

POLITECNICO MILANO | PRESENTS

PhD Yearbook | 2019

Tagliaro, Chiara	88
Taisch, Marco (Supervisor)	406, 410
Talamo, Cinzia M. L. (Supervisor)	42
Talamo, Cinzia M. L. (Tutor)	76
Tapia Ubeda, Francisco Javier	438
Tartaglia, Andrea (Supervisor)	64
Tasselli, Niccolò	592
Tateo, Davide	392
Tavakoli Dinani, Ali	594
Testa, Susanna	180
Thanh Nhan, Phan	218
Tibúrcio, Isa Helena	182
Tironi, Enrico (Relatore)	194
Tornatore, Massimo (Supervisor)	292, 388
Toscani, Nicola	198
Toscani, Sergio (Supervisor)	200
Trabucchi, Daniel	440
Trocchianesi, Raffaella (Supervisor)	178
Troncone, Sara Giulia	90
Tronconi, Enrico (Supervisor)	206, 276
Trucco, Paolo (Supervisor)	416, 428
Tubaro, Stefano (Supervisor)	302
Turner, Michael (Co-Supervisor)	106
Turri, Stefano (Supervisor)	458

U

Ugolini, Michele (Supervisor)	106
Umberto, Perego (Advisor)	612
Urgo, Marcello (Supervisor)	528
Utica, Giovanni (Supervisor)	82

V

Valente, Marco V. (Co-Supervisor)	86
Valušytė, Rūta	184
Van Uffelen, Paul (Supervisor)	220
Vedani, Maurizio (Supervisor)	512
Veljkovic, Ana	92
Verani, Marco (Co-Advisor)	490
Vezzoli, Carlo (Supervisor)	160
Viganò, Francesco	536
Viganò, Roberto (Supervisor)	506
Vigotti, Francesca	596
Villamaina, Roberta	276
Vismara, Riccardo (Advisor)	136
Visone, Roberta	154

Vitale, Daniele (Supervisor)	34
Volonterio, Alessandro (Advisor)	268

W

Wang, Wei	230
Wang, Yuchen	574
Waqas, Abi	394
Wong, Limsoon (Supervisor)	370

Y

Yu, Chunlong	538
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Z

Zagarella, Federica	94
Zahmatkesh, Shima	396
Zanda, Claudia	110
Zanoni, Michele	200
Zanotto, Francesca	112
Zappa, Emanuele (Supervisor)	524
Zappa, Franco (Supervisor)	372
Zarei, Mohammad Hossein	442
Zasso, Alberto (Supervisor)	504, 520
Zebarjadi Sar, Mandana	540
Zio, Enrico (Supervisor)	230, 480
Zucca, Marco	96
Zucchetti, Carlo	576
Zunino, Paolo (Advisor)	152
Zurlo, Francesco (Supervisor)	162, 174

DEVOID OF ANY STYLE. PROBLEMS AND PERSPECTIVES OF ARCHITECTURE IN THE AGE OF POST-CONSUMPTION

Francesca Zanotto - Supervisor: prof. Alessandro Rocca

The dissertation analyzes orientations of architectural research and practice in the exceptional complexity of the contemporary age, characterized by the environmental conditions of Anthropocene, the digitalization of services, the pervasiveness of the information, the economic recession. This complexity is tackled through the investigation of current consumption patterns, affected and profoundly changed by the illustrated conditions and by the access to new fields, new markets, new choice opportunities. The choice to investigate the contemporary condition moves from the observation of the reconsideration the architect's role is undergoing in the present age: a widespread opinion claims it is living a crisis. The preparation of the architect is specialized, but at the same time it is wide, hybrid and contaminated, holding together technical field with economic, social, cultural, artistic, political spheres. The architect is one of the few professionals able to grasp the complexity and the interconnections of the present day, with the right tools – technical and cultural – to affect the reality. Therefore, architect's fields of action may be way broader than those

experimented at the present time: the potentialities they offer need to be investigated, to take advantage of the rich environments the contemporary age is unlocking. The investigation focuses on the evolution of consumption styles in the last decade, from the disruptive explosion of the economic crisis of 2007/08 which has reset established frameworks and produced new fields to explore, the under-construction fields of post-consumption. The focus is on consumption for its relation to resource use and the connected social and cultural attitude, and for its pervasiveness in the mass society: individuals are conscious or unconscious consumers in each stage of their existence. Moreover, consumption is inherent in human nature, basis of metabolism and survival and primary source of pleasure and fulfillment since the first moments of life. To observe how consumption conditions are changing means observing a moment of profound modification of the values and purposes according to which the Earth is inhabited. *Waste* is employed in the research as a sign of the complexities and contradictions detected in current consumption modalities; the

analysis around waste focuses on the scarcity of natural resources, consequence and antithesis of waste. Waste is thus investigated for its physical and cultural value, together with the consumption dynamics around its production and its removal. The research reconstructs the path towards the awareness of the limits of Earth's ecosystem and its resources, from the literature and the design experimentations of the '60 around the idea of systemic thinking to contemporary age, where theories about degrowth and the rise of independent consumption paths push the focus of architectural debate far from iconic architecture towards a design moved by different drivers. Among the different ideologies and alternative development models rising in the Anthropocene era, the paradigm of Circular Economy (CE) has been chosen as a case study to be analyzed on the basis of its radicality: it is presented as a flexible production and consumption model finding a way to negotiate waste, aiming to systematize several contemporary issues and give unique solutions. Furthermore, it has been chosen as significantly implemented in the field of design, analyzed in

this work in the Dutch context. Above all CE, is analyzed for its openness: it constitutes a free paradigm, to be taken and shaped according to the specific conditions and it is thus able to develop specific cultural and social attitudes and lifestyles. CE is hence investigated in order to understand contradictions and potentialities of new economies and new consumption models and analyze their outputs when applied to architecture and design domains. This investigation is carried out referring to the recent research production in the Netherlands and the innovations implemented in the last few years in the Dutch urban development. The Netherlands has been chosen as research field due the official acquisition of CE as governmental interest, the widespread application of circular model in the national economy and a pervasive presence of the investigation of circular paradigm in the academic and professional reference context. The research has unveiled how the implications that CE paradigm and similar production/consumption models have on architecture still present many investigation opportunities, which would develop at best in the framework of a research by design. On one hand, a difficult relation subsists between this paradigm and many angles of the discipline: the theoretical application of CE to architecture opens interesting perspectives in terms of space uses but envisages a restraining scenario in methodological terms. The

potentialities opened by the conception of buildings as parts of interconnected cycles are innovative, but the innovation character looks unidirectional: on the long run, the CE paradigm theoretically contemplates all the components, element and material composing architecture as part of a cycle, constantly rotating around itself, with few spaces for other visions. On the other hand, CE application to design involves the promising field regarding the necessity of a reverse infrastructure supporting the reverse logistic CE entails. This infrastructure is mainly administrative and logistical but is supported by a necessary physical counterpart: a repertoire of forms, tools, spaces and uses to envision, to be accurately designed around the reverse processes entailed by circular paradigm. The understanding of the interactions between new consumption models and design is examined further through the study of several architectural exhibitions from the last decade, contemporary places of cultural production which have chosen to dialogue with the changing conditions described in this work. The analysis of the production showcased within these exhibitions (*Re-Cycle. Strategies for the House, the City, the Planet, Maxxi, Rome, 2011/12; Designing Scarcity, Nai, Rotterdam, 2014; Reporting from the Front - XV Venice Architecture Biennale, 2016; After Belonging - Oslo Architecture Triennale, 2016; bioTallinn - Tallinn Architecture Biennale, 2017*), together with

other contributions from the present public debate around design composes a complex but significant map of current orientations in architecture. One of the major directions emerging from this examination is the growing ephemeralization of the architectural practice. Among the many examples analyzed, there are few evidences of built space and vast of space uses and management, suggesting a practice less focused on the design of objects and committed to the enabling of the processes preceding and following the building of the objects. Within this background, there is still space for the materialization: design discipline can act more and more in combination, in a synergic action with other realms to elaborate systemic answers to multifaceted questions. Architecture is a part - often central - of multidisciplinary plans, involving various expertise and angles, aimed to the triggering of complex dynamics of supralocal interest. This perspective proposes an answer to the quest for new paradigms that has identified the architectural debate in the last decade: the new paradigm seems right to be the absence of a unique paradigm, in favor of a discipline able to take different forms and perform multifaceted approaches to different and multiple conditions. This awareness opens up for architects the opportunity to be involved in many, promising expanded fields.