

Alberto Seassaro. The demiurge

DESIGN PHILOLOGY. THE MASTERS SERIES

Edited by

Antonella Penati, Agnese Rebaglio and Paola Bertola

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Antonella Penati, Agnese Rebaglio and Paola Bertola

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***Morfemi* by Alberto Seassaro**



Last day as Dean, saying goodbye to colleagues, 2010.
Photo by Fausto Brevi.

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

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

ALBERTO SEASSARO

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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-*

sorzio POLI.Design [Poli.design Consortium], devoted to the cultural promotion of design and home to master programmes and post-graduate teaching activities. These were years of intense activity in which – through research and teaching – a dense web of connections was built between design and the system of Italian small and medium-sized enterprises; between design and local production systems; between design and industrial districts. The aims that had driven Alberto Seassaro, from the very beginning of his academic career, to connect the contents of research and those of teaching find their full realisation here. Indeed, the relationship between research and teaching constitutes the true fulcrum of his cultural policy, articulated on several occasions not only as a transfer of knowledge from research to teaching but also as a flow of new knowledge which, from the design experimentation taking place in teaching, returns to nourish research.

The design of teaching activities is conceived so as to leave room for the various research groups in the Department, enabling them to bring up-to-date content into the educational programmes.

As Chair of the degree programme and later as Dean of the Faculty, he sought to foster the continual renewal of themes for design reflection, particularly in the *Laboratori di Sintesi Finale* [Final Synthesis Studios] – studios devoted to accompanying students in the *Tesi di Laurea* [degree thesis]. Emerging also from this research-teaching nexus, the perimeter of design intervention was redrawn, extending its scope beyond the traditional sphere of industrial products to include immaterial artefacts such as communicative artefacts; interactive and relational systems; domestic interiors, urban exteriors and complex objects such as territories, events and cultural heritage assets.

It is again this research-teaching nexus that, within a few years, made it possible to conceptualise and define the systemic nature of design and of its related ecosystem, consisting of cultural infrastructures (sector associations, publishing, training and research bodies, events, etc.) and professional ones (the complex world of support activities such as photography, model-making, etc.), and the strategic dimension of design intervention, which was then translated into curricular training paths, university master programmes, research activities, etc. At the same time, within Politecnico di Milano, Seassaro promoted all the actions needed to create the conditions for the *De-*

sign area to break away from the Faculty of Architecture and to develop so as to give rise to autonomous teaching structures, which would be fully realised from 2000 onwards. In this sense we should read the project for offices and support infrastructures for the educational project: the *ufficio Dida* (*Didattica per il Disegno industriale*) [Dida Office – Teaching for Industrial Design], supporting innovative institutional educational projects (degree and specialist degree programmes, including inter-faculty and inter-university ones) and experimental initiatives (master programmes, *corsi IFTS* [Higher Technical Education and Training courses], continuing education courses, etc.); the *ufficio Relè* (*Relazioni estere*) [Relè Office – International Relations], devoted to cultivating exchange relationships with the network of international schools operating in the field of *Design*; the *ufficio Rap* (*Rapporto aziende-professioni*) [Rap Office – Companies – Professions Relations], for the activation of curricular internships, the building of stable relationships with the system of enterprises and the professional world, and the monitoring of educational profiles in relation to the needs and transformations of the labour market; and the *ufficio Set* [Set Office], dedicated to enhancing educational activities through exhibitions and events, and the core for the development of the project to establish instrumental laboratories (*Laboratorio di Fotografia e Movie* [Photography and Movie Laboratory]; *Laboratorio di Modellazione fisica e virtuale* [Physical and Virtual Modelling Laboratory]; *Laboratorio di Allestimenti* [Exhibition Design Laboratory]; *Laboratorio di Luce e colore* [Light and Colour Laboratory]; *Laboratorio di Moda e maglieria* [Fashion and Knitwear Laboratory]; *Laboratorio di Reverse modeling e virtual prototyping* [Reverse Modelling and Virtual Prototyping Laboratory], etc.). At the same time, his ability to weave institutional relationships laid the foundations for the construction of the Italian university network of design, with the creation at various universities (Bolzano, Venice, Turin, Genoa, Florence, Pescara, Rome, Naples, Bari and Palermo, to which Salerno, San Marino, Alghero, Brescia and Ferrara would be added in the following decade) of degree programmes, faculties and departments of *Design*, and with the launch of a research activity that brought together all the university sites active in the field of design around research topics whose contribution would prove crucial to re-defining the role of design in the Italian economic-productive system.

At the end of the 1990s, he promoted the establishment of the *Coordinamento Nazionale dei docenti e ricercatori del Settore Scientifico Disciplinare H09C (poi ICAR/13) Disegno industriale* [National Coordination of Lecturers and Researchers in the Scientific-Disciplinary Sector H09C (later ICAR/13) Industrial Design], which in 2005 took on the institutional form of the *Associazione dei docenti e ricercatori in Disegno Industriale – Società Italiana di Design* [Association of Lecturers and Researchers in Industrial Design – Italian Design Society] (initially *AUDI – Associazione Universitaria Disegno Industriale* [AUDI – University Association for Industrial Design] and later *SI.Design – Società Italiana del Design* [SI.Design – Italian Design Society]), of which he became President. In those same years he also set up the *Conferenza Nazionale dei Presidi e dei Presidenti di Corso di laurea di Disegno industriale (CPD)* [National Conference of Deans and Chairs of Degree Programmes in Industrial Design], of which he would remain President until 2010.

In this capacity, he worked to ensure that, alongside generalist education, each site would introduce, within its research and teaching activities, educational paths with a design vocation specifically oriented towards the needs of its territory. Local production systems, as well as contextual cultures, received renewed attention, which in turn fed into the editorial output of those years.

With this aim in view, we can read the strategy pursued to create a unified research network and a strong relationship with the surrounding cultural and productive context, within which the *Ricerca MURST Il ruolo del disegno industriale per l'innovazione di prodotto. Sviluppo delle risorse progettuali del Sistema Italia tra risorse locali e mercati globali* [MURST research project *The role of industrial design for product innovation. Development of Italy's design resources between local resources and global markets*], later abbreviated as *SDI, Sistema Design Italia* [Italian Design System], played the role of an incubator. It opened up an important reflection on the very nature of design research as a promoter of innovation and as a competitive lever for Italy in global markets. In 2001, the *Compasso d'oro* award assigned to the SDI research marked the consolidation of the process of building the network of university researchers in *Design*. In the motivation text, the research is described as «Precious and fundamental tool for understanding and disseminating the phenomenon of Italian design, use-

ful both for specialists and for a wider audience, whose simplicity and structural organisation make it easier to approach knowledge, thus rendering a major service to the culture of the field» [1](#).



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](#).



[4. Verbale della Commissione Consigliare del D.I. del 16/02/1995. Document →](#)

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.

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-



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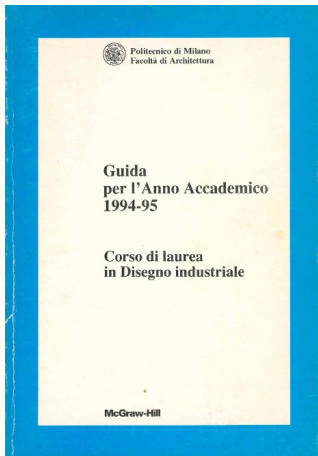
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5. Guida dello Studente - Corso di Laurea in Disegno Industriale - Supplemento. Document ->



Documento illustrativo

La *Facoltà di Architettura italiana* ha una *DM 542/93* diversificata e arricchita l'offerta didattica per rispondere positivamente e in maniera adeguata alle richieste di nuovi profili professionali di nuove competenze che la società nostra non ha conosciuti.

Metodologie del quadro neo-convensionale, profetto realistico

La società più generale in cui si colloca il nuovo corso di laurea è quella di una società industriale matura, inventiva di spazi e profitti processi trasformazioni, che si deve confrontare con dimensioni spaziali ambientali. Tali società operano in diverse fasi su un sistema diversità di operatori capaci di dialogare in dimensione multidimensionale con questi sistemi culturali e di partire da qui per proporre nuovi itinerari progettuali. In altre parole, richiede di indicare professionalmente nell'organizzazione dei processi produttivi e nella configurazione dei prodotti, inventando così diversamente il campo di azione proprio del disegno industriale.

In questo contesto, i materiali più rilevanti del nostro punto di vista sono da recuperare la invenzione tecnologica di grande portata come l'introduzione della microelettronica, la diffusione dell'informatica, della telematica e della robotica, dei nuovi materiali. Ciò comporta una logica consequenziale un duplice revisione delle attuali tipologie di oggetti, che si ispirano, tra l'altro, a nuove strutture di accoppiamento e di funzione di personaggi, prevedendone forme e spaziali diverse dall'immagine di riferimento.

Un'altra conseguenza di queste innovazioni tecnologiche è la sempre maggiore importanza che assumono le componenti comunicative dei prodotti. Ciò richiede una contemporanea integrazione delle tecniche e delle tecniche proprie della comunicazione visiva nel campo del disegno industriale. Ma c'è di più. Nella nuova società assistenziale e una crescente complessità di tutte le forme di comunicazione visiva. Dovrà dunque irripetibile lo sviluppo di quel settore di cultura che è la progettazione di sistemi di comunicazione visiva.

Da ispirazione anche applicativa in cui l'azione comunicativa deve essere orientata verso i prodotti e quella delle informazioni di pubblico servizio. La ricerca di una diversa qualità della vita individuali e sociali, se non vuole rimanere un obiettivo astratto e declinatorio, deve necessariamente ricorrere, in termini progettuali, con le prestazioni operative e comunicative di tali strutture.

Di rilevante, la questione ambientale, sempre più pressante, induce a tenerne nel debito conto tutti i problemi connessi con un uso corretto delle risorse energetiche e dei materiali. Oltre a cercare soluzioni progettuali che consentano un impiego limitato di materiali e una diminuzione dei consumi di energia, vanno nella fase di produzione e distribuzione, specie in quella di fase, del consumatore e del recettore. Inoltre nuove problemi connessi al nuovo paradigma come l'aumento esponenziale dei rifiuti, il partito problemi e scala planetaria, come il buco nell'ozonopila e l'effetto serra, che impregna una radicale revisione del parco di prodotti della nuova società e dei relativi processi produttivi.

È evidente che non col contante e rimborsare non dai criteri della metodologie attribuite impiega tanto per la progettazione quanto per la pianificazione dei prodotti, aprendo in questo modo prospettive didattiche e di ricerca che sono di importanza strategica. Tempo più si è passati al continuo rinnovamento di un quadro metodologico, obbligatoriamente si colloca, nonché ai tempi e alla sequenza che contraddistinguono tale contesto.

Il ruolo del disegno industriale

Il disegno industriale può e deve offrire contributi importanti per l'analisi, l'interpretazione e la soluzione progettuale dei problemi che ai concetti collettivi e negli anni la spaziosità offerta da questa fase di transizione con "disegno industriale" si intende qui un insieme di attività ampia e articolata, in alto stesso tempo, capace di offrire percorsi teorici e pratici. L'impresa e l'innovazione come fase del fatto che, nell'espressione disegno industriale, l'aggettivo "industriale" denota oggi una vorticoso gamma di processi produttivi e di tecniche "disegno" include una varietà sempre crescente di campi progettuali.

La copertura invece della concezione (senza del disegno industriale, di coordinare tutti i componenti tecnici, tecnologici e operativi necessari per integrare i principali nodi produttivi della cultura materiale contemporanea).

Un corso di laurea in Disegno Industriale nella Facoltà di Architettura del Politecnico di Milano

La costituzione del corso di laurea in Disegno Industriale a Milano, nell'ambito della Facoltà di Architettura del Politecnico, è particolarmente appropriata e suggestiva delle ragioni organizzative:

- la multidisciplinarietà e i ricami interdisciplinari riconosciuti che il disegno industriale ha conosciuto in passato a Milano possono essere riproposti e sollecitati da un corso di laurea che li fa propri e di ricerca; inoltre, qui si può integrare con un contesto socio-economico e produttivo particolarmente dinamico, capace di offrire stimoli alla ricerca e alla didattica e di verificare concretamente i risultati;
- 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. Invece 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, essendo inserita nel contesto di un Politecnico come quello milanese, ha l'opportunità di avvalorare la propria tradizione culturale, ereditata e gestita particolarmente qualificata nel campo delle tecnologie concernenti il disegno industriale. Il nuovo corso di laurea in Disegno è in grado di consentire importanti sinergie tra le diverse componenti del disegno.

Profili culturali e professionali

Il nuovo corso di laurea intende formare disegnatori industriali dotati della professionalità necessaria per affrontare autonomamente la attività lavorativa: la progettazione e la pianificazione di prodotti e di processi produttivi. Ma non solo. Essi possiederanno anche gli strumenti culturali e critico-costruttivi per problematizzare sull'attività, per comprendere, guidare e selezionare i processi produttivi che si stanno verificando nel contesto socio-economico, tecnologico e ambientale in cui l'attività del disegnatore industriale si svolge.

A questo scopo si prevedono, all'interno di un quadro formativo unitario, alcune articolazioni tematiche che dovranno luogo a specifici profili culturali e professionali:

La scelta di questi differenti profili è dettata da parte dalle considerazioni di ordine generale che si preannunciano. In primo luogo, la ricerca di una maggiore collaborazione del corso di laurea in Disegno industriale con la Facoltà di Architettura e di Pianificazione.

In pratica, si formeranno figure professionali altamente qualificate, che potranno svolgere la loro attività sia come liberi professionisti e consulenti, sia all'interno di imprese industriali, commerciali e di servizio, nonché nelle pubbliche amministrazioni.

Tali figure si potranno raggruppare in tre diverse profili culturali e professionali:

- **Progettazione dei prodotti industriali**

La progettazione dei prodotti industriali concerne le caratteristiche funzionali, estetiche e produttive di specifici articoli e si applica a diverse aree merceologiche: dai beni di consumo ai beni strumentali, dai mezzi di produzione ai mezzi di trasporto, dai prodotti di servizio e di collegamento 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 [7.5](#).



[7. Rivista Politecnico, n.4. Document →](#)

In the text by Alberto Seassaro published in Politecnico's magazine devoted to the newly established Faculty of Design, the fundamental steps of «intense years of *hard* experimentation of the degree programme in Industrial Design, within which – year after year – the political-institutional identity of the educational cultural project gradually grew» (Seassaro, 2001, p. 17) are retraced. After an extensive reconstruction of the main protagonists in the history of the Faculty, from those who laid the necessary groundwork, such as Tomás Maldonado, Cesare Stevan or Adriano De Maio, to all those who translated that vision into operative reality – the lecturers and the staff of the support structures – the text goes on to place the events at Politecnico di Milano within the broader framework of Italian university reform, arguing for the local innovation as an experimental model that can be replicated:

The path we have taken can help to reform and, more generally, renew studies oriented towards design and the management of innovation at Politecnico di Milano, by constructing an innovative model that positions itself between Engineering and Architecture as a *third force*, in order to give concrete form to that idea of poly-technicality which, up to now, has been interpreted and practised in a sectoral and oppositional way by two lines of thought – creativity and culture on the one hand, technology and science on the other – without achieving a genuine interdisciplinarity, which only the methodical practice of comparison in the terrain of design can make possible. (Seassaro, 2001, p. 19)

Retracing the documents and epistolary exchanges, the features and efforts of these *intense years of hard experimentation* (Ibidem) clearly emerge. One of the strategic knots for Seassaro is the claim, on behalf of the Faculty of *Design*, to the role of third actor within the established engineering-architecture pairing at Politecnico di Milano, precisely at the moment when the university is developing the territorial network



model, with an impact on the configuration of its 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](#).

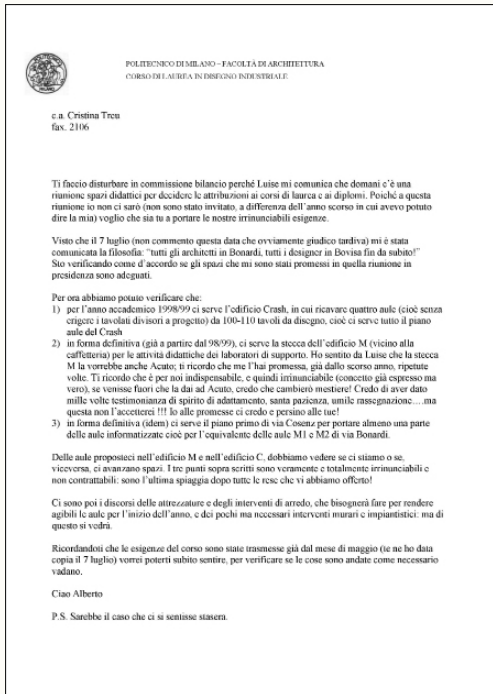


[27. Beyond the borders.](#)
[Narrative →](#)

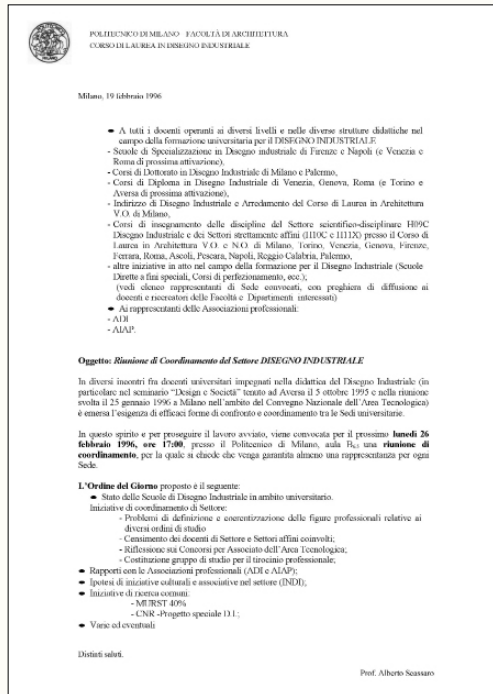
From the outset, he grasped the vital importance of keeping together the various initiatives that, in the space of less than a decade, were emerging in many Italian universities, and he set about building associations for research and coordination in teaching.

This marks the birth of the *Sistema Design Italia (SDI)* [Italian Design System]. Already in 1995, as soon as he was elected Chair of the degree programme, he drew on his experience in building coordinated CNR research alliances and, as coordinator, involved Venice, Florence, Turin, Genoa, Rome and Naples in the project *Innovazione, qualità e ambiente nel disegno industriale* [Innovation, quality and environment in industrial design].

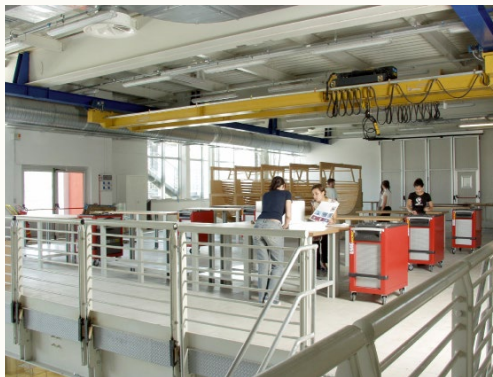
The following year, he relaunched a further research project, this time also involving the campuses in Chieti and Palermo. We might describe these as technical trials for the construction of the *Rete SDI (Sistema Design Italia)* [SDI Network – Italian Design System] which, through numerous initiatives, including the involvement, in the workshops of the degree programme in Milan, of all colleagues from Italian universities with active design courses, had already led, by 1996, to the establishment of the first national assembly of Italian Industrial Design. It was here that the groundwork was laid for the establishment of the *Società Italiana del Design* [Italian Design Society] and for the *Conferenza dei Presidi e dei Presidenti di Corso di Studi* [Conference of Deans and Chairs of Degree Programmes] [28](#). It is the beginning of a long collective history that is still being written today by those who continue to design and build it, and which continues to be nourished by the original and fertile insights contained in the dense correspondence of those who first conceived it.



22. Alberto Seassaro, Lettera al Rettore Prof.ssa Cristina Treu in merito al Campus Boviva.
[Document ->](#)



28. Riunione di Coordinamento del Settore Disegno industriale.
[Document ->](#)



25. Attività nei locali del Laboratorio di Allestimenti, Facoltà del Design, edificio N.
[Document ->](#)



26. Campus Boviva in costruzione.
[Document ->](#)

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Authors / Autori

Paola Bertola

PhD in Industrial Design and Multimedia Communication and full professor of Design at Politecnico di Milano. She teaches in the MScs in *Design for the Fashion System*, *Product Service System Design* and *Management Engineering* at Politecnico and in several international programs. She is Deputy Director of the Department of Design and Scientific Director of the Gianfranco Ferré Research Centre. She coordinates the joint program with the Fashion Institute of Technology, New York. She is cofounder of *Fashion in Process Lab* within the Department of Design. Her research focuses on creative processes, and the role of design in guiding digital transformation in CCIs, as a key driver towards more sustainable and equitable paradigms. In 2011 she was awarded with the ADI *Compasso d'Oro* Prize for Research.

PhD in Disegno Industriale e Comunicazione Multimediale e professoressa ordinaria di Design presso il Politecnico di Milano. Insegna nei Corsi di Laurea Magistrale in *Design for the Fashion System*, *Product Service System Design* e Ingegneria Gestionale presso il Politecnico.

oltre che in diversi programmi internazionali. È Vicedirettrice del Dipartimento di Design e Direttrice Scientifica del Centro di Ricerca Gianfranco Ferré. Coordina il programma congiunto con il Fashion Institute of Technology di New York. È cofondatrice del *Fashion in Process Lab* all'interno del Dipartimento di Design. La sua ricerca si concentra sui processi creativi e sul ruolo del design nell'orientare la trasformazione digitale nelle industrie culturali e creative (CCIs), come elemento chiave per paradigmi più sostenibili ed equi. Nel 2011 ha ricevuto il Premio Compasso d'Oro ADI per la Ricerca.

Luigi Bistagnino

Architect and designer. He promotes the zero-waste transformation of agri-food and industrial systems. Former Full Professor of Design at Politecnico di Torino, he founded the Bachelor's Degree in Design (1996); the Systemic Design research group; the Master's Degree in Systemic Design (2002). Coordinator of the Doctoral Board in Design (1996–2015). He teaches courses at the University of Lyon, ECAM (France), UEMG (Brazil). Co-founder of the Systemic Design Research and Education Center, Politecnico di Torino. He sits on the scientific committee of Deloitte & Touche's Food & Agriculture research and on the committee of the UNISG Sustainability Laboratory, Pollenzo. Research coordinator, among his publications: *microMACRO*, the complex of systemic micro-relations generates the new economic-productive model (2016).

Architetto e designer. Promuove la trasformazione a zero rifiuti dei sistemi agroalimentari e industriali. Già Professore Ordinario di Design al Politecnico di Torino, fonda il Corso di Laurea in Design (1996); il gruppo di ricerca Design Sistemico; la Laurea Magistrale in Design Sistemico (2002). Coordinatore del Collegio di dottorato in Design (1996-2015). Tiene corsi presso l'Università di Lione, ECAM (Francia), UEMG (Brasile). Cofondatore del Systemic Design Research and Education Center, Politecnico di Torino. È nel comitato scientifico della ricerca Food&Agricoltura di Deloitte&Touche e nel comitato del Laboratorio Sostenibilità UNISG, Pollenzo. Coordinatore di ricerche, tra le sue pubblicazioni: *microMACRO, il complesso delle micro relazioni sistemiche genera il nuovo modello economico-produttivo* (2016).

Giampiero Bosoni

Full Professor of Interior Architecture and Exhibition Design. An architect, he collaborated with Figini and Pollini, Gregotti, and Mari, with whom he developed an interest in the theory and history of architecture and design. He has written and edited about 20 books and published more than 300 articles in international journals. In 1997 he founded the Permanent Collection of the Triennale Design Museum in Milan. In 2009 MoMA in New York commissioned him the book *Italian Design* dedicated to the Italian section of their collection. President (2018–21) of the Italian Association of Design Historians and co-editor of the AIS/design Journal (2022–2025). Member of the Scientific Committee of the Fondazione Albin (2008) and of the Centro Ricerche Ferré (2021), and board member of the Fondazione CASVA (2022).

Professore Ordinario di Architettura di interni e allestimento. Architetto, ha collaborato con Figini e Pollini, Gregotti e Mari, con i quali ha sviluppato l'interesse per la teoria e la storia dell'architettura e del design. Ha scritto e curato circa 20 libri e pubblicato più di 300 articoli in riviste internazionali. Nel 1997 ha dato vita alla Collezione Permanente del Museo del Design Triennale di Milano. Nel 2009 il MoMA di NY lo incarica del libro *Italian Design* dedicato alla sezione italiana della loro collezione. Presidente (2018–21) dell'Associazione Italiana Storici del Design e co-direttore della rivista AIS/design Journal (2022–2025). Membro del Comitato Scientifico della Fondazione Albin (2008) e del Centro Ricerche Ferré (2021) e consigliere d'amministrazione della Fondazione CASVA (2022).

Bianca Bottero

Former Full Professor of Architectural Technology, she taught Environmental Design at the Second Faculty of Architecture at Politecnico di Milano. She carried out research on urban design, sustainability, and social housing with the ABITA Laboratory, which she directed. In 1987, together with Spagnoli and others, she created the international yearbook *Housing*, which she directed until 2000. With the *Associazione Alfabeti*, she teaches Italian to non-EU women in the San Siro neighborhood. Among her writings and edited volumes: *Progetto e gestione dello spazio nelle società complesse* (1984); *Progetto o metodo. Var-*

iazioni sul tema della Salina di C. N. Ledoux (1988); *Decostruzione in architettura e in filosofia* [Deconstruction in Architecture and in Philosophy] (1991; 2002); *Progettare e costruire nella complessità. Lezioni di bioarchitettura* (1993); with Di Salvo and Faré, *Architetture del desiderio* (2011). Recent writings: *Città vs cittadini? No grazie* (2023); *Città femminili? Ahimè, non ancora* (2024); *L'urbanistica è quantistica* (2025).

Già Professore Ordinario di Tecnologia dell'architettura, ha insegnato Progettazione ambientale presso la II Facoltà di Architettura del Politecnico di Milano. Ha svolto ricerche sulla progettazione urbana, la sostenibilità e l'abitazione sociale col Laboratorio ABITA da lei diretto. Nel 1987 ha creato con Spagnoli e altri l'annuario internazionale *Housing* diretto fino al 2000. Con l'Associazione Alfabeti, insegna italiano alle donne extracomunitarie del quartiere San Siro. Tra i suoi scritti e curatele: *Progetto e gestione dello spazio nelle società complesse* (1984); *Progetto o metodo. Variazioni sul tema della Salina di C. N. Ledoux* (1988); *Decostruzione in architettura e in filosofia* (1991; 2002); *Progettare e costruire nella complessità. Lezioni di bioarchitettura* (1993); con Di Salvo e Faré, *Architetture del desiderio* (2011). Scritti recenti: *Città vs cittadini? No grazie* (2023); *Città femminili? Ahimè, non ancora* (2024); *L'urbanistica è quantistica* (2025).

Flaviano Celaschi

PhD, Full Professor of Design, University of Bologna. He works on advanced design and innovation driven by project cultures. He taught at Politecnico di Milano (1995–2004 and 2009–2012); at Politecnico di Torino (2004–2009); at the University of Bologna (since 2012). He co-founded with Alberto Seassaro the first Italian Department of Design at Politecnico di Milano and the university consortium POLI.Design. He founded and directed the *Centro di Ricerca per le Imprese Culturali e Creative* at the University of Bologna; the Design School of UNISINOS in Porto Alegre, RGS, Brazil; he has taught and taken part in conferences and workshops worldwide. Dean of Italian professors of Design; scientific lead of Spoke 1 of the national research PNRR PE11 – *Made in Italy Circolare e Sostenibile*.

PhD, Professore Ordinario di Design, Università di Bologna. Si occupa di advanced design e innovazione guidata dalle culture del progetto. Ha insegnato al Politecnico di Milano (1995-2004 e 2009-2012); al Politecnico di Torino (2004-2009); all'Università di Bologna (dal 2012). Ha co-fondato con Alberto Seassaro il primo Dipartimento di Design italiano presso il Politecnico di Milano e il Consorzio universitario POLI.Design. Ha fondato e diretto il *Centro di Ricerca per le imprese Culturali e Creative* presso l'Università di Bologna; la Scuola di Design di UNISINOS a Porto Alegre in RGS Brasile; ha insegnato e partecipato a convegni e workshop in tutto il mondo. Decano dei professori italiani di Design; responsabile scientifico dello spoke 1 della Ricerca Nazionale PNRR PE11 – *Made in Italy Circolare e Sostenibile*.

Luisa Collina

PhD, Full Professor of Design at Politecnico di Milano, she works on service design, interior design, and strategic design. Since 2000 she has held various roles within the Design System at Politecnico di Milano: Head of International Relations of the School of Design (2000–2015); Coordinator of the Master's in *Product-Service System Design* (2005–2015); Dean of the School of Design (2016–2021); and Coordinator of the *Landscape, Environments, and Mobility Design* Section of the Department of Design (2023–present). From 2013 to 2019 she served as President of the international association Cumulus, of which she is currently Honorary President. Since January 2024 she has been Vice President of Fondazione Politecnico di Milano.

Dottore di ricerca, Professore Ordinario di Design al Politecnico di Milano, si interessa di design dei servizi, interni e design strategico. A partire dal 2000 assume diversi ruoli all'interno del Sistema Design del Politecnico di Milano: è stata responsabile delle relazioni internazionali della Scuola di Design (dal 2000 al 2015); coordinatrice del Master in Product-Service System Design (dal 2005 al 2015); Preside della Scuola di Design (dal 2016 al 2021) e coordinatrice della Sezione *Design del paesaggio, degli ambienti e della mobilità* del Dipartimento di Design (dal 2023 ad oggi). Dal 2013 al 2019 è stata Presidente dell'associazione internazionale Cumulus, di cui è attualmente Presidente Onorario. Da gennaio 2024 è Vicepresidente della Fondazione Politecnico di Milano.

Giancarlo Consonni

Poet, painter, urban planner, and historian of architecture and the city. He is Professor Emeritus of Urban Planning at Politecnico di Milano. He directs the Archivio Piero Bottoni. His research ranges from the formation processes of the contemporary metropolis to architectural and urban culture, the historical–anthropological characteristics of spatiality, and urban design. His latest book is *Non si salva il pianeta se non si salvano le città* (Quodlibet, 2024). He has published seven poetry collections: with Scheiwiller, *Viridarium* (1987) and *In breve volo* (1994); with Einaudi, *Vûs* (1997), *Lui* (2003), *Filovia* (2016), *Pinoli* (2021), and *Il conforto dell'ombra* (2025). His pictorial work is partly gathered in fourteen small volumes published by La Vita Felice.

Poeta, pittore, urbanista e storico dell'architettura e della città. È Professore Emerito di Urbanistica del Politecnico di Milano. Dirige l'Archivio Piero Bottoni. Le sue ricerche spaziano dai processi di formazione della metropoli contemporanea alla cultura architettonica e urbanistica, ai caratteri storico-antropologici della spazialità, al disegno urbano. Il suo ultimo libro si intitola *Non si salva il pianeta se non si salvano le città* (Quodlibet, 2024). Ha pubblicato 7 raccolte di poesia: con l'editore Scheiwiller, *Viridarium* (1987) e *In breve volo* (1994); con l'editore Einaudi, *Vûs* (1997), *Lui* (2003), *Filovia* (2016), *Pinoli* (2021) e *Il conforto dell'ombra* (2025). La sua opera pittorica è in parte raccolta in 14 volumetti editi da La Vita Felice.

Luciano Crespi

Recognized by the international scholarly community as the leading figure of an *allestitivo* [exhibition-based] design approach he terms *design del non-finito* [design of the unfinished], aimed at the regeneration of *avanzi* [remnants]. Among his publications on the subject: *Stop City Now: progetti di architettura dal finito al non-finito* (2025); *Regeneration of Abandoned Spaces: A New Design Approach* (2024); *Design del non-finito. L'interior design nella rigenerazione degli 'avanzi'* (2023); *Manifesto del design del non-finito* (2018). He edited *La progettazione tecnologica* (1987) and, with L. Tedeschi and A. L. Viati, *Marco Zanuso. Architettura e design* (2020). He was Associate Professor of *Cultura tecnologica della progettazione* [technological culture of design] and

later Full Professor of Design at Politecnico di Milano, among the founders and Chair of the Bachelor's Degree Program in Interior Design.

Riconosciuto dalla comunità scientifica internazionale come caposcuola di un approccio progettuale *allestitivo* che definisce design del non-finito, finalizzato alla rigenerazione degli *'avanzi'* Tra le pubblicazioni sull'argomento: *Stop City Now: progetti di architettura dal finito al non-finito* (2025); *Regeneration of Abandoned Spaces: A New Design Approach* (2024); *Design del non-finito. L'interior design nella rigenerazione degli 'avanzi'* (2023); *Manifesto del design del non-finito* (2018). Ha curato *La progettazione tecnologica* (1987) e, con L. Tedeschi e A. L. Viati, *Marco Zanuso. Architettura e design*, (2020). È stato Associato di Cultura tecnologica della progettazione e poi Ordinario di Design al Politecnico di Milano, tra i fondatori e Presidente del corso di laurea in Design degli interni.

Alessandro Deserti

Full Professor at Politecnico di Milano, where he serves as Director of the Department of Design until 2025. His research focuses on design-enabled innovation processes, examining the methods and tools that support them. In recent years, he has explored how organizations can initiate or evolve these processes in emerging fields, integrating them with systemic and organizational transformations to address technological, environmental, and socio-economic challenges. He has extensive experience in international research collaborations, particularly within European research and innovation projects.

Professore Ordinario al Politecnico di Milano, dove ricopre il ruolo di Direttore del Dipartimento di Design fino al 2025. La sua attività di ricerca è focalizzata sui processi di innovazione abilitati dal design, con particolare attenzione ai metodi e agli strumenti che li supportano. Negli ultimi anni ha approfondito come le organizzazioni possano avviare o sviluppare tali processi in ambiti emergenti, integrandoli con trasformazioni sistemiche e organizzative per affrontare sfide tecnologiche, ambientali e socio-economiche. Vanta una lunga esperienza in collaborazioni di ricerca internazionali, con particolare riferimento ai progetti europei di ricerca e innovazione.

Emilio Faroldi

Architect, PhD, Full Professor at Politecnico di Milano, he is Deputy Rector and the Rector's Delegate for the Development and Valorization of Spaces. He publishes on architectural and technological design; takes part in design competitions, receiving prizes and honorable mentions; and has built works in Italy and abroad, some published in leading journals. Former Editor in Chief of *TECHNE_Journal of Technology for Architecture and Environment*, he is Director of the Master in Sport Design and Management and teaches the doctoral course *Italian Architecture and Construction from the Post-War period to nowadays. Dialogues between Inheritance and project*. Professor of the International Academy of Architecture, he is a member of the Scientific Committee of the *Centro Studi e Archivio della Comunicazione* [Center for the Study and Archive of Communication] in Parma.

Architetto, PhD, Professore Ordinario al Politecnico di Milano, è Prorettore Vicario e Delegato del Rettore allo Sviluppo e alla valorizzazione degli spazi. Pubblica sui temi della progettazione architettonica e tecnologica; partecipa a concorsi di progettazione ricevendo premi e menzioni; realizza opere in Italia e all'estero, alcune pubblicate nelle principali riviste di settore. Già Editor in Chief della rivista *TECHNE_Journal of Technology for Architecture and Environment*, è Direttore del Master in Sport Design and Management e titolare del Corso di Dottorato *Italian Architecture and Construction from the Post-War period to nowadays. Dialogues between Inheritance and project*. Professore della International Academy of Architecture è Membro del Comitato Scientifico del *Centro Studi e Archivio della Comunicazione* di Parma.

Beppe Finessi

Architect, PhD. A pupil of Corrado Levi, he carries out teaching (Associate Professor at the School of Design, Politecnico di Milano), critical work (editor at the magazine *Abitare* during Italo Lupi's tenure), and research (he has curated exhibitions and publications on several great masters of Italian design, such as Achille and Pier Giacomo Castiglioni, Vico Magistretti, Angelo Mangiarotti, Pio Manzù, Alessandro Mendini, Bruno Munari). In 2010 he founded and directs *Inventario*, with which

he won the ADI Compasso d'Oro (2014), while other publications of his received two Honorable Mentions (2016). He curated *Il Design Italiano oltre le crisi*, the seventh edition of the Triennale Design Museum (2014), and *Il cucchiaino e la città*, the inaugural and permanent exhibition of the ADI Design Museum (2021).

Architetto, PhD. Allievo di Corrado Levi, svolge attività didattica (Professore Associato alla Scuola del Design del Politecnico di Milano), critica (redattore della rivista *Abitare* durante la direzione di Italo Lupi) e di ricerca (ha curato mostre e pubblicazioni su alcuni grandi maestri del design italiano, come Achille e Pier Giacomo Castiglioni, Vico Magistretti, Angelo Mangiarotti, Pio Manzù, Alessandro Mendini, Bruno Munari). Nel 2010 fonda e dirige *Inventario*, con cui vince il Compasso d'Oro ADI (2014), mentre per altre sue pubblicazioni ha ricevuto due Menzioni d'onore (2016). Ha curato *Il Design Italiano oltre le crisi*, settima edizione del Triennale Design Museum (2014), e *Il cucchiaino e la città*, esposizione inaugurale e permanente dell'ADI Design Museum (2021).

Ugo La Pietra

He lives and works in Milan. He has described himself as a *researcher* of visual arts and communication. He has presented his research through many exhibitions both in Italy and abroad. He has curated a number of exhibitions at the Triennale di Milano, the Venice Biennale, the Museum of Contemporary Art in Lyon, the FRAC Museum in Orléans, the Ceramics Museum in Faenza, and the Ragghianti Foundation in Lucca. He was awarded the Compasso d'Oro for The Research in 1979 and Compasso d'Oro for his Carrer in 2016. His research experience in art, architecture and design led him to develop such themes as *La casa telematica* (MoMA, New York, 1972 - Fiera di Milano, 1983), *Rapporto tra Spazio reale e Spazio virtuale* (Triennale di Milano, 1979, 1992), *La casa neo-eclettica* (Abitare il Tempo, 1990), *Cultura Balneare* (Centro Culturale Cattolica, 1985/95).

Viive e lavora a Milano. Si è sempre dichiarato *ricercatore* nelle arti visive e nella comunicazione. Ha comunicato le sue ricerche attraverso mostre in Italia e all'estero. Ha curato diverse esposizioni alla Triennale

di Milano, Biennale di Venezia, Museo d'Arte Contemporanea di Lione, Museo FRAC di Orléans, Museo delle Ceramiche di Faenza, Fondazione Ragghianti di Lucca. Ha vinto il Compasso d'Oro per la Ricerca nel 1979 e il Compasso d'Oro per la Carriera nel 2016. Le sue esperienze di ricerca nell'arte, nell'architettura e nel design lo hanno portato a sviluppare temi come *La casa telematica* (MoMA di New York, 1972 – Fiera di Milano, 1983), *Rapporto tra Spazio reale e Spazio virtuale* (Triennale di Milano 1979, 1992), *La casa neoeclettica* (Abitare il Tempo, 1990), *Cultura Balneare* (Centro Culturale Cattolica, 1985/95).

Eleonora Lupo

Associate Professor at the Politecnico di Milano, with a PhD in Industrial Design and Multimedia Communication. Her main research interests concern product and process design cultures, Design for the Cultural Heritage system, and cultures of design research and scientific publishing, dealing with a pluriversal approach for decentring design knowledge and narratives. She is vice president of SID Società Italiana del design, a member of the Board of the PhD Program in Design at Politecnico di Milano, and of the Collegium of Reviewers of The Design Journal.

Professoressa associata al Politecnico di Milano, PhD in Disegno industriale e comunicazione multimediale. I suoi principali interessi di ricerca si rivolgono alle culture del design di prodotto e di processo, al design per il patrimonio culturale e alle culture della ricerca e pubblicazione scientifica, tramite un approccio pluriverso per decentrare la conoscenza e narrazione del design. È vicepresidente della SID Società Italiana del design, membro del collegio di Dottorato in Design del Politecnico di Milano e del Collegium of Reviewers di The Design Journal.

Antonella Penati

PhD, Full Professor of Design at Politecnico di Milano. She served as President of the Bachelor's Degree in Industrial Design (2004-2010) and as Deputy Dean of the Faculty of Design (2002-2010) under Dean Alberto Seassarò. From 2019 to 2025 she has been Coordinator of the Design and Cultures Section of the Department of Design. Main research areas: the nature of design knowledge and modes of

knowledge transmission in education; design culture as a driver of socio-technical innovation dynamics (*Mappe dell'innovazione. Il cambiamento tra tecnica economia e società*, 1999) [Maps of Innovation: Change among Technology, Economy, and Society]. On the nature of the socio-technical object she has recently focused on pharmaceuticals (*In-Home Medication. Integrating Multidisciplinary Perspectives in Design-Driven Pharma Practices*, 2024).

Dottore di Ricerca, è Professore Ordinario di Design al Politecnico di Milano. Ha rivestito il ruolo di Presidente del Corso di Laurea in Design industriale (2004-2010); di Preside Vicario della Facoltà del Design (2002-2010) con Preside Alberto Seassaro. Dal 2019 al 2025 è Coordinatrice della Sezione Design e Culture del Dipartimento di Design.

Principali ambiti di ricerca: la natura dei saperi progettuali e le modalità di trasmissione di conoscenza in ambito formativo; la cultura del design come motore di dinamiche di innovazione socio-tecnica (*Mappe dell'innovazione. Il cambiamento tra tecnica economia e società*, 1999). Sulla natura dell'oggetto socio-tecnico ha di recente focalizzato l'attenzione sui farmaci (*In-Home Medication. Integrating Multidisciplinary Perspectives in Design-Driven Pharma Practices*, 2024).

Agnese Rebaglio

Designer and PhD, Associate Professor at the Design Department of Politecnico di Milano. Her research focuses on the role of design in innovation processes related to interiors, with an emphasis on their cultural significance and, in particular, urban spaces, from a perspective of sustainability and inclusion. She is scientific director of the Specializing Master *Design for Public Spaces* provided by POLI.design. She has developed research in the field of: design for urban social inclusion; processes of urban regeneration; energy sustainability promoted by design; circular economy for new production chains. Promoter, for the Interior Design Degree Course, of GIDE (Group for International Design Education), a network of European design schools that collaborates in educational programs.

Designer e PhD, professoressa associata di Design presso il Dipartimento di Design del Politecnico di Milano. La sua attività di ricerca si

concentra sul ruolo del design nei processi di innovazione degli interni, con riferimento alla loro portata culturale e in particolare degli spazi urbani, in una prospettiva di sostenibilità e inclusione. È direttrice scientifica del Master di Specializzazione in *Design for Public Spaces* offerto da POLI.design. Ha sviluppato ricerche nei seguenti ambiti: design per l'inclusione sociale urbana; processi di rigenerazione urbana; sostenibilità energetica promossa dal design; economia circolare per nuove filiere produttive. Promotrice, per il Corso di Laurea in Interior Design, di GIDE (*Group for International Design Education*), una rete di scuole di design europee che collaborano in programmi educativi.

Fabrizio Schiaffonati

Architect. Lecturer at Politecnico di Milano from 1967 to 2019. Full Professor in Architectural Technology from 1980 to 2012. Visiting professor at the Accademia di Architettura di Mendrisio (2001-2005) and at Università Bocconi, Milan (2006). At Politecnico di Milano he directed the *Istituto di Tecnologia*; the *Dipartimento di Programmazione Progettazione e Produzione edilizia*; and the *Dipartimento di Scienza e tecnologie dell'ambiente costruito*. He promoted and coordinated the PhD programmes in *Innovazione tecnica e progetto nell'architettura* and *Design e tecnologie per la valorizzazione dei beni culturali*. In 2006 he was among the founders of the *Società italiana della Tecnologia dell'architettura*. His main projects are published in *Calamida, Lucchini, Schiaffonati Architetti* and in *Tecnologia Architettura Territorio*.

Achitetto. Docente al Politecnico di Milano dal 1967 al 2019. Professore Ordinario in Tecnologia dell'architettura dal 1980 al 2012. Visiting professor all'Accademia di Architettura di Mendrisio dal 2001 al 2005 e all'Università Bocconi di Milano nel 2006. Al Politecnico di Milano ha diretto l'Istituto di Tecnologia; il Dipartimento di Programmazione Progettazione e Produzione edilizia e il Dipartimento di Scienza e tecnologie dell'ambiente costruito. Ha promosso e coordinato i Dottorati di ricerca in Innovazione tecnica e progetto nell'architettura e Design e tecnologie per la valorizzazione dei beni culturali. Nel 2006 è tra i fondatori della Società italiana della Tecnologia dell'architettura. I principali progetti sono pubblicati in Calamida, Lucchini, Schiaffonati Architetti e in Tecnologia Architettura Territorio.

Paolo Tinelli

Milanese, architect. He was trained at the *Artistico di Via Hayech* thanks to the teaching of Mauro Staccioli for sculpture, Carlo Cavallotti for architecture, and Anna Finocchi for Art History. He graduated in Architecture at Politecnico di Milano with Enrico Mantero in 1989. He learned the multimedia approach of Studio Azzurro from Paolo Rosa and Leonardo Sangiorgi, and approached museography thanks to the Museo Storico Etnografico della Bassa Val Sesia created by his father. He designs with Ettore Sottsass and collaborates with Patrice Martinet in theatre. Alberto Seassaro, founder and Dean of the Faculty of Industrial Design at Politecnico di Milano, involved him in a teaching collaboration that lasted more than twenty-seven years. In his professional practice, he contaminates architectural culture with constant research in the world of art and design.

Milanese, architetto. Si è formato all'Artistico di Via Hayech grazie agli insegnamenti di Mauro Staccioli per la scultura, Carlo Cavallotti per l'architettura e Anna Finocchi per la Storia dell'Arte. Si laurea in Architettura al Politecnico di Milano con Enrico Mantero nel 1989. Comprende, da Paolo Rosa e Leonardo Sangiorgi, il multimediale di Studio Azzurro e si avvicina alla Museografia grazie al Museo Storico Etnografico della Bassa Val Sesia creato dal padre. Disegna con Ettore Sottsass e collabora con Patrice Martinet nel teatro. Alberto Seassaro, fondatore e Preside della Facoltà di Disegno industriale del Politecnico, lo coinvolge in una collaborazione didattica durata oltre ventisette anni. Nella professione, contamina la cultura architettonica con la costante ricerca nel mondo dell'arte e del design.

Maria Cristina Tonelli

She graduated in Florence in Modern Letters with an art-historical focus and was a Postgraduate Fellow and University Researcher at the Scuola Normale Superiore in Pisa; after moving to the Faculty of Architecture in Florence she became Associate Professor and subsequently Full Professor of Industrial Design at Politecnico di Milano. Her research focuses on the history of industrial design and fashion: specifically, on the historical-critical analysis of design and product in relation to their cultural, technological, economic, and production fabric. Among her

most recent publications are texts on innovation in eighteenth-century England, on Giovanni Klaus Koenig, on Alberto Rosselli and *Stile Industria*, on Gianfranco Gualtierotti, as well as several essays on Tuscan products.

Laureata a Firenze in Lettere moderne, con indirizzo storico-artistico, è stata Perfezionanda e Ricercatore universitario presso la SNS di Pisa; trasferendosi alla Facoltà di Architettura di Firenze è diventata Professore Associato e in seguito Professore Ordinario di Disegno industriale presso il Politecnico di Milano.

La sua attività di ricerca verte sulla storia dell'industrial design e della moda: in specifico, sull'analisi storico-critica del progetto e del prodotto in rapporto al loro tessuto culturale, tecnologico, economico e produttivo. Delle sue ultime pubblicazioni si segnalano i testi sull'innovazione nell'Inghilterra del Settecento, su Giovanni Klaus Koenig, su Alberto Rosselli e *Stile Industria*, su Gianfranco Gualtierotti, nonché diversi saggi sul prodotto toscano.

Raffaella Trocchianesi

Architect and Associate Professor at the Department of Design, Politecnico di Milano, she teaches Interior Design Studio and Exhibit Design Studio at the School of Design. Director of the Specializing Master's IDEA_Exhibition Design, and of the Specialization Course Design and Digital Technologies for the Intangible Heritage, she mainly deals with Design for Cultural Heritage in terms of museography and exhibition design, communication and enhancement of local areas, new models and narratives of cultural experiences, and the relationship between design, Humanities and arts. She is currently scientific lead on the project Sound Design & Cultural Heritage.

Architetto e Professore associato presso il dipartimento di Design del Politecnico di Milano. Insegna *Design degli Interni* e *Exhibition Design* presso la Scuola del Design. È direttore del Master *IDEA-Exhibition Design* e del corso di specializzazione *Design e Tecnologie Digitali per il Patrimonio Culturale Intangibile*. Svolge attività didattica, progettuale e di ricerca prevalentemente nell'ambito del design per la valorizzazione dei beni culturali in termini di allestimento, museografia, nuovi modelli

di fruizione, narrazione e linguaggi per la cultura, relazione tra design Humanities e arti. È responsabile scientifico del progetto di ricerca *Sound Design and Cultural Heritage*.

This volume is part of *Design Philology* editorial project aimed at enhancing the history of design at Politecnico di Milano and, in particular, inaugurates the series *The Masters*, dedicated to the figures whose thought has fueled the cultural pluralism that is the hallmark of the entire institutional project.

The remembrance of the Masters begins with Alberto Seassaro, the demiurge, a Dean capable of giving *Design* a home by conceiving and building the first Italian Faculty at Politecnico di Milano and guiding it to the scope we know today: that of a major international system for education and research. A designing intelligence, he is owed the construction of the cultural community of the *Italian Design System*. It was no simple challenge, because in the case of design we are dealing not only with a discipline worthy of teaching and autonomous research paths, but also with an emergent phenomenon of Italian culture whose outcomes are celebrated as the splendors of an imaginative synthesis that has become, beyond our country as well, a model of invention. In the background of this quasi-biographical account lie the intertwinings with the worlds of art, architecture, and design, and the cultural imprint toward experimentation that Alberto Seassaro received during his formative years at Politecnico di Milano.