



The Logic of Approximation,
in Art and in Life

Edited by
Aldo Colonetti and Gillo Dorfles

21st Century.
Design After Design



XX1T

SilvanaEditoriale

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***The Logic of Approximation,
in Art and in Life***
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in Art and in Life***
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DESIGN

Perhaps and Maybe Beppe Finessi

Having no certainties, cultivating doubt, believing in the perhaps and maybes.

Relying – precisely for this reason – on patient research. On fine tuning ideas and projects through successive adjustments. Basing progressive improvements on the many tests conducted until only the day before. Certain, still, that tomorrow, you can – you might have to – change your mind.

There are several emblematic cases in the history of Italian design of great achievements developed thanks to the healthy daily practice of approximation.

Franco Albini designed his masterpiece chair *Luisa* – produced by the brothers Ezio and Roberto Poggi and awarded with the Compasso d'Oro in 1955 – after many years of constant testing, variations, calibrations, each time based on new versions of the object that he produced for private homes and specific commissions (besides, as it has already been written, many of the icons of Italian design were originally born for punctual occasions of interior design, and only later entered the catalogues of high quality companies) – for which Albini designed everything, objects included. An early version of the chair was found already in Villa Pestarini (Milan, 1938) and later in the Istituto di dermatologia cosmetica Hotz (Milan, 1945), before landing in the workshop

of the master carpenters-ebony specialists of Pavia in the early 1950s, where it underwent further perfecting before achieving the top standard we know.

In the early 1970s, Angelo Mangiarotti began his reflection on gravity-based embedding applied to the design of marble and stone tables – an experimentation which will lead him, through successive models, to set one record after the other, from the *Eros* marble table (1971) with a truncated-conical leg and the resting/embedding portion between leg and surface coinciding with the whole circular contact surface, to the *Incas* table in Sereina stone (1978), with a truncated pyramid-shaped leg and the surface resting only on two or four upper sides, to the *Asolo* granite table (1981), where the leg consists of a simple inclined trapezoidal plate and the resting surfaces are further reduced to the two rounded upper edges. This trio of design masterpieces alone justifies the honorary degree that Mangiarotti received in 1998 from the Technische Universität in Munich, and demonstrates that continuous development, starting each time from the new results reached the day before, is the only – intelligent and effective – road to reaching achievements that only yesterday would have been unthinkable.

Bruno Munari designed his series of *Sottovasi* for Danese in 1962: a sequence as well as an exercise in style, like a variation on a theme, where size (20 x 60 cm) is the only constant whilst the materials and shapes of the supporting surfaces and handles vary in relation to the many materials used – from Malacca cane to violet wood, aluminium to brass, via white marble,



Corrado Levi, *Holiday Home in Palau*, 1993

from felt to granite, sandblasted crystal to ebony – in constant development through successive tests leading to an inventory of different possibilities that support one another and taken together become absolute.

For the general design of his *Casa per vacanze* (holiday house) in Palau (1993), Corrado Levi draws on the structure of the typical Sardinian *stazzo*, and through successive, multiple and almost endless research, he arrives at the definition of two salient details. On a sleepless night he draws – like in a trance – a number of different solutions to the problem of the wrong placement of the exhaust pipe on the only support available to him at this time – kitchen roll – until he has an intuition of the “exact” form to correct the mistake of

the tradition with a sculptural gesture shaped like a flame (which becomes that of the chimney). In a similar way, to visually balance the asymmetric shape of a concrete beam (made to underline the profile of the mountain that characterises the natural horizon), he imagines a number of versions of a simple white painted symbol that in the definitive version becomes an abstract figure that does refer to nothing outside of itself.

The same goes for the people involved in this project, from Riccardo Blumer, responsible here for the intelligent exhibition design, who over the years – in his desire to “beat Robin Day” – has designed several technologically innovative chairs – each the outcome of the perfecting of tens and tens of prototypes, to Alberto Meda, an engineer with great talent, measure and elegance, who for a long time and in full freedom – far from the sirens of the market – dedicated himself to pure research and development pursuing ethical and political dreams; from Denis Santachiara, who has always designed the possibilities offered, by technology and by successive developments, but always in a soft and emotional way, to Lorenzo Damiani, who takes this method to heart and has made it the lifeblood of each of his creations – programmatically free, distant from the logics of the market that require only certainties and definitive solutions.

So long live approximation, if it means all of these imperfect wonders.



Inventario 01 Cover, 2010

The Bearable Lightness of Marble Lorenzo Damiani

The *Foglio* bench, first presented at Fondazione Achille Castiglioni on occasion of the *Lorenzo Damiani. Senza Stile* exhibition in 2012 and produced by Pusterla Marmi, is composed of a wooden structure upon which a thin layer of marble is simply rested and then reinforced. The stone sheet – in appearance as light as a sheet of paper – flexes under the weight of each different body, generating similar – though never the same – shapes; whilst a heavy body might draw a marble curve that adheres to the structure, a child's body will not even come close to bending it completely. The underlying wooden structure represents the maximum possible curvature of the plate, which can either come to perfectly coincide with the structure or more simply approach it.

Various factors contribute to determining the curvature: first of all the weight of the person sitting but also, I believe, the person's determination in the act of sitting itself. Users will remember the emotion of when they first sat down – the memory of this feeling of surprise will remain with them, as it did with me: as incredulous as Saint Thomas, I lowered myself carefully into the bench and the marble softly bent under my weight, without breaking.

Marble is traditionally thought of as a hard and rigid material: as a consequence of this we are initially scared to sit down for fear of breaking the thin marble plate. So we sit with extreme caution and lightness, only to then become aware of the flexible robustness of the seat: these *tests* generate an arch



Lorenzo Damiani, *Foglio*, 2012
Marble bench, 100 x 50 x 40 cm. Pusterla Marmi
Courtesy Lorenzo Damiani

**XXI Triennale
International Exhibition**

**Milan 2016
2 April — 12 September**

**21st Century.
Design After Design**

“We live in the midst of approximation, we might even say that, without approximation, our life would be impossible, and so would our art”, wrote Gillo Dorfles on occasion of the *De Divina Proportione* conference held at Triennale in 1951, with the participation of – among others – Le Corbusier, Giedion, Nervi, Rogers, Zevi and young designers Gregotti and Canella. What has changed since then about the theme Dorfles introduces – approximation – so central to the relation between design and artwork? Production methods, new materials, advanced technologies have changed the way we design the world. Since the '50s, Dorfles' research has focused on the relationship between the aesthetic dimension and the empirical existence of things. The exhibition is a journey inside approximation, on which artistic languages – art, architecture, cooking, dance, design, music, photography, etc. – are based. On show works by G. Basilico, M. Botta, J. Cage, G. Colin, L. Damiani, G. Devecchi, M. Duchamp, M. Ferrari, R. Filliou, E. Fiorucci, C. Gambardella, G. Iliprandi, P. Manzoni, G. Marchesi, A. Meda, A. Milani, U. Mulas, F. Origoni, R. Piano, A. Pomodoro, D. Santachiara, Studio Azzurro, B. Vautier; and 20 everyday objects, selected by Blumerandfriends, that are apparently simple – perhaps approximate – but essential to our lives: from the simple ruler to the pencil, from Post-It notes to the broom and the sickle. The logic of approximation, especially today, is fundamental to the evolution of everyday objects as well as new artistic languages.

With contributions by: S. Annicchiarico, V. Auricchio, Blumerandfriends, M. Botta, G. Calvenzi, G. Canova, A. Capatti, M. Capuani, F. Carmagnola, G. Colin, L. Damiani, L. De Biase, M. Devecchi, M. Ferrari, B. Finessi, E. Fiorucci, M. Galbiati, C. Gambardella, G. Iliprandi, V. Ingoglia, F. Irace, F. Leprino, G. Malossi, G. Marchesi, A. Meda, F. Origoni, L. Perondi, R. Piano, A. Pomodoro, G. Ranzi, L. Sansone, D. Santachiara, A. Santi, V. Sieni, Studio Azzurro, U. Volli.



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