

17. Mnestic Traces. Documents and Testimonies of an Institutional Revolution

Agnese Rebaglio, Antonella Penati

Department of Design, Politecnico di Milano

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-*

sortio 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» [13](#).



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](#) →



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

2. ADI Index 2002 – Il primo sito della Facoltà del Design. [Document](#) →



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) [31](#). 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 [4](#).

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 [5](#) [6](#).

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-



INDICE GENERALE DEI PROGRAMMI
del corso di laurea in Disegno Industriale

Schema del piano degli studi per il I anno pag. 3

Previsione ai corsi pag. 4

Elenco degli insegnamenti attivati per l'a.a. 1993/94 pag. 5

Corsi integrati pag. 6

Progettazione ambientale Prof. Edo Masini pag. 7
Progettazione ambientale Prof. Cristina Solaia pag. 11
Progettazione ambientale Prof. Alessandro Chertuzzi pag. 11
Attività di quartiere Prof. Edo Masini/Anna Ballarín pag. 11
Teoria e storia del D.I. Prof. Augusto Morello pag. 13
Storia dell'Arte Contemporanea Prof. Edo Masini pag. 15
Ergonomia applicata al D.I. Prof. Edo Masini pag. 15
Tecnologie generali dei materiali Prof. Pietro Luigi Cavallotti pag. 20

Corsi monodisciplinari pag. 21

Iniziative di matematiche Prof. Franca Celo pag. 22
Fisica teorica Prof. Paolo De Masi pag. 24
Disegno Prof. Mario Antonio Anselmi pag. 25
Disegno Prof. Sergio Carandini pag. 28

Laboratori di disegno industriale e ambientale pag. 29

Disegno industriale Prof. Francesco Tabbaco pag. 31
D.I. per la comunicazione visiva Prof. Giovanni Anselmi pag. 31

Progettazione ambientale Prof. Modesto Chiapponi pag. 33
Teoria e storia del D.I. Prof. Augusto Morello pag. 33

Disegno industriale Prof. Eugenio Bertinelli pag. 36
Ambientamento Prof. Anna Dell'Acqua Ballarín pag. 36

Progettazione ambientale Prof. Edo Masini pag. 40
Disegno industriale Prof. Francesco Masi pag. 40

3

Laboratori di comunicazione visiva pag. 44

Percezione e comunicazione visiva Prof. Giovanni Anselmi pag. 45
Disegno automatico Prof. Alessandro Polidina pag. 45

Grafica Prof. Giovanni Baldo pag. 48
Progettazione ambientale Prof. Cristina Solaia pag. 48

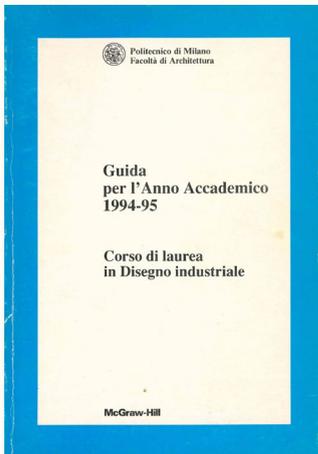
Percezione e comunicazione visiva Prof. Alessandro Polidina pag. 52
Progettazione ambientale Prof. Modesto Chiapponi pag. 52

Grafica Prof. Giovanni Luzzi pag. 56
Disegno industriale Prof. Mauro Bacci pag. 56

2



5. Guida dello Studente - Corso di Laurea in Disegno Industriale - Supplemento. Document ->



Documento introduttivo

La Facoltà di Architettura italiana ha avuto con il DM 262/89 diversificate e arricchite l'offerta didattica per rispondere positivamente e in maniera adeguata alle richieste di nuovi profili professionali di nuove competenze che a società ormai non sono confinate.

Intenzioni di un corso di laurea in Disegno Industriale presso la Facoltà di Architettura del Politecnico di Milano al momento precisamente in questi termini.

Ministrato del quadro socio-economico, produttivo ambientale

La società più generale in cui si colloca il nuovo corso di laurea è quella di una società industriale avanzata, inventiva di rapidi e profondi processi di trasformazione, che si deve confrontare con dimensioni specifiche ambientali. Tali contesti operativi si diversificano in termini di possibilità di gestione rispetto al dialogo di dimensione bioambientale con quelle socio-culturali e a partire da qui per proporre nuovi settori progettuali. In altre parole, richiede di intensificare progressivamente l'organizzazione dei processi produttivi e nella configurazione dei prodotti, intenzionali così diversamente in ordine a natura propria del disegno industriale.

In questo contesto, i materiali più rilevanti del nostro paese sono da recuperare le innovazioni tecnologiche di grande portata come l'introduzione della microelettronica, la diffusione dell'informatica, della silenziosità e della robotica, dei nuovi materiali. Ciò comporta come logica conseguenza una drastica revisione delle attuali tipologie di regimi, che si esperisce, per lo meno, attraverso processi di accorpamento e di fusione di processi, prevedendone forme più flessibili dinamicamente l'energia di produzione del dato stesso.

Un'altra conseguenza di queste innovazioni tecnologiche è la sempre maggiore importanza che assumono le componenti comunicative dei prodotti. Ciò richiede una rinnovata 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 crescita esponenziale di tutte le forme di comunicazione visiva. Diviene dunque irrinunciabile lo sviluppo di quei settori di conflitto che la progettazione di sistemi di comunicazione visiva.

Un'importante cultura applicativa in cui l'attuale concezione viene in diretta contraddizione con l'attuale qualità delle nostre risorse nel pubblico campo. La ricerca di una nuova qualità della vita industriale è sociale, si non vuole limitarsi in obiettivi aziendali e disciplinari, deve necessariamente misurarsi, in termini progettuali, con le prestazioni operative e comunicative di tali strutture.

Il bilancio, in questione ambientale, sempre più pressante, induce a tener nel debito conto tutti i problemi connessi con un uso corretto delle risorse energetiche e dei materiali. Oltre a rilevare soluzioni progettuali che consentano un impiego limitato di materiali e una diminuzione dei consumi di energia, sono nella fase di produzione e distribuzione, aperte in realtà di base, del consumatore e dei tecnologici. Inoltre nuove problemi ambientali si delineano parallelamente (o insieme) all'attuale, che riguardano problemi e scala planetaria, come il buco nell'ozono, l'effetto serra, che impingono una radicale revisione del parco di prodotti della nostra società e dei regimi propri produttivi.

È evidente che tutto ciò costringe e impedisce non solo ai criteri delle metodologie strutturali impiegati anche per la progettazione, quanto per la pianificazione dei prodotti, aperta in questo modo progettuali adattabili e di rispetto che sono di importanza strategica. Tanto più se si pensa al contesto internazionale in cui quelle tematiche obbligatoriamente si collocano, nonché ai troppi e alle inspiegabili contraddizioni nel 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 che ai concetti utilizzati da meglio sono le opportunità offerte da questa fase di transizione. Con "disegno industriale" si intende qui un insieme di attività ampia e articolata, in altre parole, di una serie di attività che si svolgono in un'attività e l'evoluzione sono date dal fatto che, nell'aggiornare disegno industriale, l'aggettivo "industriale" denota oggi una variegata gamma di processi produttivi e il termine "disegno" include una variata sempre crescente di campi progettuali.

La consegna invece è data dalle capacità (spese di offrire stimuli alle ricerche e alla didattica) di verificare concretamente i risultati:

- a differenza di quanto è avvenuto negli altri Paesi industrializzati, il disegno industriale in Italia è sempre stato considerato in stretta connessione con l'attività del tecnico. Interpretare il nuovo corso di laurea nella Facoltà di Architettura costituisce pertanto un riconoscimento della specificità del disegno industriale italiano;
- la Facoltà di Architettura di Milano, avendo inserito nel contesto di un Politecnico come quello milanese, tutti gli apporti di attività di competenze culturali, tecnologiche generali e portamento qualificanti nel campo delle tecnologie nuove di Disegno Industriale. Il nuovo corso di laurea è dunque in grado di assicurare importanti sinergie tra le diverse componenti dell'attività.

Profili culturali e professionali

Il nuovo corso di laurea intende formare disegnatori industriali dotati della professionalità necessaria per affrontare autonomamente la complessa realtà della progettazione e la pianificazione di prodotti e di processi produttivi. Ma non solo. Essi possederanno anche gli strumenti culturali e critico-creativi per problematizzare tali strutture, per comprendere, guidare e selezionare i programmi manufatti che si stanno verificando nel contesto socio-economico, tecnologico e ambientale in cui l'attività del progettista industriale si svolge.

A questo scopo si prevedono, all'interno di un quadro formativo unitario, alcune articolazioni didattiche che dovranno essere: i) attività di profili culturali e professionali;

La scelta di questi differenti profili è dettata in parte dalle considerazioni di valde generale anche la precedente, le nuove tracce della ricerca collaborativa del corso di laurea in Disegno Industriale nel merito di una ricerca di architettura di un Politecnico.

In pratica, si formeranno figure professionali autonome, capaci di poterono prolungare la loro attività in forme libere progettuali e comunicative, al di fuori di imprese industriali. Tali figure si potranno occupare in nuove attività culturali e professionali:

- **Progettazione dei prodotti industriali**

La progettazione dei prodotti industriali concerne le caratteristiche funzionali, estetiche e produttive di specifici oggetti di oggetti di diversa natura tecnologica, dal tipo di consumo o dai beni strumentali, dai mezzi di produzione ai mezzi di trasporto, dai prodotti di avvio e al collaudo alle attrezzature pubbliche e di servizio.



6. Guida dello studente A.A. 1994-95. Document ->

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 polytechnicality 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 educational 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 university on the content and forms of the reorganisation of its current structures [...] has brought to the fore proposals that derive from the combined effects of two criteria: that of 'territorial articulation' – 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 traditional 'binary' structure of the university, albeit in a more articulated and decentralised form – given the very way in which the debate has been conducted, separately within the two Faculties of Engineering 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 potentially 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]. [...] Perhaps 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 knowledge 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 [95](#):



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



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](#) ↘:

10. Commissione di Senato per il Disegno Industriale. Nota al Senato Accademico, in risposta alla Rettoriale del 15 Gennaio 1998. [Document](#) →

[...] 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 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

14. Note di
aggiornamento,
integrazione e
chiarimento al
documento Linee
programmatiche generali
di riorganizzazione
dell'offerta formativa
nel settore Disegno
industriale.
[Document →](#)



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 →](#)



19. Alberto Seassaro,
Programma elettorale
per l'elezione del Preside
della Facoltà del Design
del Politecnico di Milano
(2007-2010).
[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 – *Prorettrice* [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 unremitting 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](#)→



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

23. Alberto Seassaro,
Lettera al Rettore
Prof.ssa Cristina Treu.
[Document](#)→



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,

24. Alberto Seassaro,
Lettera al Prof.
Scoccimarro,
*Costituzione del nuovo
assetto del Dipartimento
in sezioni e Piano di
Sviluppo.*
[Document](#)→



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](#).



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 Luise 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 divisori 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 Luise 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'accetterei!!! 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 vadano.

Ciao Alberto

P.S. Sarebbe il caso che ci si sentisse stasera.



22. Alberto Seassaro, Lettera al Prorettore Prof.ssa Cristina Treu in merito al Campus Bovisa.
[Document →](#)


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 H/09: Disegno Industriale e dei Settori strettamente affini (H/08 e H/11/X) 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 e fini speciali, Corsi di perfezionamento, ecc.),
- (vedi elenco rappresentati di Sede convenenti, 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 Sedes 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
- Conoscimento 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 (NDD);
- Iniziative di ricerca comuni:
 - MIFIRST 40%
 - CNR - Progetto speciale D.I.
- Varie ed eventuali

Distinti saluti.

Prof. Alberto Seassaro



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 →](#)

References

- Bertola, P., Penati, A., & Seassaro, A. (2000). *All'insegna dell'innovazione didattica. Il Corso di Laurea in Disegno industriale del Politecnico di Milano*. A. Penati & Seassaro, A. (a cura di). *Didattica & Design. Processi e prodotti formativi nell'università che cambia*, pp. 37-58. Milano: Polidesign.
- Corso di Laurea in Disegno Industriale. (1993-1994). *Programmi degli insegnamenti del primo anno. Supplemento alla Guida dello Studente*. Facoltà di Architettura, Politecnico di Milano.
- Crespi, R. (1984). *Premesse alla formazione dell'Indirizzo di laurea in Disegno industriale e arredamento. Contributi alla formazione dell'Indirizzo di laurea in Disegno industriale e arredamento* (Seminario presso la Facoltà di Architettura). Politecnico di Milano. (Documento interno).
- Politecnico di Milano (1994). *Guida per l'anno accademico 1994-95. Corso di Laurea in Disegno Industriale*. Milano: McGraw Hill Education.
- Seassaro, A. (1995). *Verbale della Commissione Consigliare del D.I. del 16/02/1995*. Facoltà di Architettura, Politecnico di Milano. (Documento interno).
- Seassaro, A. (1996a). *Lettera al Preside della Facoltà di Architettura Cesare Stevan*. (Documento interno).
- Seassaro, A. (1996b). *Lettera al Centro Informatico di Ateneo (CIA) (4 settembre 1996)*. (Documento interno).
- Seassaro, A. (1997a). *Lettera al Preside della Facoltà di Architettura Cesare Stevan e al Rettore Adriano De Maio*. Politecnico di Milano. (Documento interno).
- Seassaro, A. (1997b). *Lettera al Prorettore Prof.ssa Cristina Treu*. (Documento interno).
- Seassaro, A., Bartezzaghi, E., Pedeferra, P., Scoccimarro, A., & Sartori, S. (1997). *Documento: Proposta di istituzione di una Facoltà del Design*, indirizzato al Rettore Prof. Adriano De Maio e al Senato Accademico del Politecnico di Milano (5 maggio 1997). (Documento interno).
- Seassaro, A. (1998a). *Commissione di Senato per il Disegno Industriale. Nota al Senato Accademico in risposta alla Rettoriale del 15 gennaio 1998* (12 giugno 1998). (Documento interno).
- Seassaro, A. (1998b). *Lettera al Prorettore Prof.ssa Cristina Treu in merito al Campus Bovisa*. (Documento interno).
- Seassaro, A. (1999a). *Linee programmatiche generali per l'adozione del "Decreto d'Area" del "Politecnico" per il settore Architettura e Ingegneria* (5 febbraio 1999). Politecnico di Milano. (Documento interno).
- Seassaro, A. (1999b). *Linee programmatiche generali di riorganizzazione dell'offerta formativa a partire dall'A.A. 1999-2000 nel settore del Disegno industriale* (12 febbraio 1999). (Documento interno).
- Seassaro, A. (1999c). *Lettera: Approvazione del Senato Accademico del progetto didattico SDI - Sistema Disegno Industriale - Trasmissione nota di risposta* (15 marzo 1999). Politecnico di Milano. (Documento interno).
- Seassaro, A. (1999d). *Note di aggiornamento, integrazione e chiarimento al documento "Linee programmatiche generali di riorganizzazione dell'offerta formativa nel settore Disegno industriale"* (15 marzo 1999). Politecnico di Milano. (Documento interno).

- Seassaro, A. (2000a). *Costituzione della III Facoltà di Architettura* (10 aprile 2000). (Documento interno).
- Seassaro, A. (2000b). *Lettera: Denominazione della nuova Facoltà di Architettura dedicata alla tematica del Disegno Industriale* (22 maggio 2000). (Documento interno).
- Seassaro, A. (2000c). *Programma elettorale per l'elezione del Preside della Facoltà del Design del Politecnico di Milano (III Facoltà di Architettura-Bovisa)* (2 giugno 2000). (Documento interno).
- Seassaro, A. (2000d) (a cura di). *Piano di sviluppo della III Facoltà di Architettura - Design - Anno 2001. Delibera del Consiglio di Facoltà del 13 ottobre 2000*. (Documento interno).
- Seassaro, A. (2000e). *Lettera al prof. Scoccimarro con oggetto: Costituzione del nuovo assetto del Dipartimento in sezioni e Piano di Sviluppo* (26 ottobre 2000). (Documento interno).
- Seassaro, A. (2001). I protagonisti, la storia, il progetto. *Politecnico. Rivista del Politecnico di Milano*, (4), 16-19.
- Seassaro, A. (2006). *Programma elettorale per l'elezione del Preside della Facoltà del Design del Politecnico di Milano (2007-2010)* (3 ottobre 2006). (Documento interno).