

CROSSROADS|INCROCI

IV Convegno Internazionale di Architettura degli Interni e Allestimento

IV International Conference on Interiors and Exhibit Design

Torino, 27-28-29 settembre 2023

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Convegno organizzato dal Politecnico di Torino, Dipartimento di Architettura e Design
con il supporto di Accademia Adrianea di Architettura e Archeologia
con il patrocinio di Politecnico di Milano, Scuola del Design

ATTI DEL IV CONVEGNO INTERNAZIONALE DI ARCHITETTURA DEGLI INTERNI E ALLESTIMENTO

Volume Palinsesti/Teorie_Archivi/Reti

Coordinamento editoriale

Pier Federico Caliarì, Carola Gentilini

Curatela, impaginazione, editing

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In copertina: elaborazione grafica di Amath Luca Diatta

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ISBN 978-88-99013-13-4 (pubblicazione digitale)

Crossroads | Incroci

Atti del IV Convegno Internazionale di
Architettura degli Interni e Allestimento

TORINO | 27-28-29 SETTEMBRE 2023

volume

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Introduction

Contemporary interior design is going through a phase of paradigmatic transformation that redefines the fundamental relationship between inhabitant and living space. This evolution emerged from the intersection of the three disciplinary approaches and the theoretical and applicative contributions of Massimo Schinco, Alessandro Melis and Claudia Pasquero, guests of the conference Crossroads/Intrecci. IV International Conference on Interior Architecture and Design, held at the Politecnico di Torino from 27 to 29 September 2023.

The convergence of environmental psychology, climate-sensitive design and bio-design generates new models for conceiving interior space that go beyond the traditional form-function dichotomy, embracing more complex dimensions of well-being, sustainability and liveability.

This interweaving of disciplines does not simply represent a design trend, but configures a new epistemological statute of Interior Design, capable of integrating the psychophysical needs of the user, contemporary ecological urgencies and the potential offered by biotechnologies applied to design. The analysis of these three approaches reveals how interior design is evolving towards a holistic discipline, where the quality of interior space is measured through multidimensional parameters that include psychological well-being, environmental impact and the regenerative capacity of environments.

The dynamics that characterise contemporary interior design require an ability to mediate between multiple and seemingly conflicting challenges: the search for meaning and identity in an increasingly globalised world, environmental su-

stainability as an ethical and design imperative, and the integration of emerging technologies that radically change the way we interact with space. These elements are constantly intertwined in the design of the interior space, generating critical grafts and intersections that redefine both function and living experience.

The theoretical reflections and practical experiments of the three speakers offer a privileged interpretative framework to observe these transformative dynamics. Each of them focuses on a key dimension of contemporary design – respectively symbolic and therapeutic narrative, resilient ecology, and the bio-digital paradigm – providing methodological and conceptual tools to understand and design the interior spaces of the near future.

The psychological dimension of interior spaces: the symbolic narration by Massimo Schinco

Massimo Schinco's contribution to the understanding of interior spaces introduces the psychological dimension as a fundamental and no longer accessory design element. His research, deeply rooted in environmental psychology and the psychoanalytic tradition, demonstrates how interior spaces are never neutral from an emotional and cognitive point of view, but constitute true psychic devices capable of profoundly influencing the well-being, relational dynamics and cognitive processes of the inhabitants. (Schinco, 2022)

Schinco theorises and applies the concept of "therapeutic space" to interior design, where every design choice – from the chromatic selection to the functional distribution of furnishings, from the qualitative and quantitative management of natural and artificial light to the

definition of the geometric proportions of rooms – becomes a tool for direct intervention in individual and collective psychological dynamics. This perspective proposes a design methodology that includes an in-depth analysis of the specific psychological needs of users, their personal histories and behavioural patterns (Schinco, 2023).

Through this approach, spaces are rethought as complex psychological ecosystems, where each functional zone responds to specific emotional needs: recollection spaces designed to encourage mental regeneration and concentration, socialisation areas calibrated to optimise interpersonal interaction, domestic work zones configured on individual cognitive rhythms and attention cycles. The materiality of the environments takes on explicit therapeutic values, where tactile surfaces, specific colours and architectural geometries are scientifically selected for their potential for psychophysical activation or relaxation.

The systemic-narrative approach developed by Schinco also underlines the crucial importance of considering living as a complex cultural and relational process. The designer becomes a mediator between past life stories and the materiality of future space. This narrative dimension generates deeply personalised environments, capable of arousing an authentic sense of belonging and lasting psychological well-being.

Climate-sensitive design: resilient ecology by Alessandro Melis

Alessandro Melis introduces in Interior Design a systemic ecological sensitivity that redefines the methodological approach to the design of interior spaces, shifting it from artificial control logics towards strategies of mediation with natural systems. His concept of “climate-sensitive design” applies the consolidated principles of architectural bioclimatic design to interior spaces, transforming each room into a dynamic system of microclimatic regulation that responds in real time to seasonal variations, external atmospheric conditions and the differentiated comfort needs of users.

This methodology entails a radical rethinking of traditional interior design strategies. Interiors are no longer conceived as artificially sealed and

air-conditioned environments through energy-intensive mechanical systems, but as intelligent, permeable membranes that selectively mediate between variable external conditions and optimal interior comfort.

The impact of this approach is particularly evident in the reconfiguration of traditional interior space hierarchies (Melis, 2022).

Melis also proposes the systematic integration of plant components within living spaces, not as mere decorative or green furnishing elements, but as active and functional components of the overall microclimate control system. Technologically advanced green walls, multifunctional indoor gardens and integrated phyto-purification systems become true architectural elements that qualitatively and quantitatively improve the composition of indoor air, automatically regulate humidity levels and significantly contribute to the overall psychophysical well-being of the inhabitants. This design vision prefigures symbiotic interiors, where the traditional distinction between natural and artificial dissolves in favour of an integrated eco-systemic approach to design (Melis, 2023).

The social dimension of Melis’ approach clearly emerges in his focus on the design of inclusive spaces capable of promoting community cohesion and collective well-being. This methodological perspective significantly expands the social function of interior design, which assumes an active role in the broader urban dynamics and environmental regeneration strategies of the territory.

Bio-design and living architecture: the bio-digital paradigm by Claudia Pasquero

The research and experimental work presented by Claudia Pasquero represents an advanced and experimental frontier in interior design, introducing biotechnology and active biological processes as actual design materials, no longer as mere metaphorical references or formal inspirations. Through the research developed with ecoLogicStudio and marco Poletto, Pasquero systematically explores the still largely unexplored potential of bio-design applied to interior spaces, where living micro-organisms, algae cultivations and complex biosynthetic processes become

active and functional architectural components of the domestic and working environment.

This methodological and technological revolution transforms the very concept of interior space. Living environments cease to be static, inert containers and become authentic living ecosystems, capable of autonomous evolution, dynamic adaptation to conditions of use and continuous regeneration of their functional components. Advanced systems of photosynthetic microalgae cultivation, integrated directly into the interior architectural surfaces, not only actively purify the ambient air and produce usable biomass, but also generate dynamic and changing visual patterns that constantly change in relation to changing environmental conditions, natural biological cycles and the inhabitants' life rhythms (Pasquero, 2020).

The impact of this innovative approach on spaces is genuinely revolutionary in its transformative scope. Traditional architectural surfaces – walls, floors, ceilings, furniture elements – are completely rethought and redesigned as multifunctional, responsive biological interfaces. This systemic and multifunctional integration generates environments characterised by high environmental performance and completely new aesthetic qualities, where visual and sensory beauty emerges directly from the natural biological processes at work and is not predefined.

Pasquero's research is at the forefront of contemporary interior design, proposing an unprecedented synthesis between nature and digital technology through complex bio-digital systems that allow for a morphogenetic and adaptive design of spaces. Some issues that this frontier poses remain unresolved, such as the control of biometric data and the preservation of the properly human and social dimension of spatial experience. (Pasquero, 2023)

Convergences and interlacements: towards integrated interior design

An in-depth comparative analysis of the methodological and theoretical contributions of Schinco, Melis and Pasquero reveals significant and unexpected convergences that clearly delineate the contours of new paradigms in interior design. All three approaches examined share a

fundamentally atmospheric view of interior space that deliberately overcomes traditional disciplinary fragmentation to embrace multiple, integrated dimensions: psychological, ecological, biological, social and technological.

The most obvious convergence concerns the intrinsically dynamic conception of inner space. Whether it is the psychological responsiveness theorised and applied by Schinco, the climatic adaptability proposed by Melis or the biological vitality explored by Pasquero, a common and shared idea of interior space as a living, intelligent system, capable of continuous transformation and proactive adaptation to the variable needs of users and changing environmental conditions, clearly emerges.

This convergence necessarily requires broadened interdisciplinary professional skills and flexible, integrated design methodologies, in which the architectural project is no longer conceived as a finite and immutable object but as an open and dynamic process, constantly becoming and available to interpretation and change over time.

Implications and future prospects

The interior designer of the near future will necessarily have to develop advanced interdisciplinary skills ranging from environmental psychology to applied biotechnology, from climatology to biochemistry, from sociology to digital technology, configuring a radically different and more complex professional figure than the current one.

This professional evolution also entails the urgent need to develop new design tools and assessment methodologies that effectively integrate psychological, environmental and biological parameters in the operational definition of spatial quality.

The complex intertwining of the psychological dimension, environmental sustainability and bio-design prefigures an Interior Design capable of responding effectively to the most urgent and pressing contemporary challenges: the global climate crisis, the planetary health emergency, the pressing need to develop new sustainable and regenerative housing models.

The educational implications of this transformation are equally significant. Educational

paths in Interior Design will necessarily have to integrate scientific, technological and humanistic skills in an organic way, preparing professionals capable of operating effectively in scenarios of increasing complexity. Interdisciplinary collaboration will no longer become optional but structurally necessary, requiring new organisational models and innovative collaborative methodologies.

In conclusion, the analysis highlights how Interior Design is going through a phase of deep paradigmatic transformation that completely redefines its objectives, methods and areas of responsibility. The convergence between psychological, ecological and biotechnological approaches does not simply represent a technical update of the discipline, but configures a qualitative leap towards a conception of the interior environment as a complex, responsive and regenerative ecosystem, capable of actively contributing to individual and collective wellbeing and global environmental sustainability.

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