di fare didattica è più episodica, sia per la complessità e l'impegno che queste iniziative comportavano sia, forse, perché la missione di fare conoscere il design politecnico alla città dopo alcuni anni era stato portato a compimento.

I *Tirocini* costituiscono un insieme di attività pari a minimo 250 ore obbligatorie per l'ammissione all'esame di laurea. Fin dall'avvio tali attività potevano essere svolte all'esterno dell'Ateneo, in termini di *Stage* presso imprese e studi professionali, o all'interno mediante la frequenza di corsi tirocinanti convenzionati con l'associazione ADI riguardanti l'esercizio della professione e lo studio di casi di studio aziendali.

Questa tavola di elementi si arricchiva, inoltre, di altre componenti tra cui, ad esempio, esperienze in scambio all'estero, mostre didattiche ed ulteriori attività extra-curricolari.

Tra queste ultime figuravano i corsi integrativi, tenuti da maestri quali Guy Bonsiepe, Ernesto Gismondi, Marco Zanuso e Achille Castiglioni e il ciclo di seminari di *Cultura del disegno industriale* curati da Tomás Maldonado e coordinati da Raimonda Riccini.

Ogni studente era, infine, chiamato a raccogliere progressivamente le proprie esperienze curriculari e non in un proprio portfolio cartaceo, che dava origine, al quarto anno, ad un corso espressamente dedicato all'elaborazione di un *book informatico*, al fine di insegnare agli studenti a raccogliere, sistematizzare e a comunicare il proprio lavoro e, al contempo, a prepararsi per entrare nel mondo del lavoro.

La mostra didattica annuale di tutti i corsi e non solo limitatamente alle tesi di laurea, come da tradizione anglosassone, così come i book degli studenti, costituivano modi diversi per creare delle occasioni di

confronto e di dialogo tra corsi e laboratori diversi, per offrire una visione d'insieme della qualità didattica offerta e, al contempo, per provare a raccogliere e a fare sedimentare quanto fatto.

16.2 La visione sistemica

L'approccio per sistemi e componenti prevede la definizione dei modi con cui dare coerenza all'insieme di moduli (in alcuni casi articolati a loro volta in sotto unità didattiche) al fine di offrire un percorso organico e coerente e non un semplice *patchwork* o scaffale aperto di cui servirsi. Da qui i numerosi insiemi, sottoinsiemi, linee di collegamento, asterischi e rimandi negli schemi di Alberto Seassaro che esplicitavano la sua visione complessiva e al contempo richiamavano regole, modelli di composizione e modalità di attuazione.

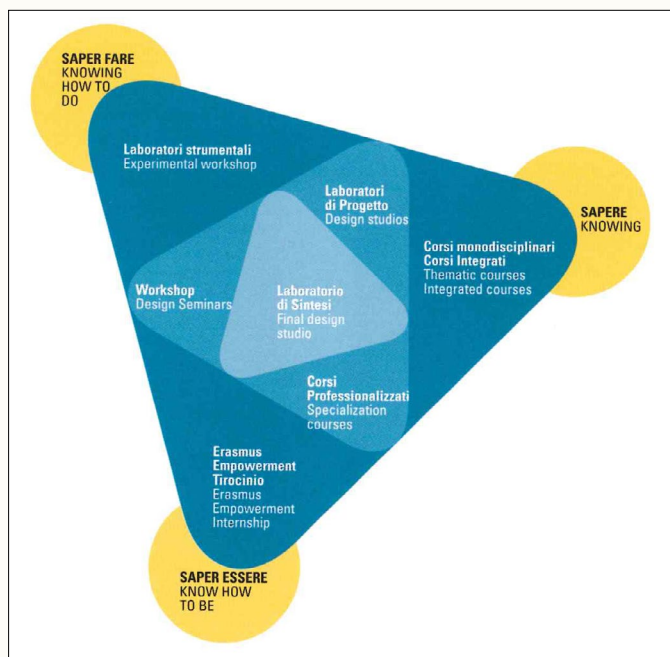
Alcuni di questi diagrammi erano strumenti di supporto a pensieri e ragionamenti destinati poi a scomparire, altri hanno avuto la fortuna di essere ripresi, ridisegnati e pubblicati.

Tra quest'ultimi figura, ad esempio, un'immagine più volte pubblicato nella *Guida dello studente* che inquadrava il ruolo delle diverse componenti nel progetto formativo dei designer mostrando con grande chiarezza i diversi contributi offerti da il *sapere*, il *saper fare* e il *saper essere* dei futuri laureati. Il principio fondativo era quello di stimolare le intelligenze multiple degli studenti, da quella legata alla conoscenza teorica a quella pratica, delle mani, e, infine a quella personale di tipo comportale e sociale: un insieme molteplice riconfigurabile con sfaccettature ed equilibri diversi, ma in ogni caso necessario per mettere i laureati nelle condizioni di potere operare e integrarsi efficacemente nel mondo del lavoro.

A partire da questa visione alta, di ampio respiro, Alberto Seassaro entrava progressivamente nel dettaglio delle diverse componenti, delle loro modalità di composizione e delle relative regole di combinazione ed aggregazione. Tra queste ne ricordo alcune principali.

Il sistema si basava sulla *modularità*, ovvero l'adozione di unità didattiche minime di 25 ore, pari – successivamente – a 2,5 crediti. Si trattava – ovviamente – di un modulo *ad hoc* del Design, diverso da quello adottato dalle altre Facoltà e Corsi di laurea (pari a 30 ore/3 crediti).

Figura 1.
Schema pubblicato per la prima volta nella Guida della studente per l'anno accademico 2003-2004.



Per un semestre, un corso monodisciplinare era pari a 50 ore, un corso integrato pari a 25+25 ore, un laboratorio progettuale da almeno 150 ore e così via, andando a formare un

tetris di orario particolarmente *efficiente*, con attività di 4 o 8 ore al giorno, che permetteva di valorizzare il tempo degli studenti evitando sia sovrapposizioni che tempi morti e di usare intensivamente gli spazi aula, da sempre troppo esigui per le necessità della Scuola.

Appartiene a quest'ottica di *chiarezza d'impostazione dell'orario* la scelta di dedicare intere giornate trasversali ai Corsi di Laurea per i corsi a scelta, in modo da permettere a tutti gli iscritti di poterli

frequentare. Una giornata alla settimana era infine sempre libera per gli studenti, per permettergli di svolgere le proprie attività esercitative e laboratoriali in autonomia, avvalendosi eventualmente anche dei laboratori strumentali, fin dall'avvio pensati a loro supporto. Questa impostazione, che oggi ci appare consolidata, si distingueva rispetto ad altre realtà caratterizzate da orari *bucherellati* e/o sovrapposti.

La composizione delle diverse unità didattiche lungo l'anno accademico era, invece, contraddistinta da un *andamento variabile*, pensato per stimolare gli studenti e allenarli ad affrontare momenti riflessivi di ricerca e di approfondimento alternati ad accelerazioni di finalizzazione del progetto; tempi lunghi dedicati ai Laboratori di Sintesi Finale e tempi brevi dei Workshop, generalmente organizzati a metà dell'anno accademico proprio per rompere il ritmo della quotidianità. L'arco temporale del Piano di Studi fino al 2000 quinquennale era, invece, suddiviso in *tre diversi cicli* d'insegnamento: un ciclo iniziale propedeutico uguale per tutti gli studenti, un ciclo centrale tematizzato, a scelta dello studente e infine un ciclo finale, legato al Laboratorio di Sintesi

Finale, nuovamente a scelta dello studente e non necessariamente in continuità con quello precedente.

Il ciclo propedeutico era stato disegnato sulla base di una *Gestalttheorie* [Teoria della forma] radicata nella tradizione del Bauhaus e della Scuola di Ulm, ma al contempo adeguata alle necessità contemporanee, non limitandosi alla psicologia della forma, ma andando a comprendere anche, ad esempio, le scienze fisico-matematiche e le scienze storiche:

Dai vari programmi emergono infatti i fondamenti della percezione (visiva e aptica), del colore, dell'ergonomia, della metodologia della progettazione, della morfologia operativa e dei processi di morfogenesi, della semiologia, oltre a materie di conoscenza della storia dell'arte moderna e contemporanea, e del design, e d'altra parte di materie di conoscenza delle strumentazioni operative. (AA.VV., 1995, p. 48)

Oltre a queste materie, volte a sviluppare la coscienza storica e teorico-critica degli studenti, il I Ciclo prevedeva dei laboratori finalizzati, tra l'altro, all'*acquisizione dei propri limiti*:

È come se si fosse portato l'aspetto terminale degli studi agli inizi, mediante l'integrazione critica di esperienza immediata, concetti teorici e motivazioni. [...] È anche palese lo scopo pratico, di liberazione delle loro (degli studenti) potenzialità creative, espressive e di immaginazione (per di più evitando di ricorrere a surrogati o specchietti per le allodole fatti di empirismi estemporanei, di stilismi e mode, di procedimenti orecchianti e mestieranti) attraverso solide basi critiche ed esperienze pratiche illuminate da apporti teorici e scientifici. (ibidem, p. 48)

Il II Ciclo era dedicato alla formazione tecnico-scientifico-professionale volta a rendere lo studente «in grado di pervenire a sintesi progettuali esecutive nei campi del disegno industriale controllando anche attraverso la formazione di prototipi le procedure tecniche di produzione» (AA.VV., 1994, p. 15), mentre il III Ciclo era dedicato a specifici approfondimenti tematici e disciplinari (incentrati sul Laboratorio di sintesi finale

e sul tirocinio) e all'esame di laurea. Dal punto di vista dell'*articolazione disciplinare*, il percorso formativo era stato suddiviso da Alberto Seassaro, sempre in dialogo con l'intero collegio docenti, in dieci aree disciplinari (successivamente asciugate a sette) così identificate: *Cultura del progetto*, *Storia e critica artistica*, *Disegno industriale e ambientale*, *Tecnologia dei materiali e controllo di qualità dei prodotti*, *Produzione e pianificazione del prodotto di serie*, *Disegno e rappresentazione*, *Scienza dei materiali*, *Scienze matematiche e scienze dell'informazione*, *Scienze statistiche, sociali ed economiche* e *Scienze fisiche e fisiche applicate*.

Ogni area era opportunamente perimetrata e descritta «alla luce degli orientamenti culturali attuali e senza pregiudizio per la dinamica di sviluppo delle discipline afferenti alle Aree» (AA.VV., 1995, p. 17-18) e quantificata in termini di monte ore rendendo evidente il *peso* di ciascuna nel generale percorso formativo (in totale pari a 3600 ore), alla ricerca dell'equilibrio corretto tra discipline scientifiche, umanistiche e progetto. Dal punto di vista culturale ed organizzativo, ogni Area era presieduta da un responsabile (individuato tra le persone *di sua fiducia*), chiamato a coordinare i docenti di riferimento, generalmente sempre provenienti, oltre che dal design, da altri settori scientifico-disciplinari. Con queste unità organizzative si intendeva, come per gli esami collegiali, promuovere il dialogo tra discipline diverse cercando di orientare gli insegnamenti disciplinari verso la dimensione progettuale, rendendoli organici al progetto formativo complessivo.

L'intersecazione tra le diverse unità didattiche organizzate in cicli e le aree disciplinari dava vita ad una matrice che faceva forse rabbrivire gli studenti per la complessità di lettura, ma che per un occhio più esperto, appare ancora oggi chiara, dettagliata e sofisticata.

Questa metastruttura del Corso di Laurea si mostra come una sorta di *tavola periodica del design* in grado di sintetizzare la composizione della *ricetta* di Alberto Seassaro per formare un designer industriale contemporaneo.

Le diverse componenti didattiche si aggregavano, infine, all'interno di percorsi didattici declinati in termini di profili culturali e professionali, prendendo – a seconda – il nome di orientamenti, indirizzi e tematizzazioni. Queste configurazioni sono la parte più variabile nel tempo dell'intero *sistema seassariano*: annualmente venivano definiti, ar-

ticolati, adeguati e modificati in modo da rispondere all'evoluzione culturale della disciplina in relazione ai cambiamenti sociali, economici e produttivi in atto, ma anche alle mutazioni del contesto accademico a scala di ateneo e del quadro normativo a livello nazionale.

Per ricostruire l'andamento degli orientamenti, degli indirizzi e delle tematizzazioni la memoria non basta: è necessario analizzare le sequenze di Manifesti di Corsi di Studio, custoditi presso la Segreteria didattica della Scuola, così come le diverse edizioni della *Guida dello Studente*.

Figura 2.
La matrice di ripartizione del monte ore pubblicato per la prima volta nella *Guida dello Studente* dell'anno accademico 1994-95 a p. 17.

Ripartizione del monte ore															
Ciclo	Monte ore complessivo	Corsi di Laurea in Disegno industriale TABELLA "C"	Monte ore		AREA DISCIPLINARI										Totale
			di Ateneo	Totale	I	II	III	IV	V	VI	VII	VIII	IX	X	
					Cultura del Progetto	Storia e Critica Artistica	Disegno Industriale e Ambientale	Teoria e Progettazione del Comunità del Prodotto	Progettazione e Produzione del Prodotto di Serie	Disegno e Progettazione di Prodotto	Scienze del materiale	Scienze della Progettazione Industriale	Scienze della Progettazione Industriale	Scienze della Progettazione Industriale	
ore	ore	ore	ore	ore	ore	ore	ore	ore	ore	ore	ore	ore	ore	ore	
I	800	Corsi di Laurea in Disegno industriale	500	500	100	100		100		100			50	50	30 ore complessive 20 ore di cui in laboratorio
		Cultura del Progetto	100	30	130										
		Disegno Industriale e Ambientale	100	30	130										
		Teoria e Progettazione del Comunità del Prodotto	100	30	130										
II	2100	Corsi di Laurea in Disegno industriale	1200	1200	100	200	100		200	100	250	100	100	50	32 ore complessive 6 ore di cui in laboratorio
		Cultura del Progetto	100	30	130										
		Disegno Industriale e Ambientale	100	30	130										
		Teoria e Progettazione del Comunità del Prodotto	100	30	130										
III	700	Corsi di Laurea in Disegno industriale	100	30	130										3 ore complessive
		Cultura del Progetto	100	30	130										
		Disegno Industriale e Ambientale	100	30	130										
		Teoria e Progettazione del Comunità del Prodotto	100	30	130										
IV	3000	Corsi di Laurea in Disegno industriale	2500	2500	300	300	500	300	200	300	250	150	100	20	3 ore complessive
		Cultura del Progetto	100	30	130										
		Disegno Industriale e Ambientale	100	30	130										
		Teoria e Progettazione del Comunità del Prodotto	100	30	130										

16.3 Le principali variazioni nel tempo

Ogni anno, con la *Guida dello Studente*, Alberto Seassaro rilasciava una nuova *versione* aggiornata delle proprie riflessioni sulla disciplina e sul proprio modello formativo, ponendolo al vaglio della *prova sul campo* per poi, di conseguenza, cambiarlo, affinarlo e implementarlo in base all'esperienza avuta. Se agli inizi la *Guida dello Studente* era una semplice dispensa rilegata con delle graffe in cui venivano sintetizzati i contenuti essenziali dei corsi offerti, progressivamente assume i connotati di una vera e propria pubblicazione, in cui i contenuti operativi rivolti agli studenti alle prese con il proprio piano di studi si integrano con testi, schemi e approfondimenti relativi al progetto culturale di riferimento e alle relative modalità di attuazione.

Di molti testi Alberto Seassaro era l'autore, mentre di tutti ne era il coordinatore e validatore. L'evoluzione della *Guida dello Studente* rende manifesto, anno per anno, l'evoluzione del suo pensiero sulla didattica del design e al contempo le principali mutazioni e sfide affrontate in quegli anni: da quelle più graduali come l'internazionalizzazione (con una progressiva pubblicazione di testi anche in inglese a partire dal

1997) e la digitalizzazione con il trasferimento dei contenuti dei corsi dalla carta al sito web di Ateneo, a quelle più dirompenti come l'introduzione della *Riforma per l'autonomia universitaria* e l'adozione del sistema del 3+2, come da DM 509/1999 (dal 2000) e l'adozione della legge 270/2004 (dal 2009-2010).

Cercando di sintetizzare un'evoluzione quanto mai ramificata e complessa si potrebbero individuare alcune fasi.

I primi cinque anni del Corso di laurea in *Disegno Industriale* sono stati volutamente sperimentali, così come previsto dalla normativa universitaria allora vigente che consentiva facilitazioni nella creazione dell'organico docenti e maggiore flessibilità in termini di deroghe e varianti all'Ordinamento e al relativo Statuto per un numero di anni pari alla durata del percorso formativo.

Nel 1998-1999 dopo il primo quinquennio di sperimentazioni entra in vigore un Nuovo Ordinamento con cui si consolidano gli orientamenti, si articolano e si diversificano gli indirizzi e in parallelo si *asciugano* e accorpano le aree disciplinari riducendole da X a VII.

Il sistema sembra quasi vicino a trovare un punto di equilibrio, ma con la firma nel giugno 1999 della Dichiarazione di Bologna, l'accordo intergovernativo di collaborazione nel settore dell'Istruzione superiore, e il DM 509 Regolamento recante norme concernenti l'autonomia didattica degli atenei del novembre 1999 detta convenzionalmente *Riforma per l'autonomia universitaria* (RAU), prende avvio il complesso processo di ridisegno del sistema universitario che porta ad un *Nuovissimo ordinamento*.

Anche a questo tsunami Alberto Seassaro reagisce prontamente, anticipando l'avvio del 3+2 già nel 2000-2001, per poi plasmare il nuovo sistema articolandolo in diversi Corsi di Laurea distinti a partire dall'a.a. 2003-2004 con cinque distinte Lauree di I livello (Disegno Industriale; Design della Comunicazione; Design della Moda e Architettura degli Interni a Milano e Disegno Industriale a Como) e 5 analoghe lauree specialistiche (dal 2010 denominate Magistrali).

Con il consolidamento del sistema del 3+2 si aprono nuove riflessioni ed opportunità relative alla possibilità di istituire nuovi percorsi in discontinuità con il triennio di base, anche in collaborazione con altri atenei. A partire da queste ipotesi nascono, nel 2005, i Corsi di Laurea Specialistica in Design & Engineering; in Design del Sistema Prodotto-Servizio

(poi Product Service System Design) e Design Navale e Nautico (in collaborazione con l'Università di Genova) con la creazione del nuovo Polo di La Spezia.

L'ultima sfida affrontata da Alberto Seassaro in qualità di Preside è rappresentata dalla legge 270/2004, adottata a partire dal 2009-2010 per le Lauree triennali e dal 2010-2011 per le Lauree magistrali.

16.4 Le variazioni dei profili culturali e le tematiche di esplorazione didattica e di ricerca

Il Corso di laurea in *Disegno industriale* ha preceduto la nascita dell'intero sistema organizzativo del design al Politecnico di Milano tra cui figura, oltre alla Facoltà/Scuola (nel 2000) il Consorzio POLI.design (istituito nell'anno 1999) e il Dipartimento di Design (istituito nel 2001).

Da qui il ruolo fondamentale ricoperto dal Corso di Laurea nell'esplorare ambiti applicativi del design, anche di tipo sperimentale e di frontiera, per comprenderne le potenzialità e l'interesse da parte delle istituzioni e del tessuto imprenditoriale.

Alberto Seassaro credeva fermamente nel legame e nella complementarità tra ricerca e didattica (sia istituzionale che post-laurea), e nella necessità di stimolare la comunità dei docenti ad intraprendere nuove strade, anche poco conosciute. Ne consegue l'introduzione, a valle del ciclo propedeutico, di accentuazioni tematiche dal carattere flessibile, modificabili di anno in anno in termini di offerta e liberamente selezionabili annualmente, anche in modo discontinuo, dagli studenti.

Queste hanno preso forme e nomi diversi nel tempo andando progressivamente non solo a identificare dei profili culturali e professionali, ma anche dei possibili ambiti di esplorazione progettuale.

Inizialmente erano denominati «percorsi didattici coerenti» (AA.VV., 1995, p. 15), corrispondenti agli indirizzi tematizzati presenti nel II ciclo ed agli orientamenti del III ciclo e consistevano in: *Progettazione del prodotto industriale*, *Progettazione delle strategie di prodotto*, *Progettazione degli ambienti* e *Progettazione delle comunicazioni visive e multimediali*. Nell'anno accademico 1997-1998 tali *Linee programmati-*

che di coordinamento didattico sono integrate con due ulteriori indirizzi: *Progettazione della luce*, ambito molto caro ad Alberto Seassaro, e *Disegno visuale e progettazione delle interfacce*, su stimolo di Giovanni Anceschi e Alessandro Polistina. L'indirizzo sugli ambienti, supportato da Maurizio Vogliazzo, si precisa assumendo la denominazione di *Progettazione industriale degli ambienti*, forse per sottolineare il diverso approccio culturale rispetto ai *cugini* architetti.

Nel 1998-1999 entra in vigore il Nuovo Ordinamento che prevede il consolidamento degli Orientamenti, intesi quali caratterizzazioni del percorso formativo per l'intero quinquennio, in termini di *Prodotto* e di *Comunicazione*, a cui si aggiungono, a partire dall'a.a. successivo, quelli di *Interni* e di *Moda* (e con essi il passaggio da 500 a 650 immatricolazioni all'anno).

A partire dall'a.a. 1999-2000 le sotto-articolazioni degli Orientamenti in Indirizzi si estendono in termini temporali e prendono il nome di *progetti didattici triennali*. Si tratta di contenitori tematici ampi, declinabili in più livelli di complessità nell'arco dei tre diversi anni (dal 2 al 4 anno) tra cui figuravano, ad esempio, *Sport design*, *Design nautico*, *Light & lighting*, *Expo design*, *Vendere e comprare nell'era dell'accesso e della sostenibilità*, *Design medicale*, *Transportation Design*, *Design dell'interazione* e *Design e management dei beni culturali*.

Anche questi progetti didattici triennali non costituivano, come per gli indirizzi e gli orientamenti, dei percorsi rigidi, ma dei semplici modi per organizzare un'offerta culturale all'interno della quale gli studenti erano liberi di esplorare e passare da un ambito all'altro. Il lavoro congiunto su più anni e su più livelli formativi ha permesso al corpo docente di costruire, aggregare e sedimentare insieme di conoscenze e di riflessioni condivise che hanno dato successivamente avvio a nuovi sviluppi, tra cui percorsi di laurea, master universitari professionalizzanti o aree di ricerca stabili all'interno del futuro Dipartimento. Nel 2000-2001 e 2001-2002, a seguito dell'istituzione della Facoltà e del nuovo Campus di Como, vengono aggiunti tre orientamenti del Corso di Laurea: *Prodotto/ergonomia* (a Milano), *Prodotto/arredo* (a Como) e *Tessile/moda-arredo* (a Como) aumentando e ridistribuendo i numeri degli ingressi di studenti pari a 600 per Milano e 150 per Como. A partire dal 2003-2004 la Laurea specialistica in *Disegno industriale* (industrial design) prevede l'articolazione in due indirizzi, *Prodotto* e *Servizi*.

L'introduzione di *Design dei servizi* risponde alle mutazioni al tempo emergenti del contesto sociale, economico e produttivo dei paesi occidentali, anticipando delle prime direttrici d'innovazione.

L'istituzione di *Design dei servizi* nel 2003 anticipa di anni quanto verrà successivamente proposto da numerose altre università in Italia e all'estero, dimostrando ancora una volta la capacità del sistema formativo del Politecnico di Milano di leggere i segnali emergenti dei cambiamenti in atto, in termini sociali, economici e produttivi e di dare con prontezza risposte adeguate ai mutamenti in atto.

Design dei servizi sarà presente come indirizzo fino all'A.A. 2009-2010. Con l'ulteriore cambio di ordinamento (dovuto all'entrata in vigore della Legge 270), attuato a partire dall'a.a. 2010-2011, tutte le lauree specialistiche assumono il nome di lauree magistrali e vengono necessariamente disattivati tutti gli indirizzi, chiudendo 20 anni di sperimentazioni.

16.5 Il cambiamento come scelta

Alcune componenti come gli Indirizzi e i *Laboratori di Sintesi Finale* erano volutamente pensati fin dagli esordi come moduli transitori, facilmente attivabili e disattivabili dagli organi del Corso di laurea e della Facoltà/Scuola. Se da un lato la didattica in università necessita di stabilità, in modo da evitare percorsi transitori da un sistema all'altro, dall'altro Alberto Seassaro credeva fortemente nel continuo cambiamento: per alimentare la progettualità e la ricerca continua di miglioramento, per individuare nuovi ambiti in cui il design poteva ricoprire un ruolo e promuovere innovazione, ma anche per stimolare i docenti ad aggiornare la propria didattica e a non mettere radici in una specifica *comfort zone*. Così ogni anno, volutamente, cambiavano le *accentuazioni tematiche*, veniva ridisegnata l'offerta dei *Laboratori di Sintesi Finale*, ruotavano i docenti dei laboratori e con essi le collocazioni dei docenti degli altri corsi; si modificavano i *team* di docenti, le denominazioni dei corsi e gli obiettivi da perseguire.

Il tutto per ambire ad un miglioramento continuo, ma anche per scardinare alcune consuetudini accademiche che Alberto Seassaro ha sempre mal tollerato: dall'idea che gli ordinari non dovessero insegnare

nei primi anni, alla loro scarsa attitudine ad esplorare e a misurarsi, annualmente, con nuovi colleghi, nuovi insegnamenti e nuovi contenuti.

Queste continue modificazioni non erano alimentate solo da motivi culturali o istituzionali, ma anche da più prosaiche necessità economiche, dettate dal mutare delle regole di distribuzione del budget destinato alla didattica tra i diversi Corsi di Laurea e le diverse Facoltà/Scuole. Dopo i primi anni gloriosi di pagamento dei docenti *a piè di lista*, l'Ateneo ha infatti voluto introdurre – comprensibilmente – l'attribuzione di un budget preventivo.

L'esercizio annuale di Alberto Seassaro era, di conseguenza, di individuare per tempo le forme di premialità introdotte dall'Ateneo e di modificare, di conseguenza, il quadro didattico per cercare di massimizzare i fondi da ottenere: mutamenti terminologici, aumenti di corsi integrati e di moduli esercitativi, modificazioni di mix didattici e altro ancora erano tutti espedienti volti ad assicurare la qualità didattica e al contempo la relativa copertura economica necessaria.

16.6 Sperimentazioni fino e oltre il limite

Alberto Seassaro sapeva fare politica, e di conseguenza difendeva con convinzione e ostinazione le proprie idee, creava consenso intorno ai propri progetti, li sviluppava, consolidava e rafforzava, costruendo dialoghi, alleanze, convergenze, sistemi organizzativi e presidi di tutela.

Da anarchico, Alberto Seassaro conosceva in profondità il quadro normativo e regolamentare in cui operava, per potere comprenderne i limiti, i vuoti e i varchi e per estendere gli spazi di manovra dei propri progetti. Inoltre, come scritto precedentemente, era instancabile, viveva (a volte dormiva) al Politecnico e non si faceva intimorire da ritmi incalzanti e scadenze ravvicinate. In questo contesto sono nate tante idee e iniziative: alcune di queste non hanno mai visto la luce, altre hanno avuto una vita breve, ma luminosa, altre – la maggioranza – sono ancora oggi attive. Tra le seconde mi piace ricordare due episodi a mio avviso coraggiosi.

A seguito delle interlocuzioni tra Alberto Seassaro, Severino Salvemini e Stefano Podestà, entrambi professori in Bocconi, è stato avviato nel 2000/2001 un indirizzo di Laurea in *Design e management della*

moda. L'idea di questo corso di laurea intersede era di combinare competenze progettuali e gestionali offrendo un percorso di studi integrato con lezioni in entrambi gli Atenei. La collaborazione con l'Università Bocconi terminerà, purtroppo, dopo soli quattro anni.

Il secondo episodio è rappresentato, poco dopo, dall'attivazione dei corsi di Laurea Triennale e Specialistica in Architettura degli Interni, avviati per un solo anno accademico nel 2003. Si è trattato di un piccolo gioiello di progettazione formativa che prevedeva un percorso didattico appartenente a due diverse Classi di laurea, quella del Design e quella dell'Architettura: operazione non facile vista la necessità di integrare in un unico corso di laurea doppi vincoli e requisiti normativi. Coloro che in quell'anno si sono iscritti al Corso di Laurea in Architettura degli interni hanno avuto il privilegio di essere al contempo Dottori in Design e in Architettura potendo accedere anche all'Ordine degli Architetti.

Si è trattato, in entrambi i casi, di progetti ambiziosi e certamente audaci, forse troppo pionieristici per il contesto in cui hanno visto la luce, che hanno voluto sfidare, anche solo per pochi mesi, i rigidi confini disciplinari.

16.7 Il rapporto con la città

Non poteva mancare in questa esplorazione una nota relativa al rapporto con il contesto in cui il Corso di Laurea, poi Facoltà/Scuola del Design, operava: la città di Milano. Alberto Seassaro era consapevole della ricchezza culturale offerta da Milano nel campo del design e, di conseguenza, ha attinto ampiamente da tali risorse:

La creazione di questo Corso di Laurea è stata possibile [...] grazie anche alla ricca e importante concentrazione locale di studiosi, liberi professionisti e uomini di azienda che si occupano professionalmente di design in senso allargato, risorse umane e competenze che hanno reso famoso il design italiano in tutto il mondo.
(Seassaro, 1999, p. 5)

Un'elevata percentuale della docenza, soprattutto nei laboratori di progetto e nei workshop, è da sempre stata prevalentemente costituita da

designer professionisti prestatati alla didattica, affiancati in molti casi da figure accademiche, spesso giovani.

I primi garantivano l'esperienza, la pratica e la capacità di riflettere attraverso e sul progetto, mentre i secondi condividevano le riflessioni teoriche e metodologiche, gli strumenti progettuali così come l'organizzazione del fare didattico. Si trattava di un bilanciamento virtuoso che ha sempre portato, ancora oggi, ampi stimoli per gli studenti e un reciproco arricchimento del corpo docenti.

Moltissimi sono i designer che sono stati coinvolti come docenti a contratto; tutti scelti per le loro capacità progettuali indipendentemente dal loro linguaggio identitario; molti erano amici di Alberto Seassaro da una vita, ma altri venivano contattati di proposito.

Oltre ai nomi già citati relativamente ai workshop, hanno fatto parte della faculty nomi come Piero Castiglioni, Pierluigi Cerri, Angelo Cortesi, Jonathan De Pas, Donato D'Urbino, A.G. Fronzoni, Stefano Giovannoni, Makio Hasuike, Isao Hosoe, Giancarlo Illiprandi, Ugo La Pietra, Claudio La Viola, Paolo Lomazzi, Antonio Macchi Cassia, Alberto Meda, Bob Noorda, Franco Origoni, Roberto Pieraccini, Umberto Riva, Paolo Rizzatto, Italo Rota, Marc Sadler, Claudio Silvestrin, Denis Santachiara, Anna Steiner, Andries Van Onck, Max Vignelli così come Aldo Cibic, Paola Navone, Nanni Strada, Clino Trini Castelli, ma anche le generazioni più giovani di designer come Fabio Bortolani, Giulio Iacchetti, James Irvine, Matteo Ragni, Paolo Rosa, Paolo Ullian, per dare solo un'idea dell'ampiezza ed eterogeneità delle figure coinvolte.

Alcune delle quali, qui non citate, hanno poi intrapreso la carriera accademica anche queste per la capacità di Alberto Seassaro di coinvolgere le persone nel progetto didattico ed accompagnarle nella loro crescita.

16.8 Conclusioni

Lungo più di due decenni di dedizione al progetto didattico del design, Alberto Seassaro ha continuamente ragionato, sperimentato, modificato e adeguato il proprio complesso modello didattico.

Nel percorrere questa breve storia della didattica mi sono persa tra tanti meandri e intersezioni tra storia principale e storie secondarie che

non volevo però tralasciare. È emerso un testo, mi rendo conto, un po' frammentato e non sempre organico, a cui è difficile dare una conclusione se non mettendo in evidenza cosa significhi per noi oggi questa eredità di pensiero e di lavoro. Seguendo, infatti, un processo inverso posso dire che le unità didattiche elaborate da Alberto Seassaro sono ancora oggi la base del modello formativo della Scuola del Design.

Sono l'alfabeto che compone gli attuali corsi di studio. Le modalità di aggregazioni, di tematizzazione e di organizzazione sono in parte leggibili in filigrana anche se sono state in parte necessariamente semplificate e in parte istituzionalizzate (o forse per essere istituzionalizzate dovevano necessariamente venire semplificate), per cui assunte e metabolizzate dal sistema organizzativo di Ateneo.

Emerge, nel complesso, un progetto formativo lungimirante e, proprio grazie all'approccio per sistemi e componenti, flessibile e duttile, in grado di essere modellato e adeguato all'evolvere del tempo; un sistema aperto, in continuo dialogo con il proprio contesto culturale, sociale, economico e produttivo; un sistema resiliente (termine un po' abusato), dotato di anticorpi, capace di resistere alle avversità e di dotarsi di presidi nei confronti di possibili *competitor*.

Si tratta di un'eredità preziosa e viva che affiora, evolve e interagisce con il lavoro quotidiano di tutti noi docenti e studenti della Scuola del Design del Politecnico di Milano.

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17. Tracce mnestiche. Documenti e testimonianze di una rivoluzione istituzionale

Agnese Rebaglio, Antonella Penati

Dipartimento di Design, Politecnico di Milano

17.1 Leggere la storia attraverso le parole che l'hanno scritta

La nascita del Sistema Design al Politecnico di Milano e negli atenei italiani è il progetto più noto di Alberto Seassaro. E anche il più celebrato. Una selezione di scritti punteggia, qui, alcuni passaggi di questa storia. L'aneddotica indulgerebbe verso toni epici. Viceversa, documenti istituzionali, verbali e comunicazioni di lavoro lasciano intravedere, in filigrana, la trama complessa di una visione che si dispiega passo passo nel fare quotidiano, fino a portare a un rinnovamento radicale e profondo di una intera istituzione. Si sentono, nei suoi scritti, le ansie per un sistema istituzionale che deve essere accompagnato e convinto ad accogliere una nuova struttura con forme di organizzazione innovative; si traccia la rete di relazioni interne ed esterne al Politecnico a cui ricorrere per trovare appoggi materiali, politici, culturali; si avvertono forti le fatiche del lavoro di costruzione e l'enorme sforzo necessario a materializzare una decisione politico-culturale in infrastrutture della

conoscenza adeguate alla formazione di una figura culturale e professionale che si presenta con caratteri di novità e con esigenze differenti rispetto alle tradizionali figure dell'architetto e dell'ingegnere. Il che comporta il rinnovamento dei modelli didattici. Si ritrovano in questi documenti i tratti dell'impegno istituzionale di Alberto Seassaro, la sua caparbia, la sua indole indomita ma anche note di divertita cordialità e vivace ironia. Abbiamo preferito, in questo capitolo, far parlare direttamente lui, usando le sue stesse parole, prelevate da materiali di natura documentale come lettere, verbali, scritti con fini istituzionali, testi destinati agli studenti ecc.

Una breve nota di premessa traccia le principali tappe di nascita ed evoluzione del Sistema Design al Politecnico di Milano e in Italia.

17.2 Breve storia della nascita di una nuova istituzione

L'attivazione e la nascita del Corso di Laurea in Design si devono alla volontà e all'operato politico di Cesare Stevan, allora Preside della Facoltà di Architettura, con l'appoggio di Tomás Maldonado, di far nascere al Politecnico di Milano una realtà universitaria all'altezza delle storiche Scuole internazionali di Design.

È però ad Alberto Seassaro che va riconosciuta la visione, sul piano culturale e istituzionale, capace di dar corpo, nell'arco di un ventennio, al Sistema Design del Politecnico di Milano e al Sistema Design Italia (SDI) di cui è stato promotore e costruttore. Lungo tutti gli anni Novanta, il suo impegno è rivolto a ricercare le condizioni politiche e materiali per la nascita delle strutture istituzionali del Sistema del Design Politecnico che troveranno il proprio compimento nel decennio successivo con un Campus nel polo di Bovisa ad esse dedicato: il Dipartimento IN.D.A.CO – Dipartimento di Industrial Design delle arti e della comunicazione – ora Dipartimento di Design, sede della ricerca; la Facoltà del Design – ora Scuola del Design –, sede della didattica istituzionale; il Consorzio POLI.Design finalizzato all'attività di promozione culturale del design, sede dei Master e delle attività didattiche post-laurea. Sono anni di intensa attività nei quali – attraverso la ricerca e la didattica – viene costruito il fitto legame tra design e sistema delle piccole e

medie imprese italiane; tra design e sistemi produttivi locali; tra design e distretti industriali.

Gli intenti che avevano animato Alberto Seassaro, fin dagli inizi della carriera universitaria, di connettere contenuti della ricerca e contenuti della didattica, trovano qui pieno compimento. E anzi, il rapporto ricerca-didattica costituisce il vero e proprio baricentro della sua politica culturale, declinato a più riprese non solo come travaso di conoscenza dalla ricerca verso la didattica ma anche come fluire di nuovo sapere che, dalla sperimentazione progettuale che ha luogo nella didattica, torna ad alimentare la ricerca. La progettazione della didattica è pensata per lasciare spazio ai diversi gruppi di ricerca del Dipartimento così che possano portare contenuti aggiornati nella formazione.

Come Presidente di Corso di Laurea prima e come Preside di Facoltà poi, cerca di favorire il rinnovamento continuo dei temi di riflessione progettuale, in particolare nei Laboratori di Sintesi Finale – Laboratori dedicati ad accompagnare lo studente nella Tesi di Laurea. Anche a partire da questo connubio ricerca-didattica, viene ridisegnato il perimetro di intervento del design allargando, oltre alla tradizionale sfera dei prodotti industriali, il suo raggio d'azione per includere artefatti immateriali quali gli artefatti comunicativi; i sistemi interattivi e relazionali; gli interni domestici, gli esterni urbani, gli oggetti complessi come i territori, gli eventi, i beni culturali.

È sempre il connubio ricerca-didattica che consente, nell'arco di pochi anni, di concettualizzare e portare a definizione la natura di sistema del design e del suo indotto costituito da infrastrutture culturali (associazioni di settore, editoria, enti di formazione e ricerca, eventi ecc.) e professionali (il complesso mondo delle attività di assist quali la fotografia, la modellazione ecc.) e la dimensione strategica dell'intervento progettuale, tradotta poi in linee formative curriculari, in master universitari e in attività di ricerca ecc.

Contemporaneamente, in ambito Politecnico, Seassaro promuove tutte le azioni necessarie a costituire le condizioni perché l'area del Design si affranchi dalla Facoltà di Architettura e si sviluppi per dar vita a luoghi della didattica autonomi che troveranno compimento a partire dal 2000. In questo senso va letto il progetto di uffici e infrastrutture di supporto al progetto formativo: l'ufficio Dida (Didattica per il Disegno industriale) a supporto dei progetti formativi innovativi

istituzionali (Corsi di laurea e di laurea specialistica anche interfacoltà e interateneo) e sperimentali (Master, corsi IFTS, corsi di formazione permanente ecc.); l'ufficio Relè (Relazioni estere) per coltivare rapporti di scambio con la rete di Scuole Internazionali operanti nell'ambito del Design; l'ufficio Rap (Rapporto aziende-professioni) per l'attivazione dei tirocini curriculari; per la costruzione di rapporti stabili con il sistema delle imprese e il mondo professionale; per il monitoraggio dei profili formativi in rapporto alle esigenze e alle trasformazioni del mercato del lavoro; l'Ufficio Set dedicato alla valorizzazione delle attività formative attraverso mostre ed eventi, e nucleo di elaborazione e sviluppo del progetto di costituzione dei Laboratori strumentali (Laboratorio di Fotografia e Movie, Laboratorio di Modellazione fisica e virtuale; Laboratorio di Allestimenti, Laboratorio di Luce e colore; Laboratorio di Moda e maglieria, Laboratorio di Reverse modeling e virtual prototyping ecc).

Contemporaneamente, la sua capacità di tessere relazioni istituzionali pone le basi alla costruzione della rete universitaria del design italiano, con la nascita in diversi Atenei (Bolzano, Venezia, Torino, Genova, Firenze, Pescara, Roma, Napoli, Bari, Palermo a cui si aggiungeranno nel decennio successivo Salerno, San Marino, Alghero, Brescia e Ferrara) di Corsi di laurea, Facoltà e Dipartimenti di Design e con l'avvio di una attività di ricerca che vede convergere tutte le sedi universitarie attive nel campo del Design su tematiche di ricerca il cui contributo risulterà cruciale per la ridefinizione del ruolo del Design nel sistema economico-produttivo italiano.

Alla fine degli anni Novanta, promuove l'istituzione del Coordinamento Nazionale dei docenti e ricercatori del Settore Scientifico Disciplinare H09C (poi ICAR/13) Disegno industriale che, nel 2005 prende la forma istituzionale dell'Associazione dei docenti e ricercatori in Disegno Industriale – Società Italiana di Design (prima AUDI – Associazione Universitaria Disegno Industriale – e poi SI.Design – Società Italiana del Design) –, di cui diviene Presidente. Negli stessi anni costituisce la Conferenza Nazionale dei Presidi e dei Presidenti di Corso di Laurea di Disegno industriale (CPD) di cui sarà Presidente fino al 2010.

In questa veste si adopera perché oltre a una formazione generalista, ciascuna Sede introduca nelle proprie attività di ricerca e di insegnamento, percorsi formativi con una vocazione progettuale mirata alle esigenze del territorio. I sistemi produttivi locali, così come le cultu-

re di contesto, assumono una nuova attenzione che alimenta i prodotti editoriali di quegli anni.

Con questa finalità va vista la strategia volta a creare una rete universitaria di ricerca e una forte relazione con l'intorno culturale e produttivo di cui la Ricerca MURST *Il ruolo del disegno industriale per l'innovazione di prodotto. Sviluppo delle risorse progettuali del Sistema Italia tra risorse locali e mercati globali* (poi sintetizzata SDI, Sistema Design Italia) ha assunto il ruolo di incubatore capace di aprire una importante riflessione sulla natura stessa della ricerca di design come promotore di innovazione e come leva competitiva dell'Italia nei mercati globali.

Nel 2001, il Compasso d'oro alla ricerca SDI suggella la stabilizzazione del processo di costruzione della rete dei ricercatori universitari in Design. Nelle motivazioni si legge: «Prezioso e fondamentale strumento per la comprensione e la divulgazione del fenomeno del design italiano, utile per addetti ai lavori e destinatari di ampia divulgazione. Semplicità e organizzazione strutturale dei documenti facilitano l'approccio alla conoscenza rendendo un grande servizio alla

Nota 1.
[Link→](#)



cultura del settore» [1](#).

Il primo decennio del 2000 è, per Alberto Seassaro, il decennio di strutturazione del Sistema Design del Politecnico di Milano. È il decennio nel quale, l'impegno istituzionale, culturale e scientifico è volto al consolidamento di quella che, oggi, possiamo definire una delle più importanti realtà universitarie di formazione di massa e di ricerca nel campo del design. È anche il decennio di sviluppo e consolidamento della comunità universitaria del design italiano.

In ambito Politecnico sono gli anni in cui prendono forma la struttura Dipartimentale (Dipartimento INDACO) e la Facoltà del Design portando a compimento e a maturità il sistema della didattica (con l'articolazione del Corso di Laurea unico in *Disegno Industriale* nei Corsi di Laurea e Laurea specialistica in *Design della Comunicazione*, *Design del Prodotto*, *Design degli Interni*, *Design della Moda*. Quest'ultimo corso nasce nel 2000 grazie a un accordo voluto e ricercato da Seassaro tra Politecnico di Milano e Università Bocconi che porterà all'attivazione dell'Indirizzo in *Design&Management della moda* poi trasformato in un Corso di Laurea Magistrale congiunto tra i due Atenei.

Deriverà successivamente da questo progetto anche la costituzione del Consorzio interuniversitario, che vedrà attivi, nell'ambito della

formazione e della ricerca nel settore moda, il Politecnico di Milano, l'Università Bocconi e l'Università Cattolica.

Sempre in questi anni vedono la luce i Corsi di laurea specialistica in *Product Service System Design* – primo corso universitario interamente in lingua inglese –; in *Design&Engineering* – corso interfacoltà con le Facoltà di Ingegneria Industriale e Ingegneria dei Processi industriali –; in *Design Navale e nautico* – Corso interateneo con l'Università di Genova –; e la nascita del Corso di studi in Furniture e Textile Design presso la sede di Como.

Nella veste di Preside di Facoltà, avvia una serie di *esperienze pilota*, alcune delle quali verranno successivamente replicate nelle altre realtà dell'Ateneo: le attività di tirocinio come momento per testare la rispondenza del profilo formativo alle necessità del mondo professionale, ma anche come momento per realizzare un legame di fiducia con il mondo aziendale; le attività di orientamento per gli studenti interni e per quelli esterni tra cui le mostre di avvio d'anno accademico, le presentazioni dei lavori di tesi presso la Triennale come apertura del mondo universitario alla città, le *Design Open Lectures* [1](#) – lezioni di design tenute in luoghi significativi per la cultura del progetto nella città di Milano –; l'appuntamento annuale al Salone del Mobile denominato *Designing designer*, seminario internazionale su tematiche emergenti nel campo del design; il progetto Caselli POLI-Tecno, per il riutilizzo dei Caselli di Porta Garibaldi come luogo di presentazione degli esiti di ricerche e sperimentazioni derivanti dalla attività accademica; la realizzazione del sito di Facoltà [2](#) e di tutti quegli strumenti di comunicazione necessari a connettere il mondo universitario con il mondo esterno; il completamento dei Laboratori strumentali di supporto alla didattica – il più imponente sistema di laboratori per il design capace di supportare la sperimentazione didattica di una Facoltà di massa.

Con il fine di consolidare la ricerca, rinnova, con spirito riformista, anche l'attività dottorale. Costituisce un primo passaggio di questa politica di riassetto la promozione di una connessione tra il Dottorato di Design e i Dottorati di ricerca di altri dipartimenti. Nascono così il Dottorato in Metodi e tecniche del disegno e sviluppo prodotto in connessione con il Dipartimento di Meccanica; il Dottorato di Tecnologie e design per i Beni Culturali in connessione con il Dipartimento Best; il Dottorato



1. *Milano Design Open Lectures*. Lezioni di design aperte alla città, promosse dai Laboratori di Laurea della Facoltà del Design.
[Documento →](#)



2. ADI Index 2002 – Il primo sito della Facoltà del Design.
[Documento →](#)

di Architettura degli interni in connessione con il Dipartimento di Progettazione. Segue, in un secondo momento – quello della maturità del sistema –, la riconvergenza delle diverse declinazioni del design in un unico Dottorato di Design presso il Dipartimento IN.DA.CO.

Sul fronte della ricerca sono anche gli anni di consolidamento della vita dipartimentale e del sostegno alla formazione di Unità di Ricerca e Didattica (UdR) focalizzate su tematiche nuove e mature.

Sul piano personale focalizza i propri interessi di ricerca, da un lato sul ruolo del design nella valorizzazione dei beni culturali e, dall'altro, sul design della luce. Sul primo versante fonda e coordina l'Unità di Ricerca *Design for Cultural Heritage* mentre, sul secondo versante, assume la responsabilità scientifica del Laboratorio di *Percettologia, fotometria, colorimetria, illuminotecnica*.

A livello nazionale come Presidente della Conferenza dei Presidi e come Presidente dell'Associazione dei docenti del design, porta a consolidamento la rete universitaria nazionale del design impegnata nella valorizzazione e difesa della disciplina e delle sue specificità scientifico-culturali con le forme e gli strumenti istituzionali necessari al suo sviluppo, tra i quali, ricordiamo, la definizione delle Classi di Laurea e Laurea Magistrale; la ridefinizione della declaratoria del Settore Scientifico Disciplinare ICAR/13 per adeguarlo alla nuova realtà del progetto; la promozione e la costruzione della rete di ricerca SDI che ha costituito uno degli esiti più importanti della Ricerca Miur *Sistema Design Italia*; le molte azioni di concertazione tra le diverse sedi universitarie per la definizione di un sistema di criteri di valutazione delle attività scientifiche capace di valorizzare la natura della produzione propria delle aree del progetto; la promozione di ricerche (CNR, MPI, PRIN ecc.) tese alla definizione del Design e delle sue potenzialità nella economia del nostro Paese; la promozione del coordinamento nazionale dei dottorati di design; ecc.

Nei paragrafi che seguono, ripercorriamo la storia di questa innovazione istituzionale attraverso una selezione dell'ampissima produzione di documenti e testi che l'hanno accompagnata, testimonianze di un impegno quotidiano non solo amministrativo, ma anche politico e culturale. Alberto Seassaro scriveva, tanto, e correggeva, con quella capacità di notazione verbo-visiva ben delineata da Giovanni Baule nel cap. 5 del presente volume. Per questo motivo, la lettura originale di

quei testi è essenziale per comprendere lo spirito delle parole e soprattutto delle azioni conseguenti compiute.

17.3 Gli inizi: i documenti che descrivono il primo Corso di Laurea in Disegno industriale

La nascita del Corso di Laurea in *Disegno Industriale* nel 1993 è preceduta da un lungo periodo di incubazione che vede l'attivazione di insegnamenti dedicati a questa disciplina, la chiamata presso la Facoltà di Architettura di docenti come Achille Castiglioni, l'attivazione nel 1984 dell'Indirizzo di Laurea in Disegno industriale. Al link si possono ripercorrere questi passaggi nell'intervento di Raffaella Crespi al seminario *Contributi alla formazione dell'Indirizzo di laurea in Disegno industriale e arredamento*, tenutosi presso la Facoltà di Architettura del Politecnico di Milano (Crespi, 1984) [32](#). Raffaella Crespi introduce il seminario tracciando la storia dell'insegnamento accademico del design, sottolineando il valore culturale che la disciplina rappresenta per la Facoltà di Architettura.



3. Contributi alla formazione dell'Indirizzo di Laurea in Disegno industriale e arredamento. [Documento →](#)

[...] Sul finire degli anni '50 venne inserita nel Piano degli Studi della Facoltà di Architettura la materia *Progettazione artistica per l'industria* e si fece la libera docenza in questa materia [...]. Che cosa voleva dire inserire un concorso universitario dedicato a questa disciplina? Voleva dire riconoscere da parte dell'autorità accademica la legittimità, per certi versi, di un'attività che fino ad allora era stata ritenuta soltanto un'attività di tipo professionistico e quindi tutta interna alla logica della produzione industriale. È negli ultimi anni '50 e nei primi anni '60 che si sviluppa un dibattito e un contributo culturale che riconnette i problemi del disegno industriale con i problemi più generali del progetto dell'ambiente costruito, ed è nel 1970 che si profila, attraverso un convegno fatto a Milano e patrocinato dall'ADI, l'ipotesi dell'insegnamento del disegno industriale a livello universitario. [...] Potremmo anche riflettere sull'opportunità che la cultura del design diventi un contributo per tutta

la facoltà [...] molto spesso gli studenti ci chiedono che cosa può fare la scuola; la scuola, questa scuola per lo meno, non è in grado di fornire strumenti operativi di tipo squisitamente professionale, però può fornire tutti gli strumenti culturali che sono anche questi, per certi aspetti, strumenti operativi. (Crespi, 1984)

Il Corso di Laurea in Disegno industriale viene quindi attivato nell'A.A. 1993-94. Una Commissione consigliare, presieduta da Alberto Seassaro, sovrintende alle necessarie attività di organizzazione della didattica. L'ultima seduta di questa Commissione, il 16 febbraio 1995, si chiude con la definizione del calendario per la costituzione degli Organi del nuovo Corso di Laurea in Disegno industriale e per l'elezione del

4. Verbale della
Commissione Consigliare
del D.I. del 16/02/1995.
[Documento →](#)



Presidente [4](#). La prima Guida dello studente viene pubblicata per l'A.A. 1993-94 come Supplemento alla Guida della Facoltà di Architettura; pochi fogli graffettati, con una iconica copertina gialla, che illustrano l'elenco dei docenti e dei programmi dei Corsi e dei Laboratori attivati al 1° anno di corso [5](#) [6](#). Alberto Seassaro inizierà a lavorare al progetto culturale del Corso di Laurea l'anno successivo e, fino a quando non sarà sostituita dalla versione digitale online, la Guida dello studente costituirà una sorta di documento programmatico, attraverso la pubblicazione annuale del Documento istitutivo e l'esplicitazione dei contenuti didattici degli insegnamenti.

17.4 Ideare il progetto culturale: la Facoltà del Design del Politecnico di Milano

Il Corso di laurea si articola, da subito, in Indirizzi che diventeranno a loro volta Corsi di Laurea. Di lì a breve la prima Facoltà di Design in Italia con un progetto didattico innovativo che ibrida le discipline ingegneristiche e le culture del progetto di matrice architettonica alimentate dalle sensibilità dei saperi umanistici. Una Facoltà dedicata alla formazione di progettisti in grado di gestire la complessità dell'ambiente contemporaneo e di anticiparne gli sviluppi [7](#). Nel testo di Alberto Seassaro pubblicato sulla rivista del Politecnico dedicata alla neonata Facoltà di Design sono ripercorsi i passaggi fondamentali di «intensi anni di *dura* sperimentazione del Corso di studi in Disegno In-

7. Rivista *Politecnico*,
n. 4.
[Documento →](#)



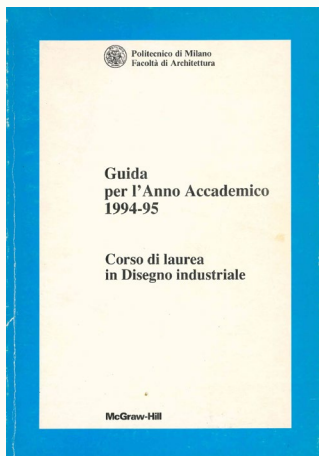


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5. Guida dello Studente - Corso di Laurea in Disegno Industriale - Supplemento. Documento →



Documento informativo

La Facoltà di Architettura italiana ha con il DM 24/2/94 diversificato e arricchito l'offerta didattica per rispondere positivamente e in maniera adeguata alle richieste di studenti professionisti e di nuove generazioni che la società esige nel loro confronto.

L'obiettivo di un corso di laurea in Disegno Industriale presso la Facoltà di Architettura del Politecnico di Milano è fornire professionalmente in questi anni:

Metasistemi del quadro socio-economico, produttivo e ambientale

Lo scenario più generale in cui si colloca il nostro corso di laurea è quello di una società fondata sui drammi dell'acqua ambata. Tale società agisce in diverse forme un tema dominato di operatori capaci di collegare la dimensione socio-economica con quella socio-culturale e di partire da qui per proporre nuove sintesi progettuali. In altre parole, richiede di essere proiettata nell'organizzazione dei processi produttivi e nella configurazione dei prodotti, secondo una direzione il cui scopo è il nuovo proprio del disegno industriale.

In questo contesto, i metasistemi più rilevanti del nostro paese di cui sono da ricevere la conoscenza tecnologica di grande portata sono: l'evoluzione della microelettronica, il del sistema dell'informatica, della robotica e della robotica, dei nuovi materiali. Ciò comporta una logica conseguenza una decisa e radicale delle attuali tipologie di oggetti, che si aprono, tra l'altro, attraverso processi di accorpamento e di fusione di prestazioni precedentemente fornite da prodotti distinti attraverso l'impiego di prestazioni del tutto nuove.

Un'altra conseguenza di queste innovazioni tecnologiche è la sempre maggiore importanza che assumono le componenti estetiche dei prodotti. Ciò richiede una consistente integrazione delle metodologie e delle tecniche proprie della comunicazione visiva nel campo del disegno industriale. Ma c'è di più. Nella nostra società assistiamo a una crescente espansione di tutte le forme di comunicazione visiva. Questo accade soprattutto in relazione agli scopi di sviluppo che la progettazione di sistemi di comunicazione visiva.

Un'importante azione applicativa in tali contesti consisteva sin da antica tradizione con i prodotti e quella della comunicazione di pubblico servizio. La ricerca di una elevata qualità della vita individuali e sociali, se non vuole rimanere un obiettivo astratto e declinatorio, deve necessariamente ricorrere, in termini progettuali, con le prestazioni operative e comunicative di tali strutture.

Il dialogo, la questione ambientale, sempre più pressante, induce a essere nel debito conto tutti i problemi connessi con un corretto delle risorse energetiche e dei materiali. Oltre a ricevere informazioni più avanzate e più complete di quelle tradizionali, ma anche a disporre di contenuti di energia, sono nella fase di produzione e distribuzione, quanto in quella d'uso, dell'ambiente e del riciclaggio. Questo induce problemi ambientali di ordine pratico, come l'uso razionale dell'energia, che impedisce una radicale revisione del tipo di prodotti della nostra società e dei rispettivi processi produttivi.

È evidente che tutto ciò comporta e richiama nuovi modi del lavoro e della metodologia applicata alla progettazione, anche per la produzione di prodotti, anche in questa modo progettuale didattica e di ricerca che sono di importanza strategica. Tutto ciò si pensa al contesto internazionale in cui questi fenomeni dell'informatica, della cultura, nonché ai bisogni e alle attività che contraddistinguono tale contesto.

Il ruolo del disegno industriale

Il disegno industriale può e deve offrire contributi importanti per l'analisi, l'interpretazione e la soluzione progettuale dei problemi (in quel momento culturale) di cui sono le opportunità offerte da questa fase di transizione. Con "disegno industriale" si intende qui un insieme di attività ampia e articolata, ma, alla stessa tempo, frutto di una forte coerenza interna.

L'importanza e l'irriducibilità sono date dal fatto che, nel "disegno industriale", l'aggettivo "industriale" denota oggi una variegata gamma di processi produttivi e il termine "disegno" include una varietà sempre crescente di campi progettuali.

La coerenza invece è data dalla capacità, tipica del disegno industriale, di coordinare tutti i contributi teorici, metodologici e operativi necessari per analizzare i problemi reali problemi della cultura materiale contemporanea.

Un corso di laurea in Disegno Industriale alla Facoltà di Architettura del Politecnico di Milano

La collocazione del corso di laurea in Disegno Industriale al Politecnico di Milano, nell'ambito della Facoltà di Architettura del Politecnico, è particolarmente appropriata e rifugge dalle seguenti argomentazioni:

- la tradizione e i risultati interdisciplinari raggiunti dal disegno industriale ha consentito in passato a Milano di essere capitale e volenterosi di un corso di laurea che il faccia proprio e il rinnovare. Inoltre, qui si può integrare con un contesto socio-economico e produttivo particolarmente dinamico, capace di offrire stimoli alla ricerca e alla didattica e di verificare concretamente i risultati;
- e di affrontare di fronte a innovazioni metodologiche e culturali dell'architettura, l'analisi e l'evoluzione di questi processi produttivi e di comunicazione visiva;
- la Facoltà di Architettura di Milano, essendo inserita nel contesto di un Politecnico come quello milanese, ha l'opportunità di sviluppare di competenza culturale, metodologica e gestionale particolarmente qualificata nel campo della tecnologia inerenti al disegno industriale. Il nuovo corso di laurea in Disegno Industriale è in grado di ricevere importanti energie da diverse componenti del sistema.

Profilo culturale e professionale

Il nuovo corso di laurea intende formare disegnatori industriali dotati della professionalità necessaria per affrontare sistematicamente la realtà lavorativa e progettuale e la pianificazione di prodotti e di processi produttivi. Ma non solo. Essi perseguiranno anche gli interessi culturali e critico-sociali per problematiche più ampie, per comprendere, guidare e indirizzare i profitti materiali che si vanno verificando nel contesto socio-economico, tecnologico e ambientale in cui l'attività del disegno industriale si svolge.

A questo scopo è previsto, nel corso di laurea, un quarto biennio unitario, durante il quale la scelta di questi diversi campi di studio è definita in base alle metodologie di ordine generale, nella presidenza, in parte, invece della particolare collocazione del corso di laurea in Disegno Industriale all'interno di una Facoltà di Architettura di un Politecnico.

In pratica, si formeranno figure professionali altamente qualificate, che potranno svolgere la loro attività sia come liberi professionisti e consulenti, sia all'interno di imprese industriali, commerciali e di servizio, nonché nelle pubbliche amministrazioni.

Tali figure si possono raggruppare in quattro profili culturali e professionali:

- **Progettazione dei prodotti industriali**

La progettazione dei prodotti industriali concerne la caratterizzazione funzionale, estetica e produttiva di quegli oggetti e di quelli a diverse aree tecnologiche del bene di consumo e di beni strumentali, dai mezzi di produzione ai mezzi di trasporto, dai prodotti di arredo e di arredamento alle attrezzature pubbliche e di servizio.



6. Guida dello studente, A.A. 1994-95. Documento →

dustriale, nell'ambito della quale anno dopo anno - è andata progressivamente crescendo l'identità politico-istituzionale del progetto culturale formativo» (Seassaro, 2001, p. 17). Dopo un'ampia ricostruzione dei protagonisti della storia della Facoltà, da coloro che hanno posto le premesse necessarie quali Tomás Maldonado, Cesare Stevan e anche Adriano de Maio, fino a tutti coloro che hanno tradotto in operatività quella visione - docenti e operatori delle strutture di supporto, il testo contestualizza le *vicende politecniche* nella più ampia riforma universitaria italiana, difendendo l'innovazione locale come un modello sperimentale replicabile:

La strada da noi percorsa può contribuire a riformare e rinnovare più in generale gli studi orientati al progetto e alla gestione dell'innovazione nel Politecnico di Milano, costruendo un modello innovativo che si inserisce fra Ingegneria e Architettura come 'terza forza' per realizzare concretamente quell'idea di politecnicità, fino a ora interpretata e praticata in modo settoriale e contrappositivo da due linee di pensiero - la creatività e la cultura da un lato, la tecnica e la scienza dall'altro -, senza accedere a una vera interdisciplinarietà, quale soltanto la metodica del confronto nel terreno del progetto può consentire. (Seassaro, 2001, p. 19)

Ripercorrendo i documenti e gli scambi epistolari, emergono con forza i tratti e gli sforzi di questi «intensi anni di 'dura' sperimentazione» (ibidem). Uno dei nodi strategici per Seassaro è la rivendicazione per la Facoltà del Design del ruolo di terzo attore nel consolidato binomio ingegneristico e architettonico del Politecnico di Milano, proprio nel momento in cui l'Ateneo sviluppa il modello di rete territoriale, con un impatto sull'articolazione dei progetti formativi.

Nel 1997, scrivendo al Preside della Facoltà di Architettura Cesare Stevan, evidenzia il ruolo del design quale innovatore e nello stesso tempo mediatore tra le due anime culturali tradizionali del Politecnico 83:

Caro Preside, [...] Il Confronto sviluppatosi in Ateneo su contenuti e modalità della riarticolazione dei suoi attuali assetti, [...] vede emergere proposte che derivano dagli effetti combinati di due

8. Alberto Seassaro,
Lettera al Preside della
Facoltà di Architettura
Cesare Stevan e al
Rettore Adriano de Maio.
[Documento →](#)



criteri: quello della 'articolazione territoriale' – che va a potenziare il modello di Politecnico 'a rete' con l'istituzione di nuove Facoltà decentrate – e quello della 'articolazione dei progetti formativi'. [...] è possibile che la tendenza emergente non possa che essere quella della riconferma del tradizionale assetto 'binario' dell'Ateneo, ancorché più articolato e decentrato – stante le modalità stesse di conduzione del dibattito gestito separatamente fra le due Facoltà di Ingegneria e di Architettura secondo logiche interne a queste due differenti realtà. Entro questa logica di prevedibile continuità, il Corso di Laurea in *Disegno Industriale* potrebbe costituire un fattore potenzialmente innovativo. Infatti il C.d.L. in *Disegno Industriale* – in questi quattro anni della sua esistenza – ha prima messo in luce poi consolidato e quindi potenziato una sua propria natura diversa e intermedia fra le due culture ingegneristica e architettonica presenti nell'Ateneo (la sommatoria delle quali non ha ancora costituito quella cultura 'Politecnica' che tutti evocano e rivendicano), costituendo la propria identità e vocazione sulla specificità del 'design', inteso come 'progettazione del prodotto industriale'. [...] Forse per questa sua natura equidistante fra le due culture dell'ingegneria e dell'architettura e, quindi, per la capacità di utilizzare metodi e tecniche di diversa provenienza, o forse per il carattere intrinsecamente innovativo dell'oggetto di conoscenza a cui si applica, ma certamente per le condizioni di forte sperimentaltà di cui ha potuto usufruire, il Corso di Laurea in *Disegno Industriale* ha potuto sviluppare contenuti fortemente innovativi sia di impatto scientifico e metodologico, sia di assetto didattico complessivo che possono anche diventare elementi connotativi dell'assetto di una nuova Facoltà. [...] (Seassaro, 1997)

Il documento presentato al Rettore Adriano De Maio e al Senato Accademico del Politecnico di Milano nel maggio del 1997, dal gruppo promotore del progetto di Nuova Facoltà del Design, presenta, in modo già compiuto, molte delle proposte che verranno realizzate negli anni successivi, a indicare un disegno complessivo già tutto prefigurato nel progetto iniziale. Il documento integrale è disponibile sulla piattaforma Design Philology al seguente link [9↗](#):



9. Proposta di istituzione di una Facoltà del Design.
[Documento→](#)

[...] il Corso di Laurea in Disegno industriale avanza al Senato Accademico e al Rettore una proposta che intende contribuire a far evolvere gli assetti tradizionali dell'Ateneo e contribuire a riconnettere la sua storica bipartizione tra Ingegneria e Architettura [...]. Alla luce dell'esperienza fatta, le motivazioni di politica culturale che hanno portato all'istituzione del Corso appaiono pienamente confermate; il design ha finalmente trovato la sua collocazione nel sistema universitario italiano in cui il Politecnico di Milano è l'unica presenza a livello nazionale; il mondo industriale ha risposto all'iniziativa con numerose associazioni e istituzioni e imprese coinvolte nella didattica [...]. L'idea di fondo del Corso, di integrare competenze provenienti dalla Facoltà di Ingegneria, oltre a quelle tradizionalmente offerte dalla Facoltà di Architettura, aprendosi in tutta la sua ampiezza alla complessità della cultura Politecnica, ha avuto un riscontro superiore alle aspettative [...]. La proposta che si avanza al Senato accademico è la seguente: istituire una nuova Facoltà del Design (Facoltà di 'Progettazione industriale') che si configuri come espressione congiunta delle Facoltà di Ingegneria e Architettura [...]. Il progetto didattico complessivo della nuova Facoltà del Design (Facoltà di Progettazione industriale), potrebbe quindi assumere la presente configurazione [...]: a livello della laurea [...]: Corso di Laurea in Disegno Industriale del prodotto; Corso di Laurea in Disegno Industriale della comunicazione; Corso di Laurea europeo in Disegno Industriale; un profilo formativo rivolto all'architettura con il Corso di laurea in Progettazione industriale degli ambienti; un nuovo profilo professionale da sperimentare in Ingegnere del disegno industriale [...]. A livello di diploma [...]: Disegno industriale della luce [...]; Ergonomia [...]; Disegno industriale del mobile e dell'arredamento [...]; Disegno industriale della moda [...]. A livello post laurea [...]: Scuole di Specializzazione in Design management; Yacht design; Car design [...]. Master e corsi di perfezionamento, cicli di aggiornamento professionale, Corsi di formazione CEE, Scuole estive [...]. Alberto Seassaro, Emilio Bartezzaghi, Pietro Peddeferri, Antonio Scoccimarro, Sergio Sirtori (Seassaro, A. *et al.*, 1997)

Nell'ottobre del 1997 viene istituita una Commissione del Senato Accademico del Politecnico *per l'istruttoria delle problematiche relative ai progetti didattici di Disegno industriale*, presieduta da Alberto Seassaro. Nel documento elaborato e inviato al Senato Accademico il 12 giugno del 1998, oltre alla completezza dell'articolazione dell'offerta formativa, oltre alla rivendicazione del carattere innovativo delle tipologie didattiche, oltre alla chiara intenzione di avviare rapporti utili alla didattica e alla ricerca con il sistema produttivo e territoriale esterno al Politecnico, è già chiaro l'intento di dare a Milano un ruolo guida (che in effetti poi il Politecnico avrà) nella diffusione a livello nazionale dell'esperienza formativa del Corso di Laurea. Il documento integrale è disponibile sulla piattaforma Design Philology al seguente link [10](#) ➤:



10. Commissione di Senato per il Disegno Industriale. Nota al Senato Accademico, in risposta alla Rettorale del 15 gennaio 1998. [Documento →](#)

[...] la Commissione ha concordato unitariamente [...] che il mandato istitutivo attribuito dal Senato – e gli obiettivi programmatori da assumere – devono esplicitamente essere intesi come: Commissione per la istituzione di una nuova Facoltà del Design (o del Disegno industriale) come risposta 'forte' alla domanda economico-sociale espressa dal sistema produttivo del 'design milanese' e italiano e come sviluppo del progetto di integrazione fra le componenti di architettura e ingegneria nel quadro del sistema di Ateneo-rete. A partire dall'assunzione di questo obiettivo programmatico, la Commissione ha [...] prodotto ipotesi operative [...]

Rispetto al punto A [*valutazione di fattibilità scientifico-culturale del progetto di nuova Facoltà*] la Commissione [...] è pervenuta alle seguenti acquisizioni:

- formulazione del carattere fondamentalmente progettuale del profilo [...] del laureato in Disegno industriale [...];
- definizione della natura induttiva del processo formativo alla pratica di progetto [...];
- analisi degli assetti internazionali dell'insegnamento universitario dell'Industrial design, e riconferma della presenza storicamente consolidata di una forte linea di approccio 'politecnico' [...];
- analisi del ruolo del CdL D.I. del Politecnico di Milano quale unico Corso di Laurea attivato in Italia a fronte dei numerosi D.U. e

delle numerose scuole private presenti a livello nazionale [...];

- valutazione degli sbocchi occupazionali [...] verificata: dagli esiti positivi dell'analisi di mercato [...] sulla medio-piccola impresa industriale lombarda [...] che ha manifestato una offerta assai più ampia della domanda espressa dal Corso.

Rispetto al punto B [*proposta di assetto strutturale della nuova Facoltà del Design (o del Disegno industriale)*]:

- articolazione dell'iter formativo [...] ai diversi livelli di studio universitario (Diploma universitario, Diplomi di laurea, Scuole di specializzazione, Dottorati di ricerca, Istruzione permanente) [...];
- consolidamento a livello di CdL differenziati dei due 'orientamenti' del 'Design del prodotto' e del 'Design della comunicazione' già attivati per l'A.A. '98-'99 e futura attivazione (prevista per l'A.A. '99-'00) di un CdL dedicato al Fashion design;
- attivazione della Scuola di specializzazione in Disegno industriale dedicata ai laureati architetti [...] e sviluppo di Scuole di Specializzazione in Disegno Industriale differenziate [...];
- potenziamento dell'offerta di formazione di dottori di ricerca [...] costituendo nuovi dottorati a carattere interdisciplinare [...];
- Articolazione territoriale [...] – secondo il modello di Ateneo-rete [...]. Ad esempio, c/o la Facoltà di Ingegneria di Como con D.U. del tessile e con D.U. del mobile in legno o c/o il Consorzio Bassa Brianza con il Furniture Design, o c/o la sede di Piacenza per il Design del componente edilizio etc.

Rispetto al punto C [*proposta di riassetto didattico disciplinare del Corso di Laurea in Disegno industriale*] [...]

- riformulazione delle Aree didattico-disciplinari [...] tesa a integrare i settori scientifico-disciplinari del Disegno industriale con quei settori (o singole discipline) di Ingegneria che esprimono connotazioni progettuali per favorire le possibilità di co-operazione progettuale; [...]
- potenziamento in tutte le esperienze progettuali del Corso dei rapporti con il mondo industriale in stretto collegamento con il Tirocinio ordinamentale.

L'insieme dei materiali d'analisi e propositivi acquisiti dalla Commissione configura pertanto un consistente corpus innovativo che

potrebbe essere del tutto adeguato al progetto di costituzione di una nuova Facoltà. [...] (Seassaro, 1998)

Il documento del febbraio 1999, *Linee programmatiche generali per l'adozione del Decreto d'Area del Politecnico di Milano per il settore Architettura e Ingegneria*, (Seassaro, 1999a) e i suoi allegati, costituiscono i passaggi istituzionali necessari per arrivare alla riforma dell'offerta formativa in Disegno industriale al Politecnico di Milano, seguendo la proposta già avanzata per l'attivazione della Facoltà del Design. Lo stralcio che qui proponiamo è relativo ai principi fondamentali alla base della progettazione didattica dei corsi. Inizia anche a prendere corpo il progetto dei Laboratori strumentali di supporto alla didattica, ancora oggi il più grande sistema di Laboratori per il Design presente a livello internazionale [11](#).



11. Linee programmatiche generali per l'adozione del *Decreto d'area* del Politecnico per il settore Architettura e Ingegneria.
[Documento →](#)

[...] Il modello didattico del Corso ha, come suoi tratti distintivi e originali, un 'approccio induttivo' al progetto che vede un progressivo incremento delle conoscenze metodologiche e tecniche dello studente con un excursus formativo 'dalla pratica alla teoria' [...]. Un altro elemento caratterizzante del Corso è la progressiva commistione della didattica con la ricerca, per cui negli anni di studio più avanzati le attività formative intersecano le attività di ricerca [...]. Un ulteriore tratto distintivo della metodologia didattica del Corso [...] è l'uso intensivo dei 'Laboratori strumentali di supporto didattico' che consentono l'esercizio della prassi progettuale [...]. Laboratori attivati con una dotazione di spazi, risorse e personale d'avvio iniziale sono quelli di Modellistica, di Fotografia, di Tecniche grafiche speciali, del Colore, di Ergonomia, di Merceologia, di Requisiti ambientali del prodotto industriale nonché i Laboratori informatizzati: Laboratorio di Media digitali e modelli virtuali, di Prototipazione rapida, di Fotografia digitale, di Tecnologie multimediali. [...] i Laboratori di Illuminotecnica [...] di Tipografia [...], di Lavorazioni tecniche per la prototipazione di cui è indifferibile l'attivazione. Per il progetto di costituzione del 'Centro studi storici del design' che raccorda le attività didattiche del Corso con le istanze culturali presenti nel mondo industriale, è infine in avanzata progettazione il Laboratorio Iconologico che raccoglie

la memoria progettuale del Corso e della produzione dei prodotti del design italiano. (Seassaro, 1999a)

12. Linee programmatiche generali di riorganizzazione dell'Offerta Formativa a partire dall'A.A. 1999-2000 nel settore Disegno Industriale.
[Documento →](#)



Il documento *Linee programmatiche generali di riorganizzazione dell'offerta formativa a partire dall'A.A. 1999-2000 nel settore del Disegno industriale* (Seassaro, 1999b) [12](#) è un documento strettamente tecnico. In esso l'offerta formativa della Facoltà è pienamente articolata ed è corredata da tutti quei dispositivi necessari per tradurre l'offerta formativa nel sistema dei Crediti didattici. Inizia con questo documento quella che si rivelerà la fase di una lunga ed estenuante richiesta all'Ateneo di risorse docenti, di spazi, di attrezzature e finanziamenti per la didattica per poter dispiegare l'intero progetto di costruzione del Sistema Design.

13. Alberto Seassaro, Lettera Approvazione del Senato Accademico del progetto didattico SDI.
[Documento →](#)



La lettera di Alberto Seassaro con oggetto *Approvazione del Senato Accademico del progetto didattico SDI – Sistema Disegno industriale – Trasmissione nota di risposta*, (Seassaro, 1999c) [13](#) è la lettera di ringraziamento ai membri del Senato Accademico per aver approvato all'unanimità il progetto di Disegno Industriale ed accompagna il documento successivo *Note di aggiornamento, integrazione e chiarimento al documento Linee programmatiche generali di riorganizzazione dell'offerta formativa nel settore Disegno industriale* (Seassaro, 1999d) [14](#) nel quale vengo-

14. Note di aggiornamento, integrazione e chiarimento al documento *Linee programmatiche generali di riorganizzazione dell'offerta formativa nel settore Disegno industriale*.
[Documento →](#)



no integrate e completate le informazioni necessarie all'attivazione del progetto presentato per renderlo rispondente ai dettati ministeriali del Decreto sulla autonomia universitaria – Decreto Ministeriale n. 509 del 3 novembre 1999 – ancora in fase di elaborazione ma le cui linee guida erano già a disposizione degli Atenei. Il documento, presente in forma estesa nella Piattaforma Design Philology, mostra Alberto Seassaro, al momento Presidente di Corso di Laurea, capace di destreggiarsi tra vincoli di varia natura, anticipando quelle capacità che, da Preside, saranno il suo lato distintivo. Lo stralcio inserito di seguito è testimonianza invece delle sue visioni strategiche.

Mentre costruisce il progetto per il Politecnico di Milano, avvia parallelamente un lavoro con tutti i responsabili dei Corsi di Design degli Atenei italiani così da pervenire alla definizione delle Classi di laurea in Disegno industriale in modo concertato.

[...] Le nuove linee ministeriali emerse, (per quanto di nostra conoscenza) successivamente alla formulazione del Decreto d'Area del Politecnico e alla presentazione del nostro progetto didattico, [...], ha richiesto un successivo lavoro di riflessione attorno ad alcuni dei criteri su cui è stato fondato il progetto di riorganizzazione didattica almeno sotto tre aspetti:

1. il primo concerne la distribuzione del numero dei crediti didattici sulle diverse tipologie disciplinari (di base, caratterizzanti ecc.) che comporta nuovi vincoli nella distribuzione [...];
2. il secondo è relativo al fatto che le indicazioni del Decreto Quadro richiedono una definizione più precisa e ragionata delle tipologie di attività che connotano gli ambiti formativi;
3. il terzo punto, che rappresenta il vero nodo 'politico' della questione, attiene al numero di crediti di ciascuna classe ovvero: quanti crediti possono essere predeterminati [...] e quanti invece sono da lasciare alle volontà ma soprattutto ai progetti didattici delle singole sedi universitarie.

[...] questo dibattito (che si svolge a livello nazionale), [...] è avviato ma non ancora concluso [...]

Tuttavia, alcuni esiti importanti sono già stati conseguiti:

- in primo luogo, è stata costituita la Assembleia Nazionale della Classe come organo permanente dei Corsi di Studio in Disegno Industriale attivati a livello nazionale (7 diplomi, 4 scuole di specializzazione, 1 Corso di Laurea);
- in secondo luogo, Presidente di questo organo è stato eletto Alberto Seassaro; [...].

Le variabili ancora aperte (le posizioni *romane* sono estremamente conservatrici e difensive, le nostre più aperte a sperimentazioni) sembrano comunque non essere tali da poter modificare il progetto già espresso, ma sono comunque da definire in modo definitivo per poter avere una formulazione certa e definitiva dei crediti, che sia già verificata a livello nazionale per consentire la mobilità intersele (importante soprattutto per Milano che è la sede a cui cercano di iscriversi i diplomati delle altre sedi). (Seassaro, 1999d)

Il 2000 è l'anno in cui si realizza il grande progetto della Facoltà del Design. Dopo anni di incubazione politico-gestionale, e dopo che la parola

15. Progetto costitutivo
della III Facoltà di
Architettura.
[Documento →](#)



design è divenuta nell'Ateneo sinonimo di *innovazione* dirompente, si avvia la fase della conquista di pari dignità con le Facoltà storiche di Ingegneria e Architettura. Il documento *Costituzione della III Facoltà di Architettura*, datato 10 Aprile 2000 (Seassaro, 2000a) [15 ↘](#), riporta l'evoluzione più matura dell'offerta formativa che, con l'istituzione della Facoltà, vedrà l'articolazione di ogni Ordinamento in un Corso di Laurea autonomo.

16. Alberto Seassaro,
Lettera Denominazione
della nuova Facoltà di
Architettura dedicata
alla tematica del Disegno
Industriale.
[Documento →](#)



Non di poco rilievo è la conquista del nome della nuova Facoltà. A fronte della decisione del Senato Accademico di chiamare le tre Facoltà gemmate da Architettura: Architettura I, Architettura II, Architettura III, Alberto Seassaro chiede in diverse comunicazioni al Rettore di adottare la dicitura *III Facoltà di Architettura – Bovisa*, ma anche *Facoltà di Architettura – Design*, *Facoltà del Design (III Facoltà di Architettura)*; «e, giornalmisticamente parlando, di Facoltà del Design del Politecnico di Milano» (Seassaro, 2000b). Sarà proprio questo il nome che la carat-

17. Alberto Seassaro,
Programma elettorale
per l'elezione del
Preside della Facoltà del
Design del Politecnico
di Milano (III Facoltà
di Architettura – Bovisa),
2002-2006.
[Documento →](#)



terizzerà fino ad oggi [16 ↘](#). Con l'istituzione della nuova Facoltà, si provvede all'elezione del Preside della stessa, seppure per un biennio di transizione tecnico (necessario per la conclusione del processo di Riforma dell'Autonomia). Unico candidato è Alberto Seassaro che, nel programma di candidatura [17 ↘](#), ripercorre le tappe fondamentali del percorso svolto sino a quel momento, in seno al Politecnico ma anche a livello nazionale: «Due *vicende politecniche* parallele, quella della avventurosa crescita del corso di studi in Design all'interno della Facoltà di Architettura e quella del radicale processo di riforme strutturali avviate nell'Ateneo dal Rettore, che convergono e si integrano alla più complessiva vicenda dell'epocale trasformazione dell'Università promossa con la Riforma dell'Autonomia [...]» (Seassaro, 2000c). L'ambizione dichiarata è come sempre lucida e iperbolica nello stesso tempo:

il raggiungimento – per usare una terminologia aziendalistica – della *leadership del settore*. Ovvero, usando un termine più politico e più ambizioso, dell'egemonia politico-culturale fra le scuole universitarie di design, ma anche, in assoluto fra tutte le scuole italiane di design, per poter almeno competere alla pari con le migliori scuole del mondo. [...] Ma anche fuori dalla scuola, e oltre le università e le accademie, la Scuola del Design del Politecnico di Milano

può diventare una risorsa per la ricerca, per la innovazione, per la formazione avanzata anche per il mondo produttivo ed aziendale. E non solo per quei settori cosiddetti *design oriented* che già questo rapporto ha storicamente sviluppato, ma per tutti quei settori che ancora non conoscono che il ruolo della *leva progettuale* è vincente nelle strategie della competizione globale. (Seassaro, 2000c)

Il documento Piano di sviluppo della III Facoltà di Architettura-Design, anno 2001 (Seassaro, 2000d) [18](#) è il primo atto autonomo di programmazione complessiva espresso dalla Facoltà dopo la sua costituzione.

Si tratta di un piano annuale a cui ne seguiranno diversi altri, finalizzato a richiedere risorse di docenza, di spazi e attrezzature, finanziarie sulla base dei progetti attivati e in corso di attivazione. Il documento, di cui pubblichiamo la copertina di presentazione, è difficilmente sintetizzabile. La mole delle iniziative presentate al Senato Accademico, già in essere o già programmate è tale che già il solo elenco è in grado di richiamare quel senso di *vertigine della lista* descritto da Umberto Eco. Rinviamo al link per la sua lettura integrale.

Degli ulteriori documenti presenti in piattaforma a testimonianza dell'evoluzione del Sistema Design, ci piace introdurre come stralcio della fase matura di Seassaro Preside, l'incipit alla sua ricandidatura a Preside nel 2006 (Seassaro, 2006) [19](#). Il testo mette in luce il sentimento del tutto umano e combattuto tra spinta continua all'innovazione e *pretesa normalità*, dentro a una Istituzione che è sempre più consolidata e gode di una comunità di attori sempre più ampia.

Avendo io ricoperto, dal '94 ad oggi, senza mai *pause né respiri*, il ruolo *effettivo e permanente* di ispiratore, ideatore, promotore, sperimentatore, realizzatore, gestore, ma anche presidiatore, valutatore, manutentore e persino, talvolta, demolitore di pressoché tutte le iniziative politico-culturali e delle relative *concretizzazioni istituzionali* della *avventura del design* nel Politecnico prima, nel sistema universitario poi, condotte con quotidiana abnegazione personale e collettiva, e riconoscendo la profonda verità umana



18. Piano di sviluppo della III Facoltà di Architettura-Design, anno 2001. [Documento →](#)



19. Alberto Seassaro, Programma elettorale per l'elezione del Preside della Facoltà del Design del Politecnico di Milano (2007-2010). [Documento →](#)

che 'l'aspirazione più diffusa è star fermi un giro', non tanto per stanchezza e tanto meno per logoramento ma per pretesa di normalità (senza dimenticare il principio democratico dell'alternanza e quello libertario della rotazione delle cariche), mi sono seriamente posto il problema di verificare non tanto la persistenza della mia *disposizione d'animo alla disponibilità* ma quella della disponibilità altrui – degli amici e colleghi con cui ho condiviso diuturnamente per così tanti anni questa avventura – a lavorare per altri quattro anni con me accettandomi nello scomodo ruolo di colui che pre-siede e che pre-sidia (appunto, *il Preside*), con tutte le connesse e ingombranti conseguenze di una operatività che solo eufemisticamente è definibile come intensa, e con tutti i rischi congeniti di quella tipologia di incombenza che deriva dall'obbligo di essere autorevoli. [...] Nei colloqui di carattere più istituzionale, è emerso in modo inequivoco, quasi perentorio, che '... non potevo sottrarmi a questa riassunzione di responsabilità...' e che quindi '...dovevo continuare...'. [...] la forte la politica di crescita del corpo docente perseguita in questi anni dalla Facoltà – sia in termini quantitativi sia in quelli più propriamente *accademici* – ci consente di avvicinarci alla costruzione di una vera e propria *nuova classe dirigente*, [...], con soggetti di altissima qualità cresciuti all'interno del sistema e che saranno in grado di interpretare, far vivere e rinnovare i contenuti anche meglio di quanto abbiamo sin qui fatto. Mi posso quindi ripresentare a questa carica non più come referente unico del sistema – nella sua *solitudine istituzionale* – ma come coordinatore di un gruppo che sta crescendo. [...] (Seassaro, 2006)

17.5 Assicurare le condizioni materiali di sopravvivenza. Ovvero, la costruzione della casa, il Campus Durando

Il Campus Durando, le aule didattiche, le aule informatizzate, i laboratori strumentali, la Biblioteca, le strutture pensate e progettate alla scala adeguata ad una Facoltà di massa, costituiscono un unicum nel panorama delle Scuole di Design europee. Ogni singolo passo, dall'ottenere

gli attaccapanni nelle aule, al conquistare gli spazi per la didattica, è tuttavia stato oggetto di rivendicazioni, richiedendo capacità di mediazione e dedizione al progetto.

Doveroso ricordare, tra i tanti colleghi che, nella loro veste istituzionale, hanno contribuito a questo miracolo, Cristina Treu – Prorettrice; Attilio Costa – Presidente Centro Informatico di Ateneo; Adriana Baglioni – Pro-rettrice; Vittorio Luise – responsabile della logistica.

E ovviamente Adriano De Maio e Giulio Ballio, Rettori del Politecnico di Milano che, pur contenendo la verve progettuale di Alberto Seassaro, lo hanno assecondato perché il Sistema Design crescesse così come è oggi. Ora che tutto c'è, pare quasi impossibile immaginare come tutto ciò che è stato conquistato sia stato ottenuto con sforzi personali diuturni [20](#). Ricordiamo, come uno dei tanti esempi, le battaglie estenuanti per avere le aule dotate di computer *Mac*, quasi addirittura fosse in gioco una contrapposizione ideologica tra ingegneri e designer e non una basilare necessità tecnica. Anche lotte di questa natura sono state necessarie per affrancare i metodi dell'insegnamento del design da quelli dell'ingegneria e dell'architettura e per costruire una propria autonomia culturale. Le poche, pochissime lettere che abbiamo scelto di presentare in piattaforma sono una testimonianza del lavoro quotidiano di formulazione di richieste per rendere vivibile la situazione iniziale e poi per ottenere le risorse necessarie per attuare il progetto del nuovo Campus di Design in Bovisa.

Le lettere vogliono rappresentare lo stile seassariano di interlocuzione con i vertici di Ateneo con i quali ha sempre *battagliato* senza mai perdere la divertita cordialità nei rapporti (con Attilio Costa, Direttore del Centro Informatico di Ateneo: «faccio seguito alla nostra faticosa conversazione – confronto? alterco? scazzatura? o come io preferisco solo chiacchierata tra due amici dall'indole polemica e dal carattere litigioso») (Seassaro, 1996) [21](#); con Cristina Treu, Prorettrice: «C(a)RA CRI!», come avvio di una lettera spinosa di richieste, o ancora «ti ho cercata molte volte (praticamente in modo ossessivo)», «ho bisogno di te con un minimo (abbondante) di tempo a disposizione», o ancora «a questo punto mi sento lasciato a *bagno maria* e *a metà del guado* con l'acqua fonda: tornare indietro? Andare avanti e annegare? Io so nuotare ma il Corso di Laurea così va a fondo» (Seassaro, 1997) [22](#) [23](#); con Antonio



20. Alberto Seassaro,
Lettera al Preside della
Facoltà di Architettura
Cesare Stevan.

[Documento →](#)



21. Alberto Seassaro,
Lettera al Centro
Informatico di Ateneo
(CIA).

[Documento →](#)



23. Alberto Seassaro,
Lettera al Prorettore
Prof.ssa Cristina Treu.

[Documento →](#)

24. Alberto Seassaro,
Lettera al Prof.
Scoccimarro,
*Costituzione del nuovo
assetto del Dipartimento
in sezioni e Piano di
Sviluppo.*
[Documento](#)→



Scoccimarro, suo grande amico oltre che collega e allora Direttore del Dipartimento Di.Tec, a chiusura di una lettera durissima sul piano politico «*bacetti* dal tuo amichetto Alberto» (Seassaro, 2000e) [24](#)↘. Le foto del Campus sono la testimonianza più concreta di come questa estenuante questua abbia dato i suoi frutti [25](#)↘ [26](#)↘.

17.6 Conclusioni. Da una visione culturale a un progetto di sistema culturale

Il carteggio negli anni si moltiplica e il passaggio definitivo alla comunicazione digitale lo rende di precaria memoria. Pubblicazioni scientifiche e divulgative, cataloghi, brochure, pubblicazioni digitali si sommano a un'infinità di documenti grigi che una struttura sempre più complessa e articolata produce quotidianamente. Nel frattempo, il design, come dominio disciplinare con le sue infrastrutture didattiche e di ricerca, si fa strada pian piano nel mondo universitario, assumendo uno statuto autonomo e riconosciuto.


Alberto Seassaro continua a tessere fili di testi che contribuiscono in modo decisivo alla creazione e al consolidamento di relazioni produttive con il contesto urbano, sociale ed economico-produttivo della città di Milano, ma anche con il tessuto nazionale e internazionale [27](#)↘.

27. Oltre i confini.
[Narrazione](#)→



Intuisce infatti da subito l'importanza vitale di tenere unite le diverse iniziative che sorgono nell'arco di meno di un decennio in molti Atenei italiani, costruisce Associazioni di ricerca e di coordinamento per la didattica. È la nascita del Sistema Design Italia (SDI).

Già nel 1995, appena eletto Presidente di Corso di Laurea, mette a frutto la sua esperienza nella costruzione di cordate di ricerca coordinata CNR e come coordinatore coinvolge nel progetto *Innovazione, qualità e ambiente nel disegno industriale* Venezia, Firenze, Torino, Genova, Roma, Napoli. L'anno successivo, ripropone un'ulteriore ricerca coinvolgendo anche le sedi di Chieti e di Palermo. Le potremmo chiamare *prove tecniche* di costruzione della Rete SDI (Sistema Design Italia) che, attraverso numerose iniziative, tra cui il coinvolgimento nei workshop del Corso di Laurea di Milano di tutti i colleghi delle sedi italiane con attivi corsi di design, perviene già nel 1996 alla costituzione della prima assemblea nazionale del Disegno industriale italiano.



POLITECNICO DI MILANO – FACOLTÀ DI ARCHITETTURA
CORSO DI LAUREA IN DESIGN INDUSTRIALE

c.a. Cristina Treu
fax. 2106

Ti faccio disturbare in commissione bilancio perché Luisa mi comunica che domani c'è una riunione spazi didattici per decidere le attribuzioni ai corsi di laurea e ai diplomi. Poiché a questa riunione io non ci sarò (non sono stato invitato, a differenza dell'anno scorso in cui avevo potuto dire la mia) voglio che sia tu a portare le nostre irrinunciabili esigenze.

Visto che il 7 luglio (non commento questa data che ovviamente giudico tardiva) mi è stata comunicata la filosofia "tutti gli architetti in Bonardi, tutti i designer in Bovisa fin da subito!" Sto verificando come d'accordo se gli spazi che mi sono stati promessi in quella riunione in presidenza sono adeguati.

Per ora abbiamo potuto verificare che:

- 1) per l'anno accademico 1998/99 ci serve l'edificio Crash, in cui ricavare quattro aule (cioè senza erigere i tavolati divisorii a progetto) da 100-110 tavoli da disegno, cioè ci serve tutto il piano aule del Crash
- 2) in forma definitiva (già a partire dal 98/99) ci serve la stecca dell'edificio M (vicino alla caffetteria) per le attività didattiche dei laboratori di supporto. Ho sentito da Luisa che la stecca M la vorrebbe anche Acuto, ti ricordo che me l'hai promessa, già dallo scorso anno, ripetute volte. Ti ricordo che è per noi indispensabile, e quindi irrinunciabile (concetto già espresso ma vero), se venisse fuori che la dai ad Acuto, credo che cambierei mestiere! Credo di aver dato mille volte testimonianza di spirito di adattamento, santa pazienza, umile rassegnazione... ma questa non l'accetterò!!! Io alle promesse ci credo e persino alle tue!
- 3) in forma definitiva (idem) ci serve il piano primo di via Cosca per portare almeno una parte delle aule informatizzate cioè per l'equivalente delle aule M1 e M2 di via Bonardi.


Delle aule proposte nell'edificio M e nell'edificio C, dobbiamo vedere se ci stiamo o se, viceversa, ci avanzano spazi. I tre punti sopra scritti sono veramente e totalmente irrinunciabili e non contrattabili: sono l'ultima spiaggia dopo tutte le rese che vi abbiamo offerte!

Ci sono poi i discorsi delle attrezzature e degli interventi di arredo, che bisognerà fare per rendere agibili le aule per l'inizio dell'anno, e dei pochi ma necessari interventi murari e impiantistici: ma di questo si vedrà.

Ricordandoti che le esigenze del corso sono state trasmesse già dal mese di maggio (te ne ho data copia il 7 luglio) vorrei poterti subito sentire, per verificare se le cose sono andate come necessario valdano.

Ciao Alberto

P.S. Sarebbe il caso che ci si sentisse stasera.



POLITECNICO DI MILANO – FACOLTÀ DI ARCHITETTURA
CORSO DI LAUREA IN DESIGN INDUSTRIALE

Milano, 19 febbraio 1996

- A tutti i docenti operanti ai diversi livelli e nelle diverse strutture didattiche nel campo della formazione universitaria per il DESIGN INDUSTRIALE
- Scuole di Specializzazione in Disegno industriale di Firenze e Napoli (e Venezia e Roma di prossima attivazione),
- Corsi di Dottorato in Disegno Industriale di Milano e Palermo,
- Corsi di Diploma in Disegno Industriale di Venezia, Genova, Roma (e Torino e Aversa di prossima attivazione),
- Indirizzo di Disegno Industriale e Arredamento del Corso di Laurea in Architettura V.O. di Milano,
- Corsi di insegnamento delle discipline del Settore scientifico-disciplinare H99C Disegno Industriale e dei Settori strumentali affini (H9C e H11X) presso il Corso di Laurea in Architettura V.O. e N.O. di Milano, Torino, Venezia, Genova, Firenze, Ferrara, Roma, Anzoli, Pescara, Napoli, Reggio Calabria, Palermo,
- altre iniziative in atto nel campo della formazione per il Disegno Industriale (Scuole Dirette a fini speciali, Corsi di perfezionamento, ecc.),
- (vedi elenco rappresentati di Sede convitati, con preghiera di diffusione ai docenti e ricercatori delle Facoltà e Dipartimenti interessati)
- Ai rappresentanti delle Associazioni professionali:
 - ADI
 - AIAP,

Oggetto: Riunione di Coordinamento del Settore DISEGNO INDUSTRIALE

In diversi incontri fra docenti universitari impegnati nella didattica del Disegno Industriale (in particolare nel seminario "Design e Società" tenuto ad Aversa il 5 ottobre 1995 e nella riunione svolta il 25 gennaio 1996 a Milano nell'ambito del Convegno Nazionale dell'Area Tecnologica) è emersa l'esigenza di efficaci forme di confronto e coordinamento tra le Sedì universitarie.


In questo spirito e per proseguire il lavoro avviato, viene convocata per il prossimo **lunedì 26 febbraio 1996, ore 17:00**, presso il Politecnico di Milano, nella R.a. una **riunione di coordinamento**, per la quale si chiede che venga garantita almeno una rappresentanza per ogni Sede.

L'Ordine del Giorno proposto è il seguente:


- Stato delle Scuole di Disegno Industriale in ambito universitario.
- Iniziativa di coordinamento di Settore:
 - Problemi di definizione e coerenza delle figure professionali relative ai diversi ordini di studio
 - Consorzio dei docenti di Settore e Settori affini coinvolti;
 - Riflessione sui Concorsi per l'Associazione dell'Area Tecnologica;
 - Costituzione gruppo di studio per il tracciato professionale;
- Rapporti con le Associazioni professionali (ADI e AIAP),
- Ipotesi di iniziative culturali e associative nel settore (INDI),
- Iniziative di ricerca comuni:
 - M.I.U.R. 40%;
 - CNR - Progetto speciale D1;
- Varie ed eventuali

Diffidati saluti.

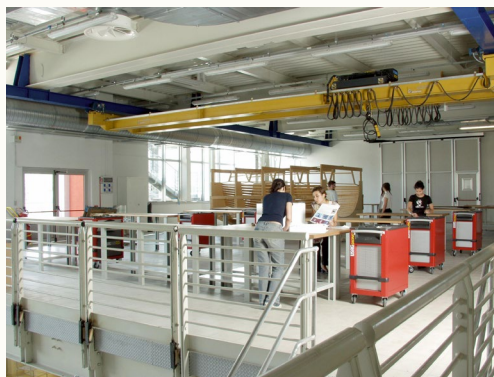
Prof. Alberto Seassaro




22. Alberto Seassaro, Lettera al Prorettore Prof.ssa Cristina Treu in merito al Campus Bovisa.
[Documento →](#)




28. Riunione di Coordinamento del Settore Disegno industriale.
[Documento →](#)





25. Attività nei locali del Laboratorio di Allestimenti, Facoltà del Design, edificio N.
[Documento →](#)





26. Campus Bovisa in costruzione.
[Documento →](#)

Qui si costruiranno le premesse per la costituzione della Società Italiana del Design e per la Conferenza dei Presidi e dei Presidenti di Corso di Studi [28](#). È l'avvio di una lunga storia collettiva che oggi viene scritta da chi prosegue nel progettare e costruirla, ma che continua a nutrirsi delle intuizioni originali e fertili racchiuse nelle parole dei fitti carteggi di chi l'ha inizialmente ideata.

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18. Dalla *merceologia* al *Cathedral Thinking*

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Dipartimento di Architettura, Università di Bologna

Le prime insistenze di Alberto Seassaro sul concetto di merceologia le ho afferrate alla fine degli anni '80 quando la sua ricerca era fortemente concentrata sui cicli produttivi edilizi e sui processi di fabbricazione della città e del territorio intesi come sistema complesso e integrato tra industria e cultura. Probabilmente Seassaro si stava rendendo conto che il quadro problematico si stava modificando verso una decisa e profonda integrazione di questi mondi che erano stati, fino ad allora, studiati da discipline separate e incomunicanti: il progettista si occupava della designazione del prodotto.

L'industria si preoccupava di come realizzarlo e distribuirlo. Due mondi strutturalmente autonomi nel pensiero e nella prassi. L'ignoranza del settore della produzione di progetto per ogni aspetto sociale, economico, processuale, produttivo e tecnologico era ripagata da una totale autonomia culturale ed economica del sistema industriale, sia nell'edilizia, che nella produzione di beni d'uso e strumentali.

All'affacciarsi della società post-industriale questi ragionamenti includevano il discorso sui sistemi e componenti industriali per l'edilizia (disciplina della quale Seassaro aveva ricoperto la cattedra,

ancora da professore associato, presso la Facoltà di Architettura del Politecnico di Milano).

Sono i primi anni di insistenza sulla *merce*. Difficile per me cogliere rapidamente la portata profondamente radicale del termine *merce* e dei suoi derivati all'interno degli studi e delle ricerche in architettura. Forse addirittura sacrilego mi appariva l'impiego della parola *merce* in quel contesto. Sicuramente per me che, per pagarmi gli studi, avevo trascorso ogni estate delle mie scuole superiori come commesso di una merceria in un borgo di montagna.

Quindi per me *merce* era un termine probabilmente perfino connotato da un filo di vergogna per la prosaicità di un concetto commerciale, all'interno di un consesso caratterizzato dall'incontro/scontro di politica-società-tecnologia-estetica-arte-potere nei processi di produzione dell'abitare, in trasformazione profonda che attraeva allora i miei studi e le mie ambizioni, anche rispetto all'ascensore sociale personale. Non avevo ancora studiato Marx, né i tanti autori consigliati da Alberto Seassaro che mi avevano accompagnato a comprenderne la portata. Trovavo poco sostenibile, e di seconda linea, lavorare sull'abitare come merce e i sistemi e componenti edilizi industrializzati dei quali ci occupavamo allora mi apparivano profondamente diversi dai beni di consumo, perché caratterizzati da modelli di business B2B e quindi caratterizzati dalle dinamiche tipiche dei beni strumentali, del cantiere, lontani dalla morfologia compositiva canonizzata, ma autorevoli perché industriali.

Ripensando agli studi di allora, viene da sorridere o piangere oggi ascoltando la cronaca sull'urbanistica milanese contemporanea nella quale appare in totale evidenza come l'architettura sia diventata merce e l'edificio stesso, dotato di una forma icona-spettacolare, di un nomignolo vezzeggiativo e giocoso, portato sul mercato da griffe immobiliari internazionali, autorizzato e fabbricato in *just in time*, si muova sulla scena del mercato esattamente come un oggetto di culto merceologico di lusso. Ecco Seassaro in quel periodo mi insegnava a leggere il mercato edilizio con gli strumenti di ogni altro mercato: gli strumenti della merce, del valore d'uso e del valore di scambio, della società dello spettacolo e della liquidità sociale e industriale della globalizzazione.

Il concetto di merce, e di conseguenza la merceologia come contesto di ricerca, continuava a piacermi poco, ma fortunatamente rimase

sullo sfondo del nostro lavoro di gruppo fino alla metà degli anni '90.

In quel periodo già funzionavamo come un gruppo di ricerca articolato dove si eran formate alcune stratificazioni di ruolo (sempre molto poco formali e per nulla fatte pesare).

Nota 1.

L'improvvisa scomparsa del prof. Giacomo Scarpini ebbe una notevole ripercussione emotiva su Seassaro e su tutti noi che lo stimavamo. Negli anni seguenti il folto gruppo dei suoi collaboratori fu poco alla volta assorbito ed il nostro gruppo di lavoro raddoppiò di dimensioni facendoci per la prima volta apparire inderogabile qualche goffo tentativo di organizzazione e formalizzazione. Due azioni queste alle quali lo spirito anarchico di Seassaro era allergico perché ogni organizzazione e formalizzazione avrebbe finito per bloccare e fissare una forma all'interno di un processo che aveva nella continua dinamica e imprevedibilità la sua forza più grande. Penso che la maggior parte di ciò che è stato fatto in quegli anni all'interno del Politecnico sia stato possibile soprattutto grazie a questa dinamica corsara che impediva ai numerosi 'contrari' di arrivare in tempo a sparare sulla piccola flotta del design poiché quando arrivavano le prime lente, ma massicce, bordate di contrasto i nostri piccoli vascelli si trovavano già in altra rotta avviati. Grazie al fiuto di Seassaro siamo per diversi anni riusciti a trasformare in guerriglia una guerra di secessione che oggi chiamerei alla conservazione dello status quo accademico precedente alla piccola rivoluzione del design. Altri parleranno della capacità e necessità innata di Seassaro di istituzionalizzare e dare statuto a ogni cosa frutto della ricerca e del pensiero. Le due cose non sono in antitesi, semmai si fondono in un'anima, sicuramente rara, di *istitutore antiorganizzazione* in cui il tempo lungo dell'istituzione e della sua sacralità si ribellava al tempo breve dell'organizzazione paralizzatrice.

C'era un nucleo di professori colleghi di Seassaro e molto vicini con i quali capitava di frequente di sovrapporsi o collaborare in ricerche ed eventi, didattica e progetti (Scarpini, Farè, Levi, Baglioni, ed altri), una fitta rete di colleghi di area tecnologica a livello delle reti nazionali di relazioni accademiche, il gruppo dei ricercatori *ope legis* che lavoravano con Alberto Seassaro dall'inizio degli anni '80 (Macchia, Garaventa, Mauri). Questi coordinavano day by day il lavoro della terza linea che era rappresentata dal gruppo dei dottorandi che avevano iniziato il percorso all'inizio degli anni '90 (Celaschi, Conio, De Paoli, Penati, Collina ed altri ¹⁵) e che a loro volta erano la cinghia di trasmissione verso un nucleo di *new entry* che progressivamente e a volte temporaneamente, si affacciavano (Ciuccarelli, Olivetti, Bertola, Deserti, ed altri).

Una ricerca sui *Materiali in lastra* in quel periodo mi avvicinò molto agli elementi della merceologia; mi fu offerta da Cesira Macchia e Adriana Baglioni per la pubblicazione del grande Manuale dello Zaffagnini sui materiali edilizi e sulla tecnologia industriale. Si ragionava sulla filiera che, dalla sostanza chimicamente caratterizzata, passava per lo stato di materia e poi, con l'introduzione della macchina e delle tecnologie a monte dei processi produttivi industriali, veniva trasformata in una forma adatta a diventare componente del processo costruttivo, e per l'appunto: il blocco, il filo, il tubo, la lastra, il profilo, erano l'esemplificazione plastica di questa che chiamai «l'intelligenza della lastra» (Celaschi, 1997).

Cominciavo ad avvicinarmi al concetto di merce nel senso che in quella fase si poteva esprimere. Qualcosa (il materiale), additivato di intelligenza progettuale industriale, diventava componente flessibile e interpretabile, al bisogno, all'interno di una catena del valore che passava per la conoscenza approfondita che il designer/progettista doveva avere per poter proseguire nella filiera che arrivava alla forma finale. Il progettista

del bene finale, dunque, non partiva dal materiale ma dalla forma attraverso la quale questo veniva commercializzato come merce intermedia disponibile. Il progettista cominciava a rendersi conto di quanto fosse importante occuparsi del materiale, del componente, della porzione *terziarizzabile*, e quanto questo progetto avrebbe influito sul sistema produttivo complessivo. Si concretizzava così un sistema di integrazione del valore d'uso e del valore di scambio che aveva intimamente a che vedere con la comprensione di vari livelli di *intelligenza progettuale* posti più o meno a monte della filiera R2B2B2C fino al riconoscimento da parte dell'utente abitante di una funzionalità estetizzata e impiegabile, disponibile ad essere acquistata e fruita.

Proprio in quel periodo Seassaro cominciava ad insistere sulla necessità di concettualizzare e strutturare (prima culturalmente e teoricamente, poi metodologicamente e quindi concretamente) un Laboratorio di Merceologia che fosse in grado di raccogliere e gestire ingenti masse informative (allora cartacee, in forma di cataloghi produttivi) sulla disponibilità dei vari stadi di generazione del valore per step di progettazione, scalata e disponibile al livello successivo di generazione del valore. L'occasione che ci permise di dare concretezza, anche logistica, a questo sistema e farlo diventare un luogo di relazioni di ricerca e di didattica fu il *megaprogetto* del Sistema di Laboratori per il Design che fu contrattato e ottenuto grazie allo sforzo ingente di Maria Cristina Treu (prorettrice vicaria di Adriano Di Maio ²³) e di Alberto Seassaro, allora ancora presidente di Corso di studi in Design.

Ma prima ancora avvenne quella che insieme ad Alessandro Deserti, colonna progettuale esecutiva di ogni pensiero immateriale di Seassaro, chiamammo scherzosamente *Operazione Exodus* che ci costrinse, per avere spazio vitale come futuri ricercatori di design, a trasferirci tutti dal campus storico di Città Studi a Milano fino alla profonda periferia malfamata della Bovisa, fuori dalla cosiddetta *goccia degli ingegneri*, consumando di fatto anche fisicamente il distacco dalla *componente edilizia* dell'area tecnologia e generando la prima vera condizione di autonomia, grazie alla quale fu possibile fare i balzi successivi di crescita. Potremmo chiamare quell'atto la *seconda guerra di secessione*, poiché la prima l'aveva com-

Nota 2.

Adriano De Maio fu Magnifico Rettore del Politecnico di Milano a metà degli anni '90. Sotto la sua gestione, con il contributo determinante di Cesare Stevan, allora Preside dell'unica Facoltà di Architettura che conteneva i primi corsi di *Disegno industriale*, avvenne la fase pionieristica del design in Italia. Il contributo di Maria Cristina Treu fu determinante anche a cercare e rendere disponibili le risorse di sviluppo del Campus Bovisa, all'interno dei fondi destinati alla decongestione dei mega atenei e del decentramento del sistema Politecnico. Scherzosamente e confidenzialmente chiamavamo l'edificio giallo del campus di design il *PalaTreu* perché era il periodo che in Europa e a Milano si usava dare ai grandi edifici sportivi e di spettacolo il nome degli sponsor ufficiali.

Nota 3.

Vale la pena ricordare che il Sistema Design Politecnico non è sempre esistito. A chi lo ha trovato fatto questa nota di richiamo pionieristico della fase dalla Secessione alla Fondazione può sembrare pleonastica, ma fa parte del ragionamento che in una pubblicazione come questa ha da farsi, qualcuno prima o poi doveva farla. Quando le cose sono fatte si possono applaudire o criticare, ma nessuno di noi, nemmeno Alberto Seassaro, aveva mai fondato prima un Dipartimento universitario; nessuno di noi aveva mai nemmeno immaginato che si potesse realizzare (anche istituzionalmente) un Consorzio interuniversitario ex art. 108 della legge del 1989 sull'Università italiana; nessuno di noi aveva mai costruito dal nulla una Facoltà con cinquemila studenti. In questo discorso c'entra notevolmente lo spazio perché senza lo spazio ogni pensiero rimane teorico e ogni persona continua a vivere nel suo quotidiano primitivo. Progettare un Sistema come quello di cui stiamo parlando voleva dire prima di tutto far diventare un insieme di spazi un luogo (ossia un sistema di relazioni produttive, pensato, abitato e vissuto). Lo spazio del civico 38/A di via Durando, dall'alto del quale (quanto è bello il cielo di Milano quando è bello), oltre la cintura della ferrovia, nelle giornate di sole, si vedeva la corona delle Alpi, rappresentò la nostra costa occidentale del continente americano, una distesa risorgimentale di praterie da coltivare e in cui poter allevare menti e produrre energia. Una guida sapiente, poca paura nei confronti dei tanti oppositori anche istituzionali, moltissima voglia e fatica e altrettanta incoscienza, fecero il resto di questa incredibile avventura.

battuta il luogotenente Seassaro lontano dai miei occhi, sotto la guida del generale Stevan nelle stanze del commodoro De Maio, dove si stava comprendendo la possibilità di uno sviluppo progressivamente autonomo del design rispetto all'anima dell'Ingegneria e dell'Architettura.

Strutturammo così una palazzina ex industriale di due blocchi di fabbrica con cinque piani ciascuno al n. 38/A di via Durando [1](#) [2](#) [3](#) dove, prima di noi, si fabbricavano farmaceutici, facendola diventare la sede della sezione Design del Dipartimento di Tecnologia (PPPE: Dipartimento di Progettazione, Programmazione e Produzione Edilizia) [3](#). Al quarto piano della scala B del plesso furono collocati i primi arredi di una biblioteca di informazioni sulle merci e fu dato avvio ad una filiera di ricerche orientate ai singoli settori produttivi. Firmammo allora insieme a Seassaro, (con Paolo Ciuccarelli che di lì a poco diventava il primo tecnico del laboratorio di merceologia, e con il costante supporto di Paola Bertola) il primo volume di quella che avrebbe dovuto diventare una collana di ricerche destinata a smontare ed esplicitare il processo di generazione del valore di complessi settori produttivi *design driven* come, per esempio, quello tipicamente Made in Italy degli occhiali nel distretto bellunese e trevigiano (Seassaro, Celaschi, Ciuccarelli, 1997).

Il laboratorio di merceologia del Politecnico di Milano fu poi trasferito nel complesso di via Durando 10, disarticolandosi dentro a quella che potremmo definire come l'esplosione delle filiere e della produzione post-industriale globalizzata e progressivamente digitalizzata che prese il nome di intersettorialità [4](#).

Diventava poco a poco (per me) progressivamente interessante e oserei dire perfino attraente lo studio sistemico delle filiere produttive e il primo incarico di docenza, il Dipartimento me lo offrì a Mantova nell'A.A. 1994-1995 proprio sulla disciplina di *Sistemi e componenti per l'edilizia*.

Lo studio mi aveva portato, sotto la guida di Seassaro, all'esplorazione della merceologia classica che era ancora allora una branca degli studi economici che si occupava di dazi



1. Campus Bovisa in costruzione.

[Documento →](#)



2. Campus Bovisa in costruzione.

[Documento →](#)



3. Campus Durando-Bovisa, fotografia degli interni.
[Documento →](#)

e compravendita di beni che per essere qualificati dovevano possedere caratteristiche standard di qualificazione prestazionale normata. I grandi manuali di merceologia moderna erano divisi in sezioni omogenee: materiali metallici, minerali non ferrosi, legnami, metalli preziosi, e così via fino ai prodotti dell'agroalimentare che rientravano nel cosiddetto traffico di materie prime o semilavorate. Vivevamo plasticamente una fase storica nella quale tutto questo armamentario scientifico doganale e valoriale si scioglieva e il vero impatto valoriale che interessava il progettista industriale si spostava di un paio di livelli a valle, dallo studio delle sostanze allo studio dei sistemi e dei componenti con qualche deriva sui materiali che di fatto, come tali, riguardavano sempre di più la chimica e l'ingegneria e sempre meno il design che non possedeva né le competenze né il tempo per far partire il suo agire da quel livello di interazione. Ci stava esplodendo in mano la globalizzazione e la digitalizzazione dell'informazione e più o meno di colpo, nel giro di un lustro ci ritrovammo a non riuscire più a stare appresso alle moli di cataloghi di materiali e semilavorati, componenti e parti di prodotti che da ogni dove ci raggiungevano.

Intanto era sempre più chiaro che il designer contemporaneo si stesse occupando prevalentemente di design della forma-merce 54, termine preso da un saggio di Maldonado e usato per raccogliere un sistematico e ponderoso lavoro scientifico di smontaggio dei concetti base che Seassaro mi aveva somministrato per anni e verso i quali sentivo un debito di classificazione: valore, bisogni, scambi, diventavano i miei mattoni per definire un campo problematico nel quale appariva chiara la differenza dell'occuparsi di oggetti (cose) oppure di merci (beni) compravendute su mercati. Appariva chiara la differenza tra valore d'uso e valore di scambio e quale dibattito ormai secolare fosse nato tra gli ormai vernacolari sostenitori del funzionalismo moderno e del futuro della modernità e gli spigliati post-moderni surfisti situazionisti del valore di scambio che ritenevano anche la funzione come uno dei modi di aggiungere valore di scambio alle cose per immetterle in un circuito di scambio di mercato spettacolare anche a fronte di una imminente *decrescita felice*.

Studiavamo l'articolato dei processi che si occupavano a monte della messa in disponibilità al progettista dei sistemi e dei componenti

Nota 4.

Un concetto molto attuale, quello dell'intersectorialità, che avevamo appreso dai due settori per antonomasia intersectoriali in Italia ossia il settore dell'automotive e quello delle costruzioni che ribadivano il concetto che rende incomprensibile e ingestibile la questione dei dazi doganali di Trump a causa della forte connessione di sistemi e componenti, materie prime e materiali che i settori chiave dell'economia contemporanea manipolano.

Nota 5.

In Celaschi (2000), un saggio introduttivo di Alberto Seassaro ripercorre le fasi pionieristiche di questo percorso di ricerca dentro la merceologia al Politecnico di Milano.

già integrati di intelligenza per orientare il suo agire. Ci interessava il fenomeno secondo il quale il designer si occupava di questi come, per esempio, Sottsass che progettava i laminati di Abet Laminati o il distretto dell'arredo basato sul tubo in acciaio in regione Lombardia, la manualistica ottocentesca del Formenti o del Valladier che informava la produzione edilizia sulla base di formati dei componenti, seguendo

Nota 6.

Cfr. per esempio, Simonelli (1997), Penati e Seassaro (1988), ma anche la collana di POLI.Design sul distretto del mobile brianzolo e sul distretto serico comasco, e molti altri saggi che testimoniano l'intenso lavoro di ricerca nei dintorni dei processi di innovazione trainati dai sistemi produttivi e dalla loro riorganizzazione.

4. Alberto Seassaro
(a cura di), *Ricerche tecnologiche coordinate*.

Facoltà di Architettura,
Istituto di Tecnologia,
Politecnico di Milano.

[Documento →](#)



ed estendendo il processo costruttivo delle cattedrali gotiche, solo per fare qualche esempio. Studiavamo l'articolato processo della subfornitura e della *value-chain* che spinge innovazione e non di quella che la subisce; studiavamo il *just in time* e la sua esigenza di partire sempre da un sistema interdipendente di fornitori partner e non subalterni, ma strategici, per l'approvvigionamento continuo. Ma anche per la partecipazione al processo progettuale e creativo.

Gli scaffali del laboratorio di merceologia si riempivano intanto di cataloghi e noi di relazioni produttive, il numero di saggi pubblicati si nutriva 6x e i contatti con l'industria e con i progettisti ci permettevano di aggiungere relazioni utili ed indispensabili per poter mandare gli studenti in tirocinio dentro ai sistemi produttivi e non solo

negli studi professionali. Intanto là fuori le merci si dematerializzavano e si digitalizzavano fino a diventare corpi umani consumatori, la servitizzazione superava l'acquisto di beni tradizionali, la natura degli scambi, incrociata nello scambio di mercato, si apriva al mix degli scambi antropologici dell'autoproduzione, del baratto, dello scambio simbolico, e di tutte queste forme in modo integrato.

La merce sotto ai nostri occhi 4x 5x 6x si riplasmava in continuo e così la necessità di studiarla e strutturare percorsi e strumenti di analisi si ingigantiva frantumandosi in mille rivoli. E intorno a quello che Seassaro aveva denominato il *Sistema Design Milano* evolvevano le professioni, esplodevano le fiere ribaltandosi nella metropoli, venivano estromessi i luoghi di produzione reale, si affacciava la lo-

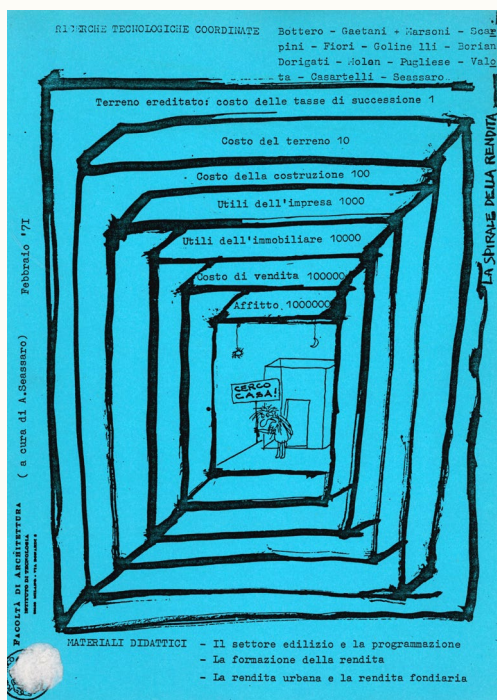




Figura 1.
Copertina del libro *Il Design della forma merce*, a cura di Flaviano Celaschi (2000).



Figura 2.
Copertina del libro *Dal Progetto al Prodotto*, a cura di Giuliano Simonelli (1997).



Figura 3.
Copertina del libro *Progetto Processo Prodotto*, a cura di Antonella Penati e Alberto Seassaro (1998).

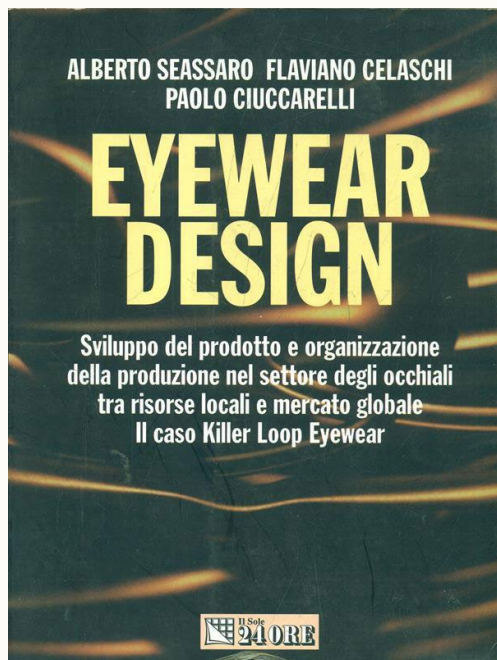


Figura 4.
Copertina del libro *Eyewear Design*, a cura di Alberto Seassaro, Flaviano Celaschi e Paolo Ciuccarelli (1998).



5. Copertina del volume *Design e Metaprogetto*.
[Documento →](#)



6. Milano Distretto del Design - Sistema Design Italia.
[Documento →](#)

gistica delle merci e i sistemi di compravendita digitale, si riattivavano interi quartieri, si popolavano di gru e di scavi, si raddoppiava il flusso di studenti per le decine di scuole di design che si aprivano, moda e design rinsaldavano un'alleanza mai riuscita prima, accoglienza e ristorazione diventavano esperienza, si ingigantiva l'economia dei servizi che noi chiamavamo del *sistema-prodotto*, producendo contraddizioni e nuove crisi, nascondendo spaccature sociali, espellendo abitanti, richiamandone altri e rimodellando e risegmentando le popolazioni in una nuova urbanistica post industriale globalizzata.

Impossibile stare appresso ai cento nuovi stimoli di ricerca che nascevano ogni stagione.

Parallelamente Seassaro entrava in una fase fondativa del *Sistema Politecnico del Design* e a questo già ragguardevole e ponderoso (direi ciclopico) lavoro di costruzione sistemica seassariana, di organizzazioni, istituzioni, strutture, organismi, tavoli, comitati, consigli, uffici, si sovrappose in poco tempo un altrettanto gigantesco lavoro di apertura di campi problematici esplorabili nella ricerca come nella didattica del design: dalla luce come forma simbolica e funzionale alle scienze dei materiali per il design, dalla sicurezza e prevenzione dei lavoratori al disegno automatico fino alla prototipazione digitale, fino ad aprire e poi coprire ognuno di questi ed altri cento campi di ricercatori ed esperti, interni ed esterni al Politecnico, portatori di acqua al piccolo stagno immobile che stava diventando un bacino imbrifero simile alla diga delle Tre Gole in Cina.

Una metafora che mi serve per dare l'idea di cosa significasse trovarsi coinvolto, a poco più di trent'anni, nel centro di un cantiere ciclopico nel quale si stava costruendo una diga mai fatta prima, dentro la quale filtrare i saperi che nemmeno un Politecnico di 140 anni poteva da solo saziare e che poco alla volta coinvolse Il Sistema Design Milano, il Sistema Design regionale, il Sistema design Italia, e poi un sistema di scuole internazionali, per terminare a costruire un bacino di raccolta e valorizzazione che viene oggi stimato come il più grande per dimensioni ed uno dei primi cinque al mondo per qualità.

Ma bloccare un fiume di questa portata significa deviare le acque e spostare immani cubature di terra, scavare e coprire, canalizzare, motorizzare, formare maestranze, approvvigionare sistemi di persone. Significa soprattutto procurarsi le risorse, quando si parla di fare ricer-

ca in Italia, soprattutto nei saperi umanistici, si sottovaluta sempre il problema della necessità di risorse continue e ingenti che un sistema di produzione scientifica richiede e alla cui produzione o reperimento nessuno di noi è stato preparato. Ricordo solo che tra il 1999 ed il 2001, con la nascita di POLI.design e poi del dipartimento IN.D.A.CO. (*Industrial Design, Arts, Communication and Fashion*), e parallelamente con lo sviluppo continuo della Facoltà, ci trovammo in 24 mesi a dover provvedere gli stipendi di 64 collaboratori coordinati continuativi di gestione della macchina amministrativa, organizzativa e progettuale non coperti da personale strutturato di Ateneo (esclusi i ricercatori e docenti della massa degli strutturati, considerando solo persone che lavoravano alla macchina organizzativa), partendo da una stanza con due collaboratori/trici, una macchina da scrivere Underwood azzurra e tre assistenti volontari saltuari e non retribuiti. Avevamo costruito quella che secondo parametri europei si chiama Piccola Media Industria. Non dormivo di notte nel pensare che il semestre successivo occorreva

Nota 7.

Nel novembre 1995 accompagnai, come *portaborse*, Seassaro ad un appuntamento con il neosindaco di Milano Formentini. Un incontro organizzato dal prof. Stevan, vecchio amico di partito socialista di Formentini nella sua carriera prelegghista. Ricordo un appuntamento breve, per i lunghi tempi della prosa seassariana, scandito da una agenda molto fitta del sindaco. Formentini in 20 minuti pose alcune domande schematiche a Seassaro: «Cos'è questo design del quale si sta parlando? Cosa c'entra il design con Milano? Cosa possiamo fare come amministrazione per favorire questa cosa?» Non so se Seassaro abbia avuto il tempo di sviluppare il suo pensiero, né so se il Sindaco davvero ascoltasse. So solo che nel 1995 il Sindaco di Milano si poneva il problema di capire cosa fosse il design e nel 2005, dieci anni dopo, esisteva un Sistema Design Milano noto e acclamato in tutto il mondo. Questa è, secondo me, la misura, non solo politecnica, del valore e della portata del progetto seassariano a cui ho assistito.

trovare le risorse per rinnovare così tanti contratti.

Di quel periodo ricordo solo o soprattutto quanto mi mancasse il poter lavorare artigianalmente giorno per giorno sui contenuti e sulle ricerche verticali, sulla scrittura di paper e pubblicazioni, sulla attenta e minuziosa preparazione dei *lucidi delle lezioni*, o nella attenta costruzione delle relazioni scientifiche internazionali, ancora non consapevole che quello che stavamo contribuendo a costruire ogni ora, ogni giorno, tutti i santi giorni, era un sistema di conoscenza esattamente frutto delle teorie e degli studi che avevamo praticato per anni: il *Sistema Design* 71. Un lavoro ciclopico come la diga che stava avvenendo in scala reale, come nella fabbricazione di un enorme Sincrotrone sperimentale per la fisica delle particelle. Le nostre particelle erano le migliaia di studenti e le centinaia di giovani ricercatori/trici, mi perdonino per il parallelismo, erano loro i portatori di quella incredibile energia che bisognava riconoscere ed estrarre per poterla accumulare e distribuire, e poi canalizzare in progetto, professione, ricerca, studio.

Alberto Seassaro aveva immaginato, e poi realizzato, un sistema per trasformare conoscenza in valore riconoscibile e trasferibile. Poco noti sono stati innumerevoli altri incredibili

progetti che oggi non esistono più, ma che costarono una quantità di tempo ed energia irraggiungibili: il Polo del Design di Como, interamente destinato ai distretti del *furniture* e del design tessile che hanno rappresentato l'economia di quelle valli; il *Casello del Design* al casello di Porta Garibaldi, dove vincemmo una gara nazionale per aggiudicarsi la gestione di un Centro di promozione del design nella metropoli di Milano in collaborazione con l'Impresa Tecno spa; il centro di ricerche per il Design dei Beni Culturali a Palazzo Forti di Sabbioneta con la progettazione e realizzazione del primo, e unico allora, Centro europeo per la valorizzazione digitale del patrimonio storico e del cultural design, fino al Politecnico del Design, società pubblico-privata con il gruppo Immobiliare Cabassi per la realizzazione congiunta di una Scuola Internazionale riconosciuta di formazione superiore al design, progetto nel quale si prefigurava una soluzione di Sistema alla residenzialità degli studenti ed alla loro accoglienza sostenibile con vent'anni di anticipo sull'attuale crisi dell'abitabilità di Milano.

Nel 2004, quando lasciai per la prima volta il Politecnico di Milano, ci rendemmo conto che il Campus di Bovisà era diventato, in piena dismissione industriale e terziarizzazione di Milano, l'unica vera fabbrica rimasta dove si faceva manifattura trasformando metalli, carta, tessuti, legno, in semilavorati e componenti e poi assemblandoli in prodotti e facendo la stessa cosa con i memi di ogni area della conoscenza che poteva servire a produrre progetto.

Nel Sistema del design del Politecnico di Milano finalmente c'era tutto: dalla macchina fotogoniometrica di misurazione della luce artificiale dalle sorgenti luminose progettate, fino alle vasche di simulazione del beccheggio delle imbarcazioni a vela; dal laboratorio di grafica artistica con tornio e presse fino agli studios digitali del terzo millennio per il movie design; dal teatro digitale di visualizzazione tridimensionale, alla sartoria di produzione moda più grande di Milano.

Corsi di alta formazione professionalizzante, seminari internazionali, convegni e congressi scientifici, ricerche competitive europee, relazioni globali, dottorati di ricerca, fino a quasi cinquemila studenti l'anno. Di ogni filone del sapere utile alla ricerca ed alla formazione al design esisteva tutta la filiera, dall'estrazione del senso, alla vetrina finale in forma di eventi (memorabili quelli al Casello di Porta Garibaldi con tanto di DJ set sotto la pioggia incessante del Salone del Mobile),

dallo spazio di partecipative design e focus group al catalogo digitale di fruizione a distanza.

Ne *I Pilastri della terra* di Ken Follett, si racconta il passaggio di mano da una generazione all'altra nella costruzione di una grandissima cattedrale gotica utilizzando il sistema del trasferimento corporativo delle conoscenze e i prodromi del sistema proto-industriale di prefabbricazione per sistemi e componenti.

Questo modello ha dato vita, negli ultimi decenni, al concetto di *Cathedral Thinking* ossia al pensiero di come si possa accettare di far parte di una costruzione che sai che non potrai veder finire perché la lunghezza del processo di fabbricazione supererà diverse generazioni, esattamente come successe per le cattedrali. Il concetto di *Cathedral Thinking* si adatta alla progettazione sostenibile dove non esiste di fatto il termine dei lavori, ogni trasformazione che immaginiamo, a catena, ne produrrà di ulteriori e innescherà processi che quando termineranno daranno immediatamente inizio alla fase di manutenzione perpetua e riadattamento ciclico [82](#).

Quello che già *in nuce* compariva allora, assieme alla dimensione ciclopica, era la dimensione immateriale di questo Sistema, quello che oggi si chiamerebbe il *gemello digitale*. Una *microfisica del costruire* (Foucault, 1977) [92](#) che possiamo oggi decostruire e riassemblare per adattarla al cambiamento accelerato e impetuoso del presente ricomponendo nuove forme complessive partendo dai componenti stabili, dalle costanti costitutive, per annodare nuovi legami tra produzione e fruizione di un sistema di conoscenza che è destinato a durare nel tempo. La sfida degli anni successivi è stata quella, sfuggendo agli *ozzi di Capua* di creare la dimensione digitale di questo Sistema e di farla lavorare a scala globale ed in continuo.

Nota 8.

A Milano si dice *Iungo come la fabbrica del Duomo* proprio per circostanziare un processo per sua natura senza termine nel quale ognuno che partecipa tiene il suo ruolo per una parte del tempo e fa compiere al progetto alcuni passi avanti lasciandone l'eredità ad altri, come in una staffetta sportiva di mezzo fondo. Nel lavoro seassariano di costruzione della Cattedrale Politecnica del design ho trovato molto dell'accettazione di questa filosofia.

Nota 9.

Laddove gli strutturalisti hanno cercato di osservare ed estrarre i meccanismi fondativi delle civiltà e in particolare Foucault lo ha fatto della modernità come pensiero politico e di potere, ci sono molti dei pensieri e dei termini che ho imparato da Alberto Seassaro a maneggiare, teoricamente e pragmaticamente.

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19. Il design dei beni culturali. Un percorso visionario

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19.1 Introduzione

L'obiettivo di questo saggio è presentare la costruzione teorica e pragmatica operata da Alberto Seassaro per il nascente ambito di ricerca del *Design per i beni culturali* ai fini del suo riconoscimento istituzionale.

La nascita e affermazione dell'ambito di ricerca del design *dei* beni culturali (avremo modo più avanti di esplorare in dettaglio le implicazioni di questa definizione *dei*) è esempio emblematico di come tutte le azioni intraprese da Alberto Seassaro rispondono in quegli anni della tenace costruzione del sistema design, in un intreccio indissolubile tra pensiero scientifico-culturale e obiettivo politico-istituzionale.

Per raggiungere questo risultato, ogni piccola tessera è, dal punto di vista di Seassaro, importante, anzi fondamentale, alla definizione del disegno complessivo. Proprio come un puzzle dettagliatissimo, Seassaro riesce a vedere ciò che appare ancora frammentato, e ogni piccola azione anche apparentemente scollegata, non immediatamente risolutiva o addirittura irrilevante, trova invece perfetta collocazione nel suo mosaico mentale sul design.

Nell'exkursus cercheremo di rispecchiare anche l'articolazione del ragionamento tipica di Alberto Seassaro fatta, da una parte di slanci e proiezioni avanzate nel futuro, ma solidamente ancorati ad azioni e operazioni concrete meticolosamente allineate in preparazione dell'obiettivo, dall'altra di movimenti circolari, ovvero divagazioni e sconfinamenti apparentemente secondari ma con cui ispira e soprattutto avvalle le sue tesi riportando sull'asse principale del ragionamento sempre nuovi sostanziali argomenti e persino neologismi utili a meglio esprimere i suoi concetti. Quindi, in un impianto narrativo principalmente cronologico, cercheremo di ricollegare i prodromi da cui nascono il suo pensiero e il suo operare, l'analisi dei suoi scritti e le ricadute da essi generate, nonché di allargare la visione a tutti gli elementi di contesto e contorno che Seassaro lucidamente intercetta e riconduce a sostegno dei suoi obiettivi scientifici e politici.

Il saggio è infatti articolato in modo *cronachistico* in una prima parte di rilettura critica degli scritti di Alberto Seassaro sul tema dei beni culturali, e una seconda sugli episodi istituzionali messi in campo (grazie al suo impegno di mobilitazione anche dei colleghi delle comunità del design), in cui una serie di continui rimandi tra le due parti dà evidenza delle complesse interdipendenze e correlazioni (temporali e causali) tra le sue elaborazioni teoriche e gli accadimenti istituzionali, resi possibili anche dalla maturazione del sistema politecnico del design che si consolidava in quegli anni.

19.2 Il Design dei beni culturali

Il tema del design per i beni culturali nasce all'interno del dibattito culturale sul Museo del design per la città di Milano, in cui il design stesso è pensato come un bene culturale. È di poco precedente a quegli anni la nascita del Sistema Design Italia (poi sviluppatosi attraverso l'agenzia SDI, con varie sedi nazionali) [1x](#) e la consapevolezza della dimensione distrettuale del design italiano. Nella visione strategica di Seassaro, la musealizzazione del design implica che la valorizzazione del design *made in Italy* diventi anche occasione di legittimazione culturale del suo statuto disciplinare, allora non ancora così scontato.



1. SDI (Sistema Design Italia). Prima ricerca nazionale sul sistema design italiano. [Evento →](#)

La sua riflessione, all'interno dell'impasse del dibattito allora in corso sul Museo del design a Milano (che allora mancava), è già proiettata in avanti: da una parte, sostiene che:

Il Museo del design a Milano esiste già, ed è costituito dalla particolare concentrazione milanese di giacimenti, di collezioni, di raccolte di merci e prodotti altamente rappresentativi del fenomeno design, come bene culturale aggregato da fruire e valorizzare grazie alla contemporanea presenza di qualità e quantità di occasioni rilevanti – al punto di far parlare di distretto del design e dei suoi indotti, e di un Museo in rete per la rete dei musei. (Seassaro, 2001, pp. 9-10)

Dall'altra, coglie l'occasione per legittimare e istituzionalizzare questo ambito di ricerca progettuale dentro la cultura del design:

L'innovazione è quella di aver portato questo tema alla dignità di progetto, un particolare tipo di progetto, 'quello del design e management dei beni culturali', sul quale occupare le migliori risorse universitarie [...] aprendo ai designer le porte di un ambito tematico progettuale di raro fascino, inesplorata portata, urgente necessità ed intenso valore economico. (Seassaro, 2001, p. 10)

In questa convergenza, la visione strategica di Seassaro è particolarmente evidente laddove afferma l'importante ruolo dell'università e della allora appena istituita III Facoltà di Architettura – Design del Politecnico di Milano [25](#), di catalizzatore di questo processo culturale, in particolare nel far cadere la falsa contrapposizione dei modelli allora in discussione,

2. Progetto costitutivo
della III Facoltà di
Architettura.
[Documento →](#)



[...] che mette a confronto da un lato le esigenze di carattere storicistico e museologico (e quindi la formula museo del design) dall'altro le esigenze politiche produttive e commerciali (e quindi la formula del Design Center). [...]. La Linea espressa dall'università è chiara. Non c'è contraddizione tra questi punti di vista, e uno ingloba l'altro. (Seassaro, 2003, pp. 248-249)

Per Seassaro il Museo del design non è solo un modo di valorizzare la produzione industriale storica, ma un sistema economico, che deve mettere in relazione l'esistente, realizzando una rete fisica e virtuale dell'intero sistema territoriale città-regione di elementi e persino eventi diffusi. Significativi sono sia le sperimentazioni all'interno del Corso di laurea in *Disegno Industriale* (un Laboratorio di Sintesi Finale dedicato al Museo del Design e 40 tesi nell'anno accademico 2000-2001, (Seassaro, 2001, p. 10).), sia i riferimenti alla *knowledge economy* e al *knowledge management*, nutriti dal progetto allora in corso, *Designet*, ovvero una piattaforma digitale per la conoscenza del design [3](#).



3. Sistemi conoscitivi per il design: una proposta metodologica. Il caso DesignNet.
[Documento →](#)

Il progetto di ricerca *Il Museo Virtuale del Design* che verrà finanziato nel 2009 da Regione Lombardia (di cui Seassaro è responsabile insieme a G. Guidi), si innesta in questa scia di grande anticipazione della dimensione digitale della valorizzazione del patrimonio culturale e progettuale. Ma la maturità strategica del suo pensiero emerge soprattutto quando richiama la necessità di una azione progettuale sistemica «[...] per affrontare in chiave di *design strategico* il problema della valorizzazione dei beni culturali» (Seassaro, 2003, p. 246). Nell'approcciare il design *come* bene culturale, Seassaro infatti definisce anche il design *dei* beni culturali come processo strategico di importanza sociale e politica, nonché la sua istituzionalizzazione dentro l'università. In quegli anni infatti nasce il *Centro per la Conservazione e Valorizzazione dei Beni Culturali* (CCVBC) di Ateneo, che, sotto la direzione del prof. Maurizio Boriani, riconosce che:

Le problematiche della tutela, conservazione e valorizzazione coinvolgono un ampio spettro di discipline e di tecniche, alcune specifiche, altre mutate da altri settori di ricerca: sono infatti coinvolti i problemi della conoscenza (storica e materiale), della diagnostica, del monitoraggio dei fenomeni e le tecniche di conservazione, ma anche i più generali temi della pianificazione territoriale e paesistica, della programmazione economica degli interventi, della diffusione e divulgazione delle conoscenze e della valorizzazione. Si può sostenere a buon diritto che quella dei Beni Culturali è materia politecnica per eccellenza e che quindi il nostro ateneo possiede le conoscenze, le strumentazioni e le relazioni interdisciplinari necessarie [4](#). (Boriani in *Rivista Politecnico*, 2004, p. 4)



E Seassaro si occupa instancabilmente di rappresentare il design come interlocutore privilegiato nel dibattito scientifico dell'Ateneo Politecnico, anche nell'ambito della valorizzazione dei beni culturali,

[...] impiegando tutte le sue possibili declinazioni disciplinari, dal design della comunicazione a quello degli eventi, a quello dei servizi, che vanno ad integrare le già consolidate pratiche progettuali in ambito museografico dell'interior design, dell'exhibition design, del graphic design, del web design. [...] (Seassaro, 2003, p. 246)

Definisce in modo organico per la prima volta nel 2003 il design per la valorizzazione dei beni culturali, o meglio la forma contratta e più significativa del *design dei beni culturali* (sua originale definizione), tramite tutte le articolazioni disciplinari e anche professionali che investe, insistendo sulla strategia complessiva che le finalizza e governa.

Progettare un bene culturale vuol dire compiere una lunga serie di operazioni, dapprima creative e poi tecniche che rendano il bene dapprima riconoscibile e poi fruibile come bene culturale. L'esempio classico è quello di un bene nascosto – che all'inizio del processo può essere ancora solamente 'materia' o 'materiale' – che viene portato alla luce attraverso momenti di studio, di analisi e critica storiografica ed estetica, fino a renderlo identificabile come bene di valore storico-artistico-culturale. E su cui, attraverso una serie di operazioni, si interviene progettualmente, per portarlo ad esaltarne le caratteristiche, affinché possa diventare un bene riconoscibile non solo dagli studiosi, ma da tutti i potenziali fruitori. (Seassaro, 2003, p. 242)

E ancora: «Progettare il valore culturale, è un preciso atto progettuale. È il processo che noi chiamiamo 'design dei beni culturali'» (Seassaro, 2003, p. 242). Come Seassaro tiene a precisare:

Ciò che è relativamente nuovo è che la condizione della fruizione di un bene culturale presuppone – necessita – quella dell'immediata percezione da parte del fruitore (dell'utente, del cittadino) di es-

sere esso stesso soggetto attivo all'interno di una sistema di alto valore culturale. (Seassaro, 2003, pp. 240-241)

In questo processo tecnico-creativo il momento fondamentale è la fruizione e richiede anche competenze di design specifiche, come quella del design della comunicazione, del design degli eventi e infine del design dei servizi, «definendo tutti i modi e le procedure – ma anche le tecnologie – per costituire la praticabilità del rapporto tra il bene e il suo fruitore» (Seassaro, 2003, p. 242).

Questo pensiero nasce nel contesto da un lato, di una «crescente declinazione del concetto stesso di bene culturale, e quindi di una progressiva moltiplicazione di quelli che vengono riconosciuti come beni, per così dire, 'museabili'» (Seassaro, 2003, p. 240) (un neologismo), dall'altro della trasformazione del design che, secondo Seassaro, come *scienza e tecnica del progetto* ingloba «infiniti oggetti del progetto, conquistando i territori dell'immaterialità».

È del 2001 anche l'istituzione del dipartimento INDACO – *Industrial Design, Arti, Comunicazione e Moda* al Politecnico di Milano, il primo dipartimento dedicato al design e alle sue articolazioni tematiche (oggi Dipartimento di Design).

In quel contesto emerge in modo ancora più urgente la necessità di posizionare la cultura del progetto per i beni culturali all'interno della matrice Politecnica. Seassaro registra il bisogno, accanto ai profili dei gestori dei beni culturali e dei consulenti specialistici (di matrice ingegneristica e tecnologica), «di rinnovate e innovative competenze capaci di gestire il processo comunicativo e fruitivo, a cui l'esperienza accademica di ricerca e formazione per il design può dare risposta» (Seassaro, 2004, p. 12), e traduce concretamente questo bisogno nella creazione, all'interno del neonato dipartimento, di gruppi di ricerca tematici (le UdRD Unità di ricerca e didattica) e nella Facoltà, di curricula formativi, di cui si darà più estesa descrizione nella seconda parte del saggio.

È in quest'alveo che il mio interesse scientifico da progettista e ricercatore dei processi di trasformazione e produzione dei beni culturali ha trovato nel dipartimento INDACO del Politecnico di Milano un gruppo di colleghi docenti, ricercatori, dottorandi e assegnisti

di ricerca con i quali ho fondato l'Unità di ricerca del Design per la valorizzazione dei beni culturali e che all'interno della Facoltà che ho l'onore di presiedere ha sviluppato due linee di orientamento della didattica che si esprimono nella direzione del Design degli ambienti per i beni culturali e del Design della comunicazione dei beni culturali [5](#) [1](#). (Seassaro, 2004, pp. 14-15)

5. Brochure dell'unità di ricerca e didattica DeCH.
[Documento →](#)



Nota 1.
[Link →](#)



6. Seassaro A. *Per un contributo politecnico alla valorizzazione dei beni culturali*.
[Documento →](#)



7. d.Cult: il design per la valorizzazione dei beni culturali. Strategie, strumenti e metodologie di progetto.
[Documento →](#)



8. D&CH: Il design del patrimonio culturale fra storia memoria e conoscenza. L'immateriale, il virtuale, l'interattivo come materia di progetto nel tempo della crisi.
[Documento →](#)



9. La valorizzazione dei beni culturali come processo di design : Casi, metodologie, strumenti.
[Documento →](#)



10. Proceedings della Conferenza Cumulus 38°S 2009. Hemispheric Shifts Across Learning, Teaching and Research.
[Documento →](#)



Nell'approfondimento dei processi di valorizzazione dei beni culturali, diventa inoltre strategico mappare le competenze di design per i beni culturali all'interno del Dipartimento (come sivedrà più avanti), e illustrare il lavoro di molti dei colleghi che hanno affrontato in modo strategico e collettivo il progetto di beni culturali all'interno del Dipartimento [6](#), ma soprattutto la necessità di infrastrutturazione del Dipartimento affinché «i saperi disciplinari possano interferire interdisciplinariamente e diventare reali supporti all'avanzamento industriale del paese, anche rispetto alla produzione di valore mediante i beni culturali» (Seassaro, 2004, pp. 14-15), a dimostrazione di come il *cimento* di Seassaro si basi da subito su una visione prospettica di grande anticipazione di una cultura del progetto matura per quella che definisce «l'industria dei beni culturali» (Seassaro, 2004, p. 13).

Negli anni successivi l'ambito di ricerca si consolida progressivamente divenendo oggetto di progetti di ricerca nazionale in grado di restituire sia la «fenomenologia multiverso di design dei beni culturali» [7](#) (Parente, Lupo, 2009) che le strette interrelazioni con le dimensioni virtuali e interattive rese possibili dalle nuove tecnologie digitali [8](#) (Irace, 2013); nonché vari progetti di ricerca applicata (tra cui il già citato Museo Virtuale del Design) e tesi di dottorato [9](#).

Tutte queste esperienze hanno concorso a ri-definire metodologicamente, e promuovere anche internazionalmente attraverso conferenze [10](#), l'approccio del design (e del *meta-progetto*) dei beni culturali come una *practice-based research*:

Attraverso una serie di sperimentazioni di tipo teorico ed applicativo si è costruita quindi una piattaforma scientifica di design per

i beni culturali. [...] In questi processi, l'azione di valorizzazione del design è riconoscibile anche in fase metaprogettuale, cioè preliminare al progetto, nel momento in cui identifica e connota un certo bene come suscettibile di successive pratiche di valorizzazione [...]. Ovviamente, accanto a questa capacità di lettura trasversale del processo di valorizzazione, che ne rappresenta la regia complessiva, il design sostanzia il suo intervento attraverso le sue competenze e specializzazioni operative, cioè quell'insieme di tecniche, linguaggi e strumenti del progetto che trasformano le scelte strategiche in azioni concrete [...]. È necessario avere una esperienza diretta e concreta della materia dei beni culturali, che avviene solo nel momento in cui si progetta: occorre cioè operare da progettisti ma con una visione strategica capace di pensare competenze aggregate sottoforma di modelli e processi replicabili. (Lupo, 2009, pp. 10-11)

Gli accadimenti istituzionali a seguire descritti confermano ulteriormente i passaggi di consolidamento di questo percorso scientifico e culturale.

19.3 Il contesto istituzionale

La relazione tra design e patrimonio culturale ha avuto inizio circa 25 anni fa, ancora prima della costituzione dell'Unità di Ricerca e Didattica denominata *Design dei Beni Culturali* fortemente voluta da Alberto Seassaro, coordinata da Flaviano Celaschi prima, dallo stesso Seassaro dopo e infine da Fulvio Irace. Parallelamente alla riflessione sulla musealizzazione del design che si andava sviluppando in quegli stessi anni, questo gruppo di lavoro cercava di trovare strumenti e processi utili allo studio strutturato del patrimonio culturale nelle sue varie forme e articolazioni, nonché di dotarsi di nuovi paradigmi per comprendere le dinamiche di costruzione del valore all'interno di sistemi culturali complessi (Celaschi, 2000). Attività che prosegue tutt'oggi in un rinnovato team denominato *DeCH_Design for Cultural Heritage* [2](#).

È proprio nei primi anni 2000 infatti che Alberto Seassaro –



Nota 2.
[Link →](#)

hanno determinato la crescita del design come disciplina universitaria in Italia – ebbe la lungimiranza di dare spazio e identità a un connubio tanto proficuo e interessante quanto – a quel tempo – inusuale: come si evince dai suoi scritti precedentemente riportati parliamo infatti del connubio tra *design* – quale disciplina vocata all'innovazione – e *patrimonio culturale* quale ambito tematico sempre più necessitante di nuove modalità di valorizzazione, comunicazione e fruizione.

Il percorso ebbe inizio con l'intuizione di mappare le discipline del progetto, della storia e della critica, della rappresentazione e del management relative al patrimonio culturale presenti in prima battuta nel dipartimento INDACO e poi nei diversi dipartimenti dell'Ateneo, al fine di creare un vero e proprio *Albo delle competenze politecniche* (BBCC

Nota 3.

Processi e metodi design based per la sistematizzazione, divulgazione e valorizzazione del patrimonio di esperienze, competenze, tecnologie, della cultura politecnica in materia di beni culturali: il progetto e lo sviluppo di eventi e prodotti informativi, formativi, di addestramento degli operatori, 2003-2004). Progetto di ricerca a cura di R. Trocchianesi (resp. scientifico A. Seassaro).

2003-2004 ³⁵) a dimostrazione della ricchezza e dell'articolazione di questo ambito tematico nonché della potenzialità di quello che avrebbe potuto fare l'università – in termini di didattica, ricerca e progetto – per le istituzioni, gli enti, i soggetti agenti nell'intero sistema dell'industria culturale.

Grazie soprattutto all'approccio strategico di Seassaro, significative sono state le azioni che hanno portato al posizionamento di questa branca del design all'interno del sistema Politecnico prima (considerando anche il *CCVBC – Centro di Conservazione e valorizzazione dei Beni Culturali di Ateneo* precedentemente citato) e del sistema design nazionale e internazionale poi. Tali azioni investono sia le tematiche di progetto sviluppate nei laboratori, soprattutto nei Laboratori di Sintesi finale nei quali è tuttora evidente la scelta di affrontare questioni che hanno ampie ricadute sul piano sociale e soprattutto culturale, sia l'istituzione di orientamenti curriculari da lui fortemente voluti quali *Comunicazione per la valorizzazione dei beni culturali* all'interno del Corso di Laurea di *Design della Comunicazione* (attivo dall'A.A. 2003-2004 al 2006-2007) e *Allestimento e museografia per i beni culturali* all'interno del Corso di Laurea di *Design degli Interni* (attivo dall'A.A. 2004-2005 al 2006-2007), nei quali divenne concreta l'attenzione alla valorizzazione, attraverso il design, dei patrimoni di culture materiali e intellettuali. In particolare, all'interno dell'orientamento di *Comunicazione per la valorizzazione dei beni culturali* erano attivi laboratori di progetto e corsi teorici volti ad affrontare le specificità della cultura del progetto della grafica e comu-

nicazione visiva in contesti culturali fisici e digitali, museografico-allestitivi, territoriali. Nel percorso curriculare, tra gli insegnamenti specifici di indirizzo, venne inserito un corso di *Sistema dei beni culturali e museologia* a sottolineare l'importanza da un lato dell'approccio sistemico al patrimonio e dall'altro la sinergia verso l'interdisciplinarietà con l'ambito dell'arte, della curatela e dell'organizzazione scientifico-museale.

Oltre a sistemi integrati di brand identity territoriale e museale, alla produzione di artefatti audiovisivi e editoriali per la cultura, all'approccio narrativo e nuovi linguaggi, si diede spazio a una linea di lavoro incentrata sulla rappresentazione della complessità attraverso visualizzazione dati e infografica affrontando sfide progettuali derivanti dalla rappresentazione visiva di fenomeni culturali complessi. Archivi digitali e musei virtuali costituivano contesti privilegiati in cui esplorare nuove modalità di fruizione, narrazione e comunicazione del patrimonio a partire dall'utilizzo delle nuove tecnologie. Il già citato progetto *Designet* si inserisce proprio in questa linea di ricerca.

Ancora più specifico l'orientamento di *Allestimento e museografia per i beni culturali* dove spiccavano corsi di carattere critico-teorico quali *Arte e Architettura* in cui si rifletteva sui confini disciplinari e sulle aree di interpolazione tra approccio artistico e cultura progettuale e *Museografia* dove il museo veniva analizzato e affrontato come sistema culturale a tutto tondo dal punto di vista architettonico e degli spazi, ma anche come luogo *abitativo* per nuove modalità di fruizione, come *prodotto* di marketing culturale, come *organismo sensibile* pronto ad aprirsi a progetti innovativi. Tra i corsi di progetto vennero istituiti il *Laboratorio di allestimento* e il *Workshop di allestimento*.

Entrambi volti ad approfondire un ambito applicativo degli interni incentrato su contesti culturali ad ampio spettro: musei, fiere, eventi indoor e outdoor. Vi è da dire che il progetto di allestimento è volto a dare forma a un racconto tridimensionale dove vengono affrontate – a livello integrato – la dimensione progettuale degli interni (progetto spaziale e distribuzione), del prodotto (artefatti allestitivi) e della comunicazione (brand identity museale e wayfinding). Anche la componente illuminotecnica diventa centrale, per questo fu inserito un corso di *Cultura e progetto della luce* di cui lo stesso Seassaro fu titolare e sperimentatore di modelli didattico-progettuali incentrati su quella che era una delle sue principali traiettorie di innovazione e di ricerca inventiva.

11. Master in /IDEA:
Exhibition Design,
Architettura dell'Esposizione.
[Documento →](#)

In entrambi gli orientamenti fu previsto un ciclo di *Open lecture*, testimonianze speciali da parte di voci autorevoli per lo più esterne all'accademia, provenienti dal mondo professionale e aziendale.

In continuità con la formazione curriculare e in collaborazione con la Facoltà di architettura, 20 anni fa nacque anche un master di primo livello (tutt'ora attivo) in *Exhibition design – Architettura dell'esposizione*  [11](#) erogato da Politecnico di Milano (POLI.design) e IDEA (Associazione Italiana Exhibition Designers) dove l'approccio architettonico e quello del design si interpolavano in funzione di progetti allestitivi di matrice per lo più culturale e museografica.

Sempre in quegli anni – nel 2004 – fu istituito un programma di dottorato interdipartimentale (Dipartimento INDACO e Dipartimento BEST) che durerà fino al 2011 quando si decise di accorpare o comunque ridurre il numero di dottorati. Il programma si intitolava *Design e tecnologie per la valorizzazione del patrimonio culturale* e fu grazie alla proficua collaborazione interdisciplinare e all'intelligenza relazionale di tre grandi figure politecniche: Fabrizio Schiaffonati, Cesare Stevan e Alberto Seassaro che la costituzione di un programma dottorale incardinato nel polo di Mantova (proposto e coordinato dallo stesso Fabrizio Schiaffonati) fu l'occasione per attivare un contesto geografico e culturale dove il territorio stesso faceva da ambiente di sperimentazione per sviluppare progetti ad alta complessità culturale. In quegli anni tante furono le ricerche dottorali applicate al territorio che contribuirono a consolidare l'identità del polo di Mantova come la sede politecnica vocata al patrimonio culturale. Si predisposero azioni e collaborazioni fruttuose con comunità, aziende e istituzioni locali volte a esplorare e *mettere a terra* progetti di attivazione, valorizzazione, comunicazione del territorio. Il corso di dottorato ebbe un ruolo centrale nella costruzione di un *ecosistema del Design dei Beni culturali* che si nutriva di una circolarità di azioni poi rivelatasi virtuosa e vantaggiosa per lo stesso territorio coinvolto. In questo caso la triangolazione tra le discipline dell'architettura, delle tecnologie applicate ai sistemi delle governance territoriali e la cultura del progetto *design driven* vocato all'innovazione dei prodotti e dei processi culturali, si è rivelata una sinergia vincente nello sviluppo di una branca del design che poi si è consolidata e ampliata nel tempo. Questi sono solo alcuni dei segnali della forte sensibilità dell'istituzione alla dimensione culturale del progetto per il

patrimonio culturale. Anche grazie alla lungimiranza e determinazione di una figura così visionaria, si struttura così – in quegli anni – un luogo di ricerca, didattica e progetto multidisciplinare; un luogo destinato all'osservazione, alla sperimentazione e alla progettazione che si dota di nuovi paradigmi per comprendere le dinamiche di costruzione del valore intorno al patrimonio culturale materiale e immateriale, da diversi punti di vista e verso nuove prospettive.

Come detto prima potremmo forse definirlo proprio un *ecosistema del Design dei Beni culturali*, un sistema cioè che ancora oggi si auto-alimenta con le multiverse strutture e occasioni di ricerca, didattica e progetto politecnico, ma anche capace di assorbire, trasformare e riversare all'esterno rinnovate forme di valore.

Cruciali furono le ricerche da lui intuite e coordinate sia per la varietà delle scale di intervento (cfr. il già citato *Museo Virtuale del Design* coordinato con G. Guidi o *E.CH.I Progetto di valorizzazione del patrimonio intangibile nel territorio alpino italo-svizzero* coordinato con R. Trocchianesi) che per approccio strategico-sistemico (cfr. i già citati progetti Prin). Innegabile riconoscere che ciò che prese corpo in quel periodo era una sorta di perlustrazione sistematica delle competenze (umanistiche e tecniche) e delle potenzialità progettuali relative al patrimonio culturale che oggi trova sede all'interno del progetto collettivo di costituzione di una rete nazionale e internazionale di applicazione del design dei beni culturali.

Il focus della ricerca, in quella fase iniziale, aveva trovato sintesi nell'idea che l'apporto che l'approccio *design driven* poteva offrire allo sviluppo del Design dei beni culturali era rappresentato dall'urgenza di riposizionare il valore dell'interdisciplinarietà al centro della cultura progettuale.

19.4 Conclusioni. Traiettorie, approdi e nuove prospettive

L'eredità che Seassaro ha lasciato per l'ambito di ricerca del design dei beni culturali è importante: non è solo scientifica o istituzionale, ma di continua ricerca e innovazione responsabile. Molte cose sono accadute: la ricerca europea si è posta come orizzonte di riferimento, le oppor-

12. Il progetto Design per
il cambiamento sistemico.
[Evento →](#)



tunità ed esperienze di progetto moltiplicate, le competenze dentro il dipartimento sono ampliate e trasversali, collegate alla linea strategica del Design per i sistemi della creatività e della cultura, per valorizzare la produzione e fruizione culturale in modo sostenibile e inclusivo [12 ↘](#). Ancora oggi, come lo stesso Seassaro indica:

L'interesse strategico che risiede nel design dei beni culturali va oltre il suo specifico ambito settoriale e disciplinare, caratterizzandosi anche per l'elevato livello di interdisciplinarietà, che lo pone come trasversale e complementare a tutta quella grande parte della cultura contemporanea che guarda al progetto. (Seassaro, 2013, p. 40)

La sua posizione sostiene una etica progettuale consapevole e tuttavia capace di cogliere le opportunità di un modello di valorizzazione e produzione della conoscenza che permea le estetiche e gli immaginari del quotidiano, in uno scenario di *Heritage continuum* (Lupo, 2021) fluido e stratificato tra reale e finzionale, che sembra presagire (e anche ammonire) i più recenti sviluppi tecnologici (metaversi, AI), e tuttavia offrire speranza progettuale:

La celebrazione prende il posto della 'memoria vigile', e il monumento diventa lo strumento per ossificarla in un simbolo, per farla diventare da materia viva, materia morta, congelata in un solo aspetto, quello del gesto retorico. Il progetto quindi, se non ci salva, ci consola. E se non ci offre la vita eterna, ci stimola ma anche ci consente tecnologicamente con l'iper-realtà a-cronologica e immateriale di avere virtualmente tutto ma 'per finta'. Di aggregare tutti i beni culturali in una infinita panoramica dove contemporaneamente ogni cosa di ogni tempo, esistente o immaginata, può essere colta nella finzione percettiva come nella fiction narrativa. Perché tutto è museabile e tutto è esibibile, allestibile e comunicabile in uno spettacolo mitologico totale. (Seassaro, 2013, p. 42)

Questa branca del design è diventata un lavoro corale: sono diversi, infatti, i testimoni che hanno permesso di far emergere l'importanza del patrimonio culturale come tema di progetto e – simmetricamen-

te – di porre con decisione il design come approccio per il patrimonio culturale stesso.

A distanza di 25 anni, è una disciplina sempre più consolidata a livello nazionale e internazionale, alimentata da partnership con altre università, con attori istituzionali, con interlocutori aziendali volti a proseguire il percorso verso l'innovazione e a rispondere in modo sempre più consapevole a canali di finanziamento dedicati. Un tracciato che segna l'evoluzione del design politecnico. Un tracciato che si sviluppa lungo tre direzioni 4 principali tutt'ora percorribili:

- la ricerca di *nuove questioni aperte per il design* – vero e proprio bisogno comune da parte della comunità scientifica – di esplorare e rintracciare obiettivi verso cui indirizzare lo studio in ambito culturale (anche e soprattutto a fronte delle trasformazioni tecnologiche, sociali ed economiche);
- la ricerca che indaga i *significati* che il *prodotto* del design può rappresentare all'interno del complesso sistema *multiscalare* del patrimonio culturale;
- la ricerca che indaga il *valore* che il *prodotto* di design manifesta all'interno dei processi di produzione, attivazione, valorizzazione, comunicazione e consumo culturale.

Nota 4.

La riflessione su queste tre direzioni di ricerca è stata innescata da un passaggio presente all'interno del saggio di Celaschi, Penati, Trocchianesi, (2016).

Autorialità

Il presente contributo è frutto di una riflessione congiunta da parte delle autrici. Nello specifico: Eleonora Lupo è autrice di *Introduzione*, *Il design dei beni culturali* e co-autrice delle *Conclusioni*; Raffaella Trocchianesi è autrice di *Il contesto istituzionale* e co-autrice delle *Conclusioni*.

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20. Ogni studente è a suo modo un Maestro

Paolo Tinelli

Architetto

Una delle cose che mi ha sempre stimolato e, di conseguenza, legato per quasi trent'anni ad Alberto Seassaro era il suo modo di trasmettere conoscenza, nell'insegnamento, agli studenti.

In oltre quarant'anni, Alberto ha saputo lasciare in eredità il senso profondo del design come disciplina del progetto che *chiama a correo* innumerevoli altre discipline in costante evoluzione.

I suoi corsi, prima alla Facoltà di Architettura e successivamente alla Facoltà del Design erano concentrati sull'educazione e sulla crescita di ogni persona, di ogni singolo studente, catturando e sviluppando la sua personale essenza, utilizzando metodi legati alla tradizione teorica e, allo stesso tempo, metodi basati sull'esperienza, con in sottofondo schemi e principi e in primo piano esempi, di ampia cultura, di citazioni e di metafore.

Nei suoi corsi, letteratura, filosofia, antropologia, storia, geografia, arti e lingue, promuovevano lo sviluppo del pensiero creativo improntato alla sapienza e alla qualità del buon progettare.

E anche questa finalità non era raggiunta utilizzando solo richiami bibliografici e realizzazioni esercitative fini a sé stesse.

Chiedeva agli studenti una maturità critica e il libro era uno strumento che, assieme a tanti altri, era destinato a far crescere la qualità delle conoscenze incorporate nei progetti il cui svolgimento doveva eccellere nel *concetto* oltre che nella qualità tecnica e realizzativa.

Il suo pensiero sulla didattica si è evoluto negli anni ma ha mantenuto alcune linee che mi permettono in tutta tranquillità di denominarlo come *il metodo Seassaro per l'insegnamento del design*. Un modo di insegnare che, soprattutto da studente, mi aveva molto colpito, trovandolo differente da tutti gli altri insegnamenti che allora frequentavo alla Facoltà di Architettura alla metà degli anni '80. Non posso dimenticare il seminario di *Cultura e progetto della luce* nel suo corso di *Tecnica ed economia della produzione edilizia* che si era subito palesato come un concentrato di saperi multidisciplinari ritenuti la base minima necessaria per progettare, e realizzare quanto progettato, utilizzando quel metodo del *learning by doing* che diverrà la caratteristica centrale degli insegnamenti della Facoltà del Design, dove *l'imparare facendo* si componeva proprio di insegnamenti teorici ed esperienze pratiche dirette.

Negli anni '80 i Corsi di Disegno industriale della Facoltà di Architettura erano pochissimi e, quelli che io avevo incontrato, erano impostati in modo del tutto differente. Alcuni svolti con semplici esercitazioni didattiche di piccola progettualità, come quelli svolti da Raffaella Crespi a cui premeva tantissimo la propria bibliografia. Quelli di Marco Zanuso erano invece importanti, complessi e sofisticati. Si diventava ottimi progettisti, sapientemente preparati tramite esercitazioni non banali sia di architettura che di design ma, come in alcuni corsi di *Progettazione e Composizione architettonica*, dovevi seguire il *verbo* e diventare un discepolo del docente. Achille Castiglioni con la sua figura non autoritaria, assolutamente semplice e diretta, era il professore dei *mille segreti* del buon progettare, una figura di grande esperienza con cui era piacevolissimo confrontarsi senza alcun timore. Corsi di Maestri importanti ma che a me erano sembrati finalizzati alla formazione di più o meno esperti *artigiani del design*.

Prima del seminario di Alberto Seassaro non avevo incontrato un corso dotato di quella sensibilità emotiva necessaria per far percepire il design come disciplina dotata di una *profondità culturale* necessaria a formare progettisti con caratteri e personalità autentiche, resilienti e capaci di affrontare le sfide con una propria integrità e, soprattutto,

con la capacità di guardare oltre l'esistente, alla ricerca di nuove idee e soluzioni, andando oltre il disegno e la modellazione di manufatti e prodotti.

Il corso di Alberto Seassaro affrontava un elemento fondamentale sia per l'architettura sia per il design quale la *luce* e, guardando oltre gli aspetti meramente tecnici, ne evidenziava gli alti contenuti simbolici e metaforici presenti nelle arti, nella filosofia, nella teologia per costruire un percorso di studi su un tema solo apparentemente *astratto*.

Il corso offriva esperienze dirette e trasversali utilizzando la luce per *parlare di prodotto* con Piero Castiglioni, della sua lampada Scintilla edita nel 1972 da Fontana Arte e ora icona del design minimalista. Fu presentata al seminario come «lampada da non guardare, abbagliante come la luce del sole» e qui lascio intuire il dibattito, il confronto e le metafore sulla *luce da non guardare*. Ma la luce era anche un modo per parlare di altissima tecnologia grazie agli interventi del Centro Elettrotecnico Sperimentale Italiano (C.E.S.I.) di Milano in Via Rubattino, dove le nuove tecnologie della fibra ottica, allora ancora sperimentali, potevano condurre la luce da una sorgente distante attraverso dei tubi, *come se fosse acqua*. E anche in questo caso lascio immaginare il dibattito generato dall'incontro delle questioni più tecnologiche con le visioni metaforiche attorno alla luce. La luce venne anche proposta come *ambiente*, come *modellatrice di luoghi* attraverso l'esperienza di Gabriele Amadori, impegnato scenografo che, assieme ad Alberto Seassaro, introdusse il termine *sinestesia* come capacità, più o meno volontaria, di coinvolgere diversi sensi nella percezione di un evento. Un termine per noi nuovo, su cui Alberto Seassaro aveva già lavorato negli anni '60 nella sua tesi di laurea, e che si rivelava assolutamente dirompente per chi si avviava alla progettazione.

Su questo concetto di sinestesia, Alberto Seassaro propose di progettare e realizzare un caleidoscopio come macchina per manipolare e modellare la luce. Oggetto straordinario per la didattica del design, capace di catalizzare visioni, idee e, se ben compreso, di cimentare lo studente su progetti di grande apertura culturale e di far emergere così l'anima e la personalità di chi stava progettando.

La seconda esercitazione era altrettanto sofisticata. Lo studente era chiamato a creare un *evento luminoso* nel tempo e nello spazio. Se la variabile del tempo poteva essere definita liberamente, lo spazio era

invece dato e doveva avere la forma di un cubo avente come modulo base il metro. Furono presentate opere davvero giganti, cubi oltre i due metri di lato i cui eventi riportavano dotte metafore e citazioni, spaziando dall'interpretazione con luce UV della *goccia* di Bruno Munari al design e ai colori della, allora, neonata Memphis, fino a repliche della natura con riproduzioni del fulmine e dell'aurora boreale.

Uno splendido e *luminoso* inizio per quello che divenne uno dei corsi più iconici dell'indirizzo di Laurea in *Disegno industriale* nel Corso di laurea di *Architettura* e, per qualche anno, nella Facoltà del Design del Politecnico di Milano. Fu un successo straordinario e una soddisfazione grandissima che Alberto Seassaro, con i suoi più profondi valori tipici di una generazione cresciuta nel confronto e nel contraddittorio, anche politico, ben assaporò.

Una didattica fortemente multidisciplinare dunque cresciuta nel tempo e finalizzata a dotare lo studente di tutte quelle conoscenze capaci di dare una solidissima e autonoma base culturale e soprattutto un proprio pensiero critico, non disgiunti da una capacità progettuale che non disdegnava la gestione dell'elemento tecnico.

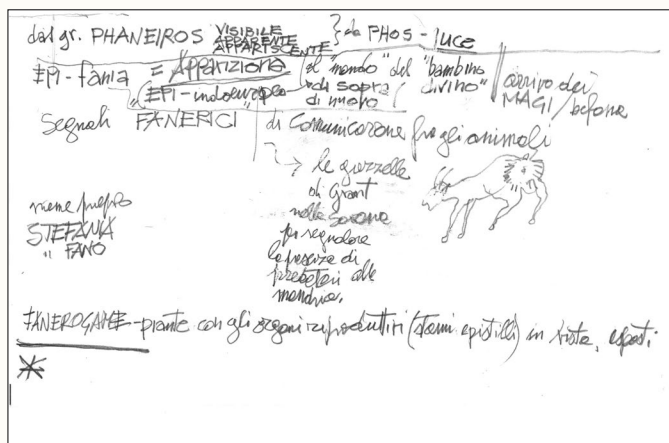
Il *learning by doing* ha trovato nella didattica di Alberto Seassaro il modo per formare designer con una propria identità ma anche con le competenze adeguate per lavorare in team in un clima di confronto continuo; valore che lasciava nello studente la sensazione di aver acquisito una maturità che andava oltre la mera esperienza necessaria per superare un esame.

Questa impostazione didattica, che ho sperimentato nel 1987 come studente e successivamente visto evolvere affiancando per molti anni Alberto Seassaro come assistente alla didattica, non ha mai cambiato nella sostanza i suoi contenuti, ma è stata oggetto di un costante lavoro di aggiustamento e integrazione, arricchita dalle sue ricerche sulla luce.

Uno degli elementi cardine di questa ricerca era costituito da un percorso etimologico che portava ad approfondire sempre più il significato più vero e profondo della parola *luce* e della costellazione di termini che rappresentano i fenomeni luminosi, andando a toccare aspetti scientifici, culturali e antropologici delle differenti civiltà umane.

Studi che Alberto Seassaro ha riepilogato e raccolto in due bellissimi strumenti che, insieme a Claudio Conio (mio collega nei lunghissimi anni

Figura 1.
Appunti per il Corso di Lighting design.



1. Radici etimologiche
vocaboli della luce.
[Documento →](#)



2. Radici etimologiche
vocaboli della luce.
[Documento →](#)



di assistenza), abbiamo iconicamente chiamato *la piramide* e i *papiri*. La *piramide* [1](#) è una straordinaria, geometrica, sintesi di

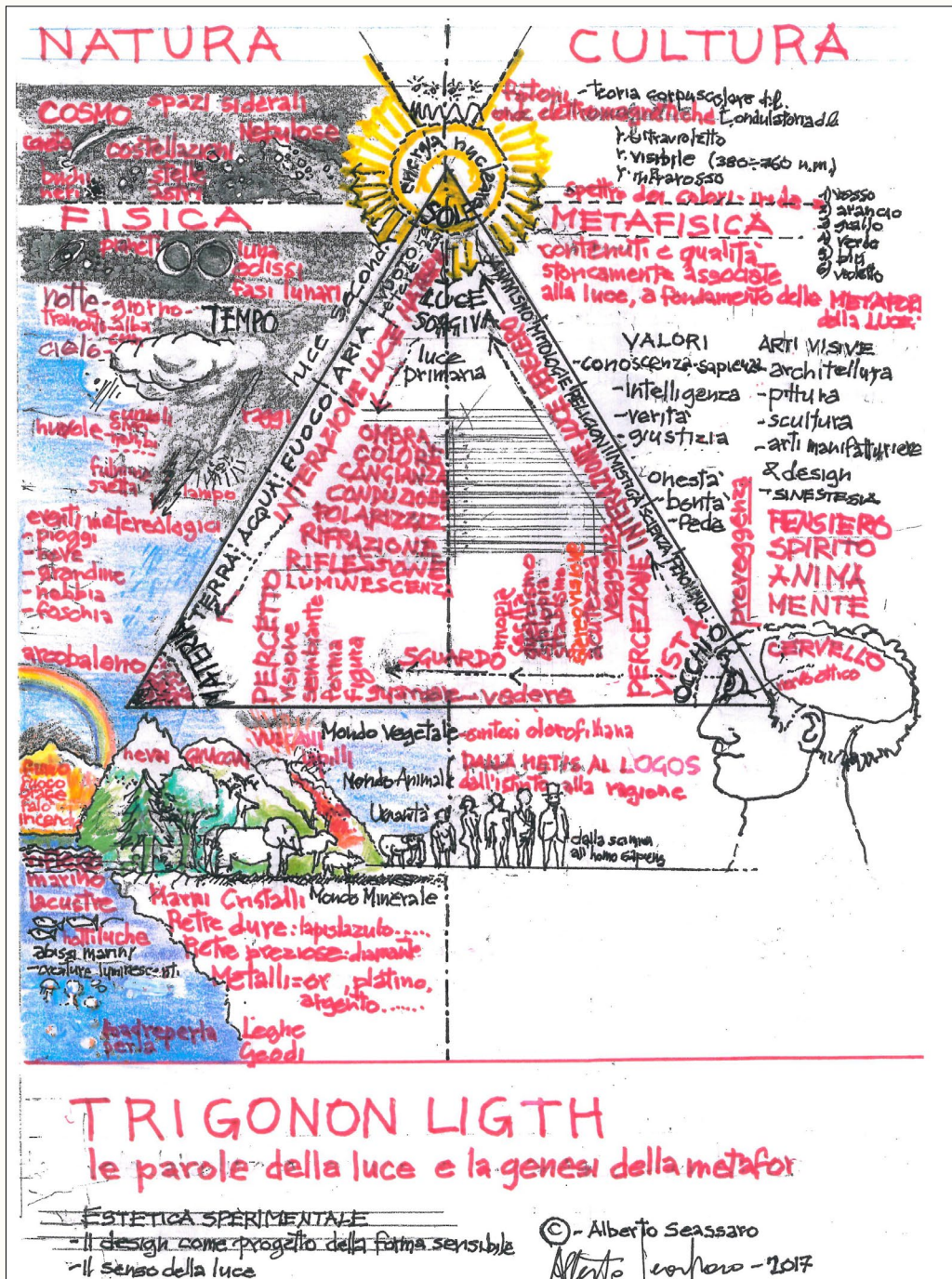
tutto lo scibile che ruota attorno alla luce e che Alberto Seassaro ha concentrato in una bellissima opera grafica qui sotto riprodotta.

Uno specchietto piccolo minuto ma denso di segni e di scritti distribuiti in un circuito logico e totalmente descrittivo di questa energia che permette agli esseri viventi di vedere. I *papiri* [1](#) [2](#),

diagrammi di studio disegnati su lunghe strisce di fogli tra loro incollati dove Alberto Seassaro, in un enorme domino, elenca significati e considerazioni storiche e antropologiche delle varie civiltà sulla luce. Otto fogli di varie lunghezze che hanno probabilmente generato la *Piramide*.

Un ultimo pensiero sulla figura di Alberto Seassaro, come docente e come Preside. Sostenendo con convinzione la crescita morale ed educativa degli studenti, trasmetteva loro anche la conoscenza degli aspetti politici che accompagnano l'evoluzione dell'università. Memorabile fu la lezione in cui spiegò la riforma universitaria 3+2 - con l'introduzione del primo livello di Laurea triennale e del secondo livello di Laurea specialistica o magistrale, stabiliti dal DM 509/99 e poi modificati dal DM 270/04.

Interrompendo la lezione, tenne un lungo discorso che partiva dall'Articolo 33 della Costituzione e illustrava con cura agli studenti i dettagli di quella riforma, dimostrando grande rispetto e considerazione nei loro confronti, perché fossero consapevoli, anche sul piano politico, delle trasformazioni del luogo in cui si stavano formando e ne fossero protagonisti, per diventare, ciascuno a suo modo, giovani Maestri del design [3](#).



3. Progetto non finito del Manifesto per il Corso di Culture della luce.

[Documento →](#)

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PhD in Industrial Design and Multimedia Communication and full professor of Design at Politecnico di Milano. She teaches in the MScs in *Design for the Fashion System*, *Product Service System Design* and *Management Engineering* at Politecnico and in several international programs. She is Deputy Director of the Department of Design and Scientific Director of the Gianfranco Ferré Research Centre. She coordinates the joint program with the Fashion Institute of Technology, New York. She is cofounder of *Fashion in Process Lab* within the Department of Design. Her research focuses on creative processes, and the role of design in guiding digital transformation in CCIs, as a key driver towards more sustainable and equitable paradigms. In 2011 she was awarded with the ADI *Compasso d'Oro* Prize for Research.

PhD in Disegno Industriale e Comunicazione Multimediale e professoressa ordinaria di Design presso il Politecnico di Milano. Insegna nei Corsi di Laurea Magistrale in *Design for the Fashion System*, *Product Service System Design* e Ingegneria Gestionale presso il Politecnico,

oltre che in diversi programmi internazionali. È Vicedirettrice del Dipartimento di Design e Direttrice Scientifica del Centro di Ricerca Gianfranco Ferré. Coordina il programma congiunto con il Fashion Institute of Technology di New York. È cofondatrice del *Fashion in Process Lab* all'interno del Dipartimento di Design. La sua ricerca si concentra sui processi creativi e sul ruolo del design nell'orientare la trasformazione digitale nelle industrie culturali e creative (CCIs), come elemento chiave per paradigmi più sostenibili ed equi. Nel 2011 ha ricevuto il Premio Compasso d'Oro ADI per la Ricerca.

Luigi Bistagnino

Architect and designer. He promotes the zero-waste transformation of agri-food and industrial systems. Former Full Professor of Design at Politecnico di Torino, he founded the Bachelor's Degree in Design (1996); the Systemic Design research group; the Master's Degree in Systemic Design (2002). Coordinator of the Doctoral Board in Design (1996–2015). He teaches courses at the University of Lyon, ECAM (France), UEMG (Brazil). Co-founder of the Systemic Design Research and Education Center, Politecnico di Torino. He sits on the scientific committee of Deloitte & Touche's Food & Agriculture research and on the committee of the UNISG Sustainability Laboratory, Pollenzo. Research coordinator, among his publications: *microMACRO*, the complex of systemic micro-relations generates the new economic-productive model (2016).

Architetto e designer. Promuove la trasformazione a zero rifiuti dei sistemi agroalimentari e industriali. Già Professore Ordinario di Design al Politecnico di Torino, fonda il Corso di Laurea in Design (1996); il gruppo di ricerca Design Sistemico; la Laurea Magistrale in Design Sistemico (2002). Coordinatore del Collegio di dottorato in Design (1996–2015). Tiene corsi presso l'Università di Lione, ECAM (Francia), UEMG (Brasile). Cofondatore del Systemic Design Research and Education Center, Politecnico di Torino. È nel comitato scientifico della ricerca Food&Agricoltura di Deloitte&Touche e nel comitato del Laboratorio Sostenibilità UNISG, Pollenzo. Coordinatore di ricerche, tra le sue pubblicazioni: *microMACRO*, il complesso delle micro relazioni sistemiche genera il nuovo modello economico-produttivo (2016).

Giampiero Bosoni

Full Professor of Interior Architecture and Exhibition Design. An architect, he collaborated with Figini and Pollini, Gregotti, and Mari, with whom he developed an interest in the theory and history of architecture and design. He has written and edited about 20 books and published more than 300 articles in international journals. In 1997 he founded the Permanent Collection of the Triennale Design Museum in Milan. In 2009 MoMA in New York commissioned him the book *Italian Design* dedicated to the Italian section of their collection. President (2018–21) of the Italian Association of Design Historians and co-editor of the AIS/design Journal (2022–2025). Member of the Scientific Committee of the Fondazione Alinari (2008) and of the Centro Ricerche Ferré (2021), and board member of the Fondazione CASVA (2022).

Professore Ordinario di Architettura di interni e allestimento. Architetto, ha collaborato con Figini e Pollini, Gregotti e Mari, con i quali ha sviluppato l'interesse per la teoria e la storia dell'architettura e del design. Ha scritto e curato circa 20 libri e pubblicato più di 300 articoli in riviste internazionali. Nel 1997 ha dato vita alla Collezione Permanente del Museo del Design Triennale di Milano. Nel 2009 il MoMA di NY lo incarica del libro *Italian Design* dedicato alla sezione italiana della loro collezione. Presidente (2018–21) dell'Associazione Italiana Storici del Design e co-direttore della rivista AIS/design Journal (2022–2025). Membro del Comitato Scientifico della Fondazione Alinari (2008) e del Centro Ricerche Ferré (2021) e consigliere d'amministrazione della Fondazione CASVA (2022).

Bianca Bottero

Former Full Professor of Architectural Technology, she taught Environmental Design at the Second Faculty of Architecture at Politecnico di Milano. She carried out research on urban design, sustainability, and social housing with the ABITA Laboratory, which she directed. In 1987, together with Spagnoli and others, she created the international yearbook *Housing*, which she directed until 2000. With the *Associazione Alfabeti*, she teaches Italian to non-EU women in the San Siro neighborhood. Among her writings and edited volumes: *Progetto e gestione dello spazio nelle società complesse* (1984); *Progetto o metodo. Var-*

iazioni sul tema della Salina di C. N. Ledoux (1988); *Decostruzione in architettura e in filosofia* [Deconstruction in Architecture and in Philosophy] (1991; 2002); *Progettare e costruire nella complessità. Lezioni di bioarchitettura* (1993); with Di Salvo and Faré, *Architetture del desiderio* (2011). Recent writings: *Città vs cittadini? No grazie* (2023); *Città femminili? Ahimè, non ancora* (2024); *L'urbanistica è quantistica* (2025).

Già Professore Ordinario di Tecnologia dell'architettura, ha insegnato Progettazione ambientale presso la II Facoltà di Architettura del Politecnico di Milano. Ha svolto ricerche sulla progettazione urbana, la sostenibilità e l'abitazione sociale col Laboratorio ABITA da lei diretto. Nel 1987 ha creato con Spagnoli e altri l'annuario internazionale *Housing* diretto fino al 2000. Con l'Associazione Alfabeti, insegna italiano alle donne extracomunitarie del quartiere San Siro. Tra i suoi scritti e curatele: *Progetto e gestione dello spazio nelle società complesse* (1984); *Progetto o metodo. Variazioni sul tema della Salina di C. N. Ledoux* (1988); *Decostruzione in architettura e in filosofia* (1991; 2002); *Progettare e costruire nella complessità. Lezioni di bioarchitettura* (1993); con Di Salvo e Faré, *Architetture del desiderio* (2011). Scritti recenti: *Città vs cittadini? No grazie* (2023); *Città femminili? Ahimè, non ancora* (2024); *L'urbanistica è quantistica* (2025).

Flaviano Celaschi

PhD, Full Professor of Design, University of Bologna. He works on advanced design and innovation driven by project cultures. He taught at Politecnico di Milano (1995–2004 and 2009–2012); at Politecnico di Torino (2004–2009); at the University of Bologna (since 2012). He co-founded with Alberto Seassaro the first Italian Department of Design at Politecnico di Milano and the university consortium POLI.Design. He founded and directed the *Centro di Ricerca per le Imprese Culturali e Creative* at the University of Bologna; the Design School of UNISINOS in Porto Alegre, RGS, Brazil; he has taught and taken part in conferences and workshops worldwide. Dean of Italian professors of Design; scientific lead of Spoke 1 of the national research PNRR PE11 – *Made in Italy Circolare e Sostenibile*.

PhD, Professore Ordinario di Design, Università di Bologna. Si occupa di advanced design e innovazione guidata dalle culture del progetto. Ha insegnato al Politecnico di Milano (1995-2004 e 2009-2012); al Politecnico di Torino (2004-2009); all'Università di Bologna (dal 2012). Ha co-fondato con Alberto Seassaro il primo Dipartimento di Design italiano presso il Politecnico di Milano e il Consorzio universitario POLI.Design. Ha fondato e diretto il *Centro di Ricerca per le imprese Culturali e Creative* presso l'Università di Bologna; la Scuola di Design di UNISINOS a Porto Alegre in RGS Brasile; ha insegnato e partecipato a convegni e workshop in tutto il mondo. Decano dei professori italiani di Design; responsabile scientifico dello spoke 1 della Ricerca Nazionale PNRR PE11 – *Made in Italy Circolare e Sostenibile*.

Luisa Collina

PhD, Full Professor of Design at Politecnico di Milano, she works on service design, interior design, and strategic design. Since 2000 she has held various roles within the Design System at Politecnico di Milano: Head of International Relations of the School of Design (2000–2015); Coordinator of the Master's in *Product-Service System Design* (2005–2015); Dean of the School of Design (2016–2021); and Coordinator of the *Landscape, Environments, and Mobility Design* Section of the Department of Design (2023–present). From 2013 to 2019 she served as President of the international association Cumulus, of which she is currently Honorary President. Since January 2024 she has been Vice President of Fondazione Politecnico di Milano.

Dottore di ricerca, Professore Ordinario di Design al Politecnico di Milano, si interessa di design dei servizi, interni e design strategico. A partire dal 2000 assume diversi ruoli all'interno del Sistema Design del Politecnico di Milano: è stata responsabile delle relazioni internazionali della Scuola di Design (dal 2000 al 2015); coordinatrice del Master in Product-Service System Design (dal 2005 al 2015); Preside della Scuola di Design (dal 2016 al 2021) e coordinatrice della Sezione *Design del paesaggio, degli ambienti e della mobilità* del Dipartimento di Design (dal 2023 ad oggi). Dal 2013 al 2019 è stata Presidente dell'associazione internazionale Cumulus, di cui è attualmente Presidente Onorario. Da gennaio 2024 è Vicepresidente della Fondazione Politecnico di Milano.

Giancarlo Consonni

Poet, painter, urban planner, and historian of architecture and the city. He is Professor Emeritus of Urban Planning at Politecnico di Milano. He directs the Archivio Piero Bottoni. His research ranges from the formation processes of the contemporary metropolis to architectural and urban culture, the historical-anthropological characteristics of spatiality, and urban design. His latest book is *Non si salva il pianeta se non si salvano le città* (Quodlibet, 2024). He has published seven poetry collections: with Scheiwiller, *Viridarium* (1987) and *In breve volo* (1994); with Einaudi, *Vûs* (1997), *Lui* (2003), *Filovia* (2016), *Pinoli* (2021), and *Il conforto dell'ombra* (2025). His pictorial work is partly gathered in fourteen small volumes published by La Vita Felice.

Poeta, pittore, urbanista e storico dell'architettura e della città. È Professore Emerito di Urbanistica del Politecnico di Milano. Dirige l'Archivio Piero Bottoni. Le sue ricerche spaziano dai processi di formazione della metropoli contemporanea alla cultura architettonica e urbanistica, ai caratteri storico-antropologici della spazialità, al disegno urbano. Il suo ultimo libro si intitola *Non si salva il pianeta se non si salvano le città* (Quodlibet, 2024). Ha pubblicato 7 raccolte di poesia: con l'editore Scheiwiller, *Viridarium* (1987) e *In breve volo* (1994); con l'editore Einaudi, *Vûs* (1997), *Lui* (2003), *Filovia* (2016), *Pinoli* (2021) e *Il conforto dell'ombra* (2025). La sua opera pittorica è in parte raccolta in 14 volumetti editi da La Vita Felice.

Luciano Crespi

Recognized by the international scholarly community as the leading figure of an *allestitivo* [exhibition-based] design approach he terms *design del non-finito* [design of the unfinished], aimed at the regeneration of *avanzi* [remnants]. Among his publications on the subject: *Stop City Now: progetti di architettura dal finito al non-finito* (2025); *Regeneration of Abandoned Spaces: A New Design Approach* (2024); *Design del non-finito. L'interior design nella rigenerazione degli 'avanzi'* (2023); *Manifesto del design del non-finito* (2018). He edited *La progettazione tecnologica* (1987) and, with L. Tedeschi and A. L. Viati, *Marco Zanuso. Architettura e design* (2020). He was Associate Professor of *Cultura tecnologica della progettazione* [technological culture of design] and

later Full Professor of Design at Politecnico di Milano, among the founders and Chair of the Bachelor's Degree Program in Interior Design.

Riconosciuto dalla comunità scientifica internazionale come caposcuola di un approccio progettuale *allestitivo* che definisce design del non-finito, finalizzato alla rigenerazione degli *'avanzi'* Tra le pubblicazioni sull'argomento: *Stop City Now: progetti di architettura dal finito al non-finito* (2025); *Regeneration of Abandoned Spaces: A New Design Approach* (2024); *Design del non-finito. L'interior design nella rigenerazione degli 'avanzi'* (2023); *Manifesto del design del non-finito* (2018). Ha curato *La progettazione tecnologica* (1987) e, con L. Tedeschi e A. L. Viati, *Marco Zanuso. Architettura e design*, (2020). È stato Associato di Cultura tecnologica della progettazione e poi Ordinario di Design al Politecnico di Milano, tra i fondatori e Presidente del corso di laurea in Design degli interni.

Alessandro Deserti

Full Professor at Politecnico di Milano, where he serves as Director of the Department of Design until 2025. His research focuses on design-enabled innovation processes, examining the methods and tools that support them. In recent years, he has explored how organizations can initiate or evolve these processes in emerging fields, integrating them with systemic and organizational transformations to address technological, environmental, and socio-economic challenges. He has extensive experience in international research collaborations, particularly within European research and innovation projects.

Professore Ordinario al Politecnico di Milano, dove ricopre il ruolo di Direttore del Dipartimento di Design fino al 2025. La sua attività di ricerca è focalizzata sui processi di innovazione abilitati dal design, con particolare attenzione ai metodi e agli strumenti che li supportano. Negli ultimi anni ha approfondito come le organizzazioni possano avviare o sviluppare tali processi in ambiti emergenti, integrandoli con trasformazioni sistemiche e organizzative per affrontare sfide tecnologiche, ambientali e socio-economiche. Vanta una lunga esperienza in collaborazioni di ricerca internazionali, con particolare riferimento ai progetti europei di ricerca e innovazione.

Emilio Faroldi

Architect, PhD, Full Professor at Politecnico di Milano, he is Deputy Rector and the Rector's Delegate for the Development and Valorization of Spaces. He publishes on architectural and technological design; takes part in design competitions, receiving prizes and honorable mentions; and has built works in Italy and abroad, some published in leading journals. Former Editor in Chief of *TECHNE_Journal of Technology for Architecture and Environment*, he is Director of the Master in Sport Design and Management and teaches the doctoral course *Italian Architecture and Construction from the Post-War period to nowadays. Dialogues between Inheritance and project*. Professor of the International Academy of Architecture, he is a member of the Scientific Committee of the *Centro Studi e Archivio della Comunicazione* [Center for the Study and Archive of Communication] in Parma.

Architetto, PhD, Professore Ordinario al Politecnico di Milano, è Prorettore Vicario e Delegato del Rettore allo Sviluppo e alla valorizzazione degli spazi. Pubblica sui temi della progettazione architettonica e tecnologica; partecipa a concorsi di progettazione ricevendo premi e menzioni; realizza opere in Italia e all'estero, alcune pubblicate nelle principali riviste di settore. Già Editor in Chief della rivista *TECHNE_Journal of Technology for Architecture and Environment*, è Direttore del Master in Sport Design and Management e titolare del Corso di Dottorato *Italian Architecture and Construction from the Post-War period to nowadays. Dialogues between Inheritance and project*. Professore della International Academy of Architecture è Membro del Comitato Scientifico del *Centro Studi e Archivio della Comunicazione* di Parma.

Beppe Finessi

Architect, PhD. A pupil of Corrado Levi, he carries out teaching (Associate Professor at the School of Design, Politecnico di Milano), critical work (editor at the magazine *Abitare* during Italo Lupi's tenure), and research (he has curated exhibitions and publications on several great masters of Italian design, such as Achille and Pier Giacomo Castiglioni, Vico Magistretti, Angelo Mangiarotti, Pio Manzù, Alessandro Mendini, Bruno Munari). In 2010 he founded and directs *Inventario*, with which

he won the ADI Compasso d'Oro (2014), while other publications of his received two Honorable Mentions (2016). He curated *Il Design Italiano oltre le crisi*, the seventh edition of the Triennale Design Museum (2014), and *Il cucchiaino e la città*, the inaugural and permanent exhibition of the ADI Design Museum (2021).

Architetto, PhD. Allievo di Corrado Levi, svolge attività didattica (Professore Associato alla Scuola del Design del Politecnico di Milano), critica (redattore della rivista *Abitare* durante la direzione di Italo Lupi) e di ricerca (ha curato mostre e pubblicazioni su alcuni grandi maestri del design italiano, come Achille e Pier Giacomo Castiglioni, Vico Magistretti, Angelo Mangiarotti, Pio Manzù, Alessandro Mendini, Bruno Munari). Nel 2010 fonda e dirige *Inventario*, con cui vince il Compasso d'Oro ADI (2014), mentre per altre sue pubblicazioni ha ricevuto due Menzioni d'onore (2016). Ha curato *Il Design Italiano oltre le crisi*, settima edizione del Triennale Design Museum (2014), e *Il cucchiaino e la città*, esposizione inaugurale e permanente dell'ADI Design Museum (2021).

Ugo La Pietra

He lives and works in Milan. He has described himself as a *researcher* of visual arts and communication. He has presented his research through many exhibitions both in Italy and abroad. He has curated a number of exhibitions at the Triennale di Milano, the Venice Biennale, the Museum of Contemporary Art in Lyon, the FRAC Museum in Orléans, the Ceramics Museum in Faenza, and the Ragghianti Foundation in Lucca. He was awarded the Compasso d'Oro for The Research in 1979 and Compasso d'Oro for his Career in 2016. His research experience in art, architecture and design led him to develop such themes as *La casa telematica* (MoMA, New York, 1972 - Fiera di Milano, 1983), *Rapporto tra Spazio reale e Spazio virtuale* (Triennale di Milano, 1979, 1992), *La casa neo-eclettica* (Abitare il Tempo, 1990), *Cultura Balneare* (Centro Culturale Cattolica, 1985/95).

Viive e lavora a Milano. Si è sempre dichiarato *ricercatore* nelle arti visive e nella comunicazione. Ha comunicato le sue ricerche attraverso mostre in Italia e all'estero. Ha curato diverse esposizioni alla Triennale

di Milano, Biennale di Venezia, Museo d'Arte Contemporanea di Lione, Museo FRAC di Orléans, Museo delle Ceramiche di Faenza, Fondazione Ragghianti di Lucca. Ha vinto il Compasso d'Oro per la Ricerca nel 1979 e il Compasso d'Oro per la Carriera nel 2016. Le sue esperienze di ricerca nell'arte, nell'architettura e nel design lo hanno portato a sviluppare temi come *La casa telematica* (MoMA di New York, 1972 – Fiera di Milano, 1983), *Rapporto tra Spazio reale e Spazio virtuale* (Triennale di Milano 1979, 1992), *La casa neoeclettica* (Abitare il Tempo, 1990), *Cultura Balneare* (Centro Culturale Cattolica, 1985/95).

Eleonora Lupo

Associate Professor at the Politecnico di Milano, with a PhD in Industrial Design and Multimedia Communication. Her main research interests concern product and process design cultures, Design for the Cultural Heritage system, and cultures of design research and scientific publishing, dealing with a pluriversal approach for decentring design knowledge and narratives. She is vice president of SID Società Italiana del design, a member of the Board of the PhD Program in Design at Politecnico di Milano, and of the Collegium of Reviewers of The Design Journal.

Professoressa associata al Politecnico di Milano, PhD in Disegno industriale e comunicazione multimediale. I suoi principali interessi di ricerca si rivolgono alle culture del design di prodotto e di processo, al design per il patrimonio culturale e alle culture della ricerca e pubblicazione scientifica, tramite un approccio pluriverso per decentrare la conoscenza e narrazione del design. È vicepresidente della SID Società Italiana del design, membro del collegio di Dottorato in Design del Politecnico di Milano e del Collegium of Reviewers di The Design Journal.

Antonella Penati

PhD, Full Professor of Design at Politecnico di Milano. She served as President of the Bachelor's Degree in Industrial Design (2004-2010) and as Deputy Dean of the Faculty of Design (2002-2010) under Dean Alberto Seassaro. From 2019 to 2025 she has been Coordinator of the Design and Cultures Section of the Department of Design. Main research areas: the nature of design knowledge and modes of

knowledge transmission in education; design culture as a driver of socio-technical innovation dynamics (*Mappe dell'innovazione. Il cambiamento tra tecnica economia e società*, 1999) [Maps of Innovation: Change among Technology, Economy, and Society]. On the nature of the socio-technical object she has recently focused on pharmaceuticals (*In-Home Medication. Integrating Multidisciplinary Perspectives in Design-Driven Pharma Practices*, 2024).

Dottore di Ricerca, è Professore Ordinario di Design al Politecnico di Milano. Ha rivestito il ruolo di Presidente del Corso di Laurea in Disegno industriale (2004-2010); di Preside Vicario della Facoltà del Design (2002-2010) con Preside Alberto Seassaro. Dal 2019 al 2025 è Coordinatrice della Sezione Design e Culture del Dipartimento di Design.

Principali ambiti di ricerca: la natura dei saperi progettuali e le modalità di trasmissione di conoscenza in ambito formativo; la cultura del design come motore di dinamiche di innovazione socio-tecnica (*Mappe dell'innovazione. Il cambiamento tra tecnica economia e società*, 1999). Sulla natura dell'oggetto socio-tecnico ha di recente focalizzato l'attenzione sui farmaci (*In-Home Medication. Integrating Multidisciplinary Perspectives in Design-Driven Pharma Practices*, 2024).

Agnese Rebaglio

Designer and PhD, Associate Professor at the Design Department of Politecnico di Milano. Her research focuses on the role of design in innovation processes related to interiors, with an emphasis on their cultural significance and, in particular, urban spaces, from a perspective of sustainability and inclusion. She is scientific director of the Specializing Master *Design for Public Spaces* provided by POLI.design. She has developed research in the field of: design for urban social inclusion; processes of urban regeneration; energy sustainability promoted by design; circular economy for new production chains. Promoter, for the Interior Design Degree Course, of GIDE (Group for International Design Education), a network of European design schools that collaborates in educational programs.

Designer e PhD, professoressa associata di Design presso il Dipartimento di Design del Politecnico di Milano. La sua attività di ricerca si

concentra sul ruolo del design nei processi di innovazione degli interni, con riferimento alla loro portata culturale e in particolare degli spazi urbani, in una prospettiva di sostenibilità e inclusione. È direttrice scientifica del Master di Specializzazione in *Design for Public Spaces* offerto da POLI.design. Ha sviluppato ricerche nei seguenti ambiti: design per l'inclusione sociale urbana; processi di rigenerazione urbana; sostenibilità energetica promossa dal design; economia circolare per nuove filiere produttive. Promotrice, per il Corso di Laurea in Interior Design, di GIDE (*Group for International Design Education*), una rete di scuole di design europee che collaborano in programmi educativi.

Fabrizio Schiaffonati

Architect. Lecturer at Politecnico di Milano from 1967 to 2019. Full Professor in Architectural Technology from 1980 to 2012. Visiting professor at the Accademia di Architettura di Mendrisio (2001-2005) and at Università Bocconi, Milan (2006). At Politecnico di Milano he directed the *Istituto di Tecnologia*; the *Dipartimento di Programmazione Progettazione e Produzione edilizia*; and the *Dipartimento di Scienza e tecnologie dell'ambiente costruito*. He promoted and coordinated the PhD programmes in *Innovazione tecnica e progetto nell'architettura* and *Design e tecnologie per la valorizzazione dei beni culturali*. In 2006 he was among the founders of the *Società italiana della Tecnologia dell'architettura*. His main projects are published in *Calamida*, *Lucchini*, *Schiaffonati Architetti* and in *Tecnologia Architettura Territorio*.

Achitetto. Docente al Politecnico di Milano dal 1967 al 2019. Professore Ordinario in Tecnologia dell'architettura dal 1980 al 2012. Visiting professor all'Accademia di Architettura di Mendrisio dal 2001 al 2005 e all'Università Bocconi di Milano nel 2006. Al Politecnico di Milano ha diretto l'Istituto di Tecnologia; il Dipartimento di Programmazione Progettazione e Produzione edilizia e il Dipartimento di Scienza e tecnologie dell'ambiente costruito. Ha promosso e coordinato i Dottorati di ricerca in Innovazione tecnica e progetto nell'architettura e Design e tecnologie per la valorizzazione dei beni culturali. Nel 2006 è tra i fondatori della Società italiana della Tecnologia dell'architettura. I principali progetti sono pubblicati in *Calamida*, *Lucchini*, *Schiaffonati Architetti* e in *Tecnologia Architettura Territorio*.

Paolo Tinelli

Milanese, architect. He was trained at the *Artistico di Via Hayech* thanks to the teaching of Mauro Staccioli for sculpture, Carlo Cavallotti for architecture, and Anna Finocchi for Art History. He graduated in Architecture at Politecnico di Milano with Enrico Mantero in 1989. He learned the multimedia approach of Studio Azzurro from Paolo Rosa and Leonardo Sangiorgi, and approached museography thanks to the Museo Storico Etnografico della Bassa Val Sesia created by his father. He designs with Ettore Sottsass and collaborates with Patrice Martinet in theatre. Alberto Seassaro, founder and Dean of the Faculty of Industrial Design at Politecnico di Milano, involved him in a teaching collaboration that lasted more than twenty-seven years. In his professional practice, he contaminates architectural culture with constant research in the world of art and design.

Milanese, architetto. Si è formato all'Artistico di Via Hayech grazie agli insegnamenti di Mauro Staccioli per la scultura, Carlo Cavallotti per l'architettura e Anna Finocchi per la Storia dell'Arte. Si laurea in Architettura al Politecnico di Milano con Enrico Mantero nel 1989. Comprende, da Paolo Rosa e Leonardo Sangiorgi, il multimediale di Studio Azzurro e si avvicina alla Museografia grazie al Museo Storico Etnografico della Bassa Val Sesia creato dal padre. Disegna con Ettore Sottsass e collabora con Patrice Martinet nel teatro. Alberto Seassaro, fondatore e Preside della Facoltà di Disegno industriale del Politecnico, lo coinvolge in una collaborazione didattica durata oltre ventisette anni. Nella professione, contamina la cultura architettonica con la costante ricerca nel mondo dell'arte e del design.

Maria Cristina Tonelli

She graduated in Florence in Modern Letters with an art-historical focus and was a Postgraduate Fellow and University Researcher at the Scuola Normale Superiore in Pisa; after moving to the Faculty of Architecture in Florence she became Associate Professor and subsequently Full Professor of Industrial Design at Politecnico di Milano. Her research focuses on the history of industrial design and fashion: specifically, on the historical-critical analysis of design and product in relation to their cultural, technological, economic, and production fabric. Among her

most recent publications are texts on innovation in eighteenth-century England, on Giovanni Klaus Koenig, on Alberto Rosselli and *Stile Industria*, on Gianfranco Gualtierotti, as well as several essays on Tuscan products.

Laureata a Firenze in Lettere moderne, con indirizzo storico-artistico, è stata Perfezionanda e Ricercatore universitario presso la SNS di Pisa; trasferendosi alla Facoltà di Architettura di Firenze è diventata Professore Associato e in seguito Professore Ordinario di Disegno industriale presso il Politecnico di Milano.

La sua attività di ricerca verte sulla storia dell'industrial design e della moda: in specifico, sull'analisi storico-critica del progetto e del prodotto in rapporto al loro tessuto culturale, tecnologico, economico e produttivo. Delle sue ultime pubblicazioni si segnalano i testi sull'innovazione nell'Inghilterra del Settecento, su Giovanni Klaus Koenig, su Alberto Rosselli e *Stile Industria*, su Gianfranco Gualtierotti, nonché diversi saggi sul prodotto toscano.

Raffaella Trocchianesi

Architect and Associate Professor at the Department of Design, Politecnico di Milano, she teaches Interior Design Studio and Exhibit Design Studio at the School of Design. Director of the Specializing Master's IDEA_Exhibition Design, and of the Specialization Course Design and Digital Technologies for the Intangible Heritage, she mainly deals with Design for Cultural Heritage in terms of museography and exhibition design, communication and enhancement of local areas, new models and narratives of cultural experiences, and the relationship between design, Humanities and arts. She is currently scientific lead on the project Sound Design & Cultural Heritage.

Architetto e Professore associato presso il dipartimento di Design del Politecnico di Milano. Insegna *Design degli Interni* e *Exhibition Design* presso la Scuola del Design. È direttore del Master *IDEA-Exhibition Design* e del corso di specializzazione *Design e Tecnologie Digitali per il Patrimonio Culturale Intangibile*. Svolge attività didattica, progettuale e di ricerca prevalentemente nell'ambito del design per la valorizzazione dei beni culturali in termini di allestimento, museografia, nuovi modelli

di fruizione, narrazione e linguaggi per la cultura, relazione tra design Humanities e arti. È responsabile scientifico del progetto di ricerca *Sound Design and Cultural Heritage*.

This volume is part of *Design Philology* editorial project aimed at enhancing the history of design at Politecnico di Milano and, in particular, inaugurates the series *The Masters*, dedicated to the figures whose thought has fueled the cultural pluralism that is the hallmark of the entire institutional project. The remembrance of the Masters begins with Alberto Seassaro, the demiurge, a Dean capable of giving *Design* a home by conceiving and building the first Italian Faculty at Politecnico di Milano and guiding it to the scope we know today: that of a major international system for education and research. A designing intelligence, he is owed the construction of the cultural community of the *Italian Design System*. It was no simple challenge, because in the case of design we are dealing not only with a discipline worthy of teaching and autonomous research paths, but also with an emergent phenomenon of Italian culture whose outcomes are celebrated as the splendors of an imaginative synthesis that has become, beyond our country as well, a model of invention. In the background of this quasi-biographical account lie the intertwinings with the worlds of art, architecture, and design, and the cultural imprint toward experimentation that Alberto Seassaro received during his formative years at Politecnico di Milano.