

13. Alberto Seassaro and the Construction of the Italian Academic Design Network

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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!*