

16. Teaching, According to Alberto Seassaro

Luisa Collina

Department of Design, Politecnico di Milano

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



the School's work known to the city and of fueling debate on design [23](#).

2. *Milano Design Open Lectures 2002*. Lezioni di design aperte alla città, promosse dai Laboratori di Laurea della Facoltà del Design. [Event](#)→

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.

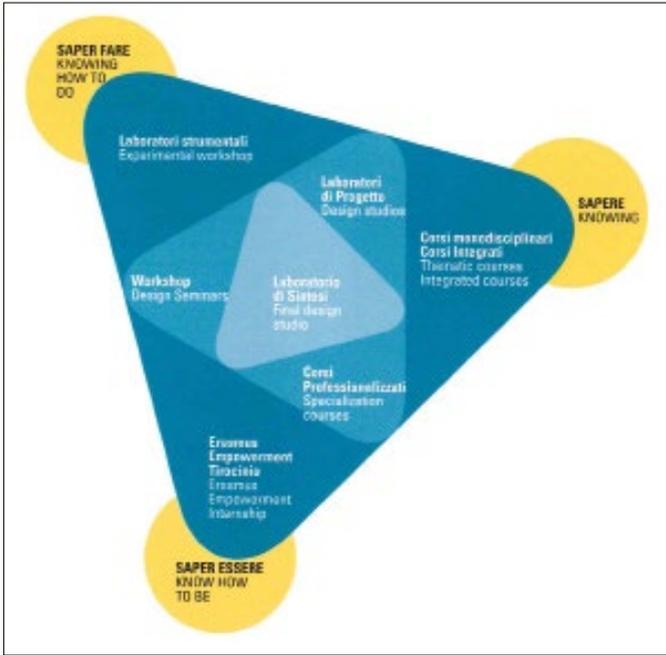
16.2 The Systemic Vision

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 *Gestalttheorie* [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 Seassarò – 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.

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 «*Progetti formativi triennali*» [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, AG 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 Origo- ni, 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.

References

- AA.VV. (1994). *Guida per l'Anno Accademico 1994-95, Corso di Laurea in Disegno Industriale*. New York: Mc Graw Hill Education.
- AA.VV. (1995). *Guida per l'Anno Accademico 1995-96, Corso di Laurea in Disegno Industriale*. New York: Mc Graw Hill Education.
- Seassaro, A. (a cura di). (1999). *Guida per l'Anno Accademico 1999-2000, Corso di Laurea in Disegno Industriale*. Milano: Arti Grafiche Pinelli.