Design 2030: Practice









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Alberto Bassi, Patrizia Bolzan, Daria Casciani, Michele De Chirico, Barbara Del Curto, Loredana Di Lucchio, Venere Ferraro, Gian Andrea Giacobone, Angela Giambattista, Slivia Imbesi, Giovanni Innella, Sarvpriya Raj Kumar, Michele Marchi, Giuseppe Mincolelli, Maurizio Montalti,



dimension of

consumption systems?

Design has been recognized as a discipline of doing. Its practical dimension has always exceeded the theoretical one, and the second has always placed the first at the centre. If this assumed a connotation of certainty in the context of the 20th century, today, in the contemporary world, is the Design

doing still valid? How the applied dimension of this knowledge has to be expressed? Can the "profession" of the designer specialized in product categories still valid? What space will it occupy between the professions of the future? What should be its relationship with production and

The issue 72 of **diid** opens up to those applied experiments where Design, within the laboratories and in the places of production, is outlining a different

nature and prefigures a new role in and for society.

Loredana Di Lucchio, Lorenzo Imbesi, Sabrina Lucibello



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# **Think**

# Resilient Professions. When Design practices become responsible

If we have to ask ourselves what the practice of Design will be like in the near future, we certainly need to observe the present and understand what the signs of changes are and try to project them in a prediction logic.

The most evident sign that we cannot ignore is the ever more pressing acknowledgement of the inadequacy of the massive consumption system to which the contemporary society, at least that in countries with mature economies, had conformed and informed during the previous century.

Design, born and developed in that same system, today is demonstrating the need for a rethinking and a change of its paradigms. At the level of critical theoretical reflection, this rethinking and change are by now a recognized fact, and possible evolutions have already been imagined.

What we are interested in knowing here is whether and what changes are also taking place in the design practical dimension with which the designers express themselves and give their contribution to the social, cultural, productive and economic system.

For this reason, the authors have opened an informal dialogue with two interesting Design realities that already in their nature seems to have the seed of change. Thanks to a reflective, critical, but equally germinative action, they have made their work and themselves "a field of experimentation" for the design of the near future.

An interesting picture emerges where the keyword is "resilience", understood here not in its political meaning of "resistance" but in the one closest to psychology that speaks of "positive reorganization", of "sensitive reconstruction" of "enhancement of identity ". So here is a practice made up of ideas even more than forms, critical thoughts that as objects resiliently redesign the near future as if to answer the "levian" question of "if not now, when?"

[ anthropocene, responsibility, design practices, joe velluto, forma fantasma ]

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# Design as an attitude[1]

The Design has always been an attitude typical of the man who, relying on an innate predisposition for planning and solving problem, has tried to improve his condition by changing what nature did not make available or not had granted to him (Di Lucchio, 2018). It is an almost ancestral attitude that man also shares with other animal species: and not only with the primates close to us, but also with birds, able to arrange their elaborate nests, or with insects, able to build their sophisticated constructions, and also with the simpler life forms such as bacteria and viruses that chemically modify the habitat to make it hospitable for their residence.

However, if in the human being this propensity has been the driving force for the unstoppable technological progress that has brought us to the current condition, today a general picture emerges that returns countless and evident criticalities rather than benefits.

Especially in the last three centuries, the effects of the ingenuity and work of human beings on the global environment have intensified until reaching an epochal transition that has veered towards the Anthropocene<sup>[2]</sup>. It is a human-dominated geological era (Crutzen, 2006) in which human actions irreversibly impact on the terrestrial ecosystem, causing territorial, structural, and climatic changes. An era where the cracking of the links between man and habitat does not only concern natural resources and the environment, but also the spheres of ethics and politics.

It is unprecedented, but a specific, predictable condition, in which the exponential increase of artefacts places the issue of pollution at the center of the debate. In this condition, scientific and technological progress outline consumption scenarios where every waste becomes obsolescence. Moreover, the many social, economic and cultural differences continue to divide an already open society globally, and the reasons for production and consumption are often distant from the real needs of people's lives (Imbesi, 2010).

Examining and following the now irreversible anthropogenic traces, therefore, means identifying and understanding the factors, both natural and artificial, that determine the creation of these new conditions of imbalance. "Nature that discards everything that does not support the entire system, is radically discarding our species as well," said Elizabeth Kolbert (2014) in her book "The sixth extinction" and the sustainability of the entire ecosystem starts from the formation of new planning.

The analytical and scientific eye of Design can attempt to respond with practical solutions to macroscopic problems and imbalances between multiple systems (Thackara, 2006). Design can be able to profoundly reconsider the relationship between human beings and the habitat that hosts them: renew ing the processes of design-production-consumption of new artefacts; limiting their environmental impact; rethinking how human beings build relationships within the ecosystem in which they live.

Therefore, Design becomes fundamental to develop projects considering all the interconnections in-between product, service, system and the environment. An

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environment that includes its ecological, social, cultural, and technological aspects (Marseglia, 2017) and imagining the system not as a simple sum of its multiple parts but as a complex of intricate interrelationships, where quality derives from the relationships between the components of the system itself (Capra, 2013).

The goal is to reach design outcomes characterized by a profound interest in humanity, in its habitat and its system of relationships, that are altruistic, extroverted, interested in both the natural and social environment, and capable of matching ethics with aesthetics (Antonelli in Croci, 2018). They are new, creative, and cross-disciplinary expressions, sensitive and research-oriented, ecologically responsible, and socially responsive, the result of a renewed sense of responsibility of the Design Discipline which thus becomes a radical, revolutionary, and resilient tool (Papanek, 1972). In this constantly changing scenario, a profound cultural change emerges, already underway for some years, the result of the formation and dissemination of critical thought and a systemic vision that guides innovation on a social and ethical scale. Here Design acts or should act, as a meaningful and conscious planning tool for the rethinking of products and services that can take care of the world and man in an effective way.

Therefore, how is the profession of designer adapting today in an attempt to respond, through design practice, to the environmental, economic, and social challenges that the anthropogenic era requires us to face? Trying to answer this question, we have opened a dialogue with two interesting Design studios which, albeit with different approaches, are both addressing the topic set here through experimentation, research, and production.<sup>[3]</sup>

The dialogue dealt with the ethical responsibility of design and rethinking the traditional practices to reflect on the role that the Design Discipline has in the search for a new balance in the interrupted relationship between man and nature.

## Joe Velluto: resilient actions[4]

The ethical dimension of Design is today facing a new season of environmental and social commitments to respond to the many emergencies/urgencies that the most recent anthropogenic mutations require.

Together with Joe Velluto studio, we questioned how much this new version of the human-made world is influencing the traditional design practice. We reflected if Design as a discipline can intercept new directions of change in a resilient perspective, adapting the practice changes to the real world through a meaningful sense of responsibility. The ethical dimension of Design is today facing a new season of environmental and social commitments to respond to the many emergencies/urgencies that the most recent anthropogenic mutations require. The answer is obvious. Design is changing, and we must necessarily ask ourselves what it means to be a designer in the anthropocentric present we are living. We must reconsider the small part that we represent as living beings on this planet by reflecting on the interconnection that exists not only between human beings but also between all living beings on this Earth.

Design practices have always and continuously shaped themselves to respond to the various economic, social, and technological dynamics from its origin until today. Especially in Italy, after a very early rationalist orientation, there was a response – around the 1960s – linked to a radical approach, or counter-design, which went beyond the rational setup, entering the most interesting and unknown territory of reflection. It was a "Design with the thought" – linked to the great masters Sottsass, Munari, Mari, Castiglioni – related more to the meaning of the project and a little less to the shape. Then there was an approach – around the 90s – oriented more to the morphological dimension of artefacts, where form, aesthetics, and the consumer industry were the masters. A "Shape Design" which, by making the reasons for technique and the market prevail over meaning, led Design towards a formalist drift (Mari, 2002). Then, over the years, there have been several other approaches related to marketing and design thinking that have transformed the Design into a service, emptying the discipline of its soul of research and experimentation to go towards safe roads in economic terms (especially after the 2008 crisis).

Today, the Design Discipline is discovering a new historical phase that goes beyond the dynamics of the previous and rise to a profession that is no longer the overlap of various disciplines, but a multiform metabolic cycle in which they feed on each other and transform each other.

By feeding and contaminating each other, they generate a new way of designing aimed at improving the human condition to produce progress. We are therefore passing from a form of organization as a set of independent skills, to a heterogeneous fusion of simultaneous subjects that reason and work on the bonds that unite men to the natural environment. Bonds that have been deeply compromised, or even destroyed, over the years.

As designers, we should go back to making hierarchical clarity between what matters and understanding that man and nature are not separate entities and, everything is connected. We should understand that real innovation does not mean designing the ultimate LED lamp with IoT technology, but designing with a new mentality, possibly taking into consideration the end of life of a product and its environmental, social, and economic sustainability. Anthropocentric design (son of the great Masters of the past) must de-anthropize itself, leaving room for the imagination to (quickly) explore new solutions useful for the community (Meschiari, 2019). Here, the role of the Designer is crucial and cannot fail to be responsible in this sense.

In the same way, Joe Velluto Studio, always focusing on the daily human gestures within the theatre of life, has amplified their design actions in an attempt to adapt, with coherence, effectiveness, and responsibility to the different global challenges that the planet calls us to face today.

In particular, they focused on the issue of the indiscriminate use of plastic, wondering if it makes sense to demonize it in such an extreme way, or if it is possible to identify an alternative to the problem that leads to a more conscious and responsible use of this precious raw material.

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An example is the project "To re or not to re", an apparent reference to the famous phrase from Shakespeare's Hamlet, which is a collection of vases produced using a post-consumer "second life" plastic, that therefore derives directly from waste, 100% recycled and recyclable. Each container "wears" a mask that represents the "original containers" from which the vase itself comes, representing its past life. The colour range is always variable because it comes from what it is possible to find from time to time in landfills, which is plastic materials compatible with each other and divided by colour. Once transformed into granules, they can guarantee a product quality very similar to that of a product generated with virgin plastic.

This project is part of the RO Plastic Prize (an event curated by Rossana Orlandi during the Milan Design Week 2019).

Furthermore, it is evolving in collaboration with the partner company, Teraplast SpA, thanks to new design research on the theme of information linked to the conscious and responsible use of plastics.

With a completely different approach, but always concerning the theme of the product life cycle, the "One shot, one life" project has questioned critically and provocatively on how to reintroduce an iconic piece of Design, the Superleggera designed by Giò Ponti for Cassina in 1955, within the biological life-death-life chain. Thanks to microholes in the wood structure, obtained by shooting the legs of the chair, the entry of woodworms that will initiate the process of re-inserting, facilitating the connection of the chair into the biological chain of life.

As the previous one, also the project "One shot, one life" is part of the line of experiments related to the theme "Responsible vision for a responsible design" which underlines the crucial role of Design in facing today's ethical issues.

Within the capitalist system, we have focused on making the human being feel good, but, in reality, the ecosystem in which we live is not composed only of the human being, on the contrary, we are the minority compared to the multitude of other beings living. The designer, therefore, has the necessary task of offering responsible answers that avoid contaminating the planet with "poorly designed objects and structures" (Papanek, 1972).

# Forma Fantasma: resilient reflections[5]

In a context in which events occur suddenly and uncontrollably and in which resources are increasingly limited, an idea of research-oriented Design emerges more than ever. Here Design is capable of operating according to complex and fragmented operational approaches that are not limited to observe what exists passively, but rather to determine virtuous mechanisms of plausible transformations.

Together with Forma Fantasma Studio, we have reasoned if it is possible today to detect a paradigm shift that pushes Design to critically questioning about overcoming traditional concepts, practices and processes. The aim is to give an adequate response to the environmental, social, economic and technological challenges that new global assets call us to face.

Precisely as a consequence of the various kinds of stresses that the current context imposes on us, from the beginning of their work, the focus of the design activities of Studio Forma Fantasma has never been to try to satisfy the needs of the Industry necessarily. Nevertheless, their research and experiments immediately have questioned the traditional "four-leaf clover structure" of design, production, sale, and consumption (De Fusco, 1985), now considered traditionalist if compared to the current scenario of instability.

Since 2009, with the project "Molding Tradition", the Studio has focused much more on the meaning of objects into a broader context as a response to a historical moment characterized by a profound economic and social crisis. The project "Molding Tradition" examined the influence of African culture during the medieval period in Sicily draw a parallel with the current migration crisis.

A large part of their works has concerned with research in the field of materials investigated from multiple points of view – from the traditional dimension to the perspective of the meaning that they preserve and carry with them.

In the case of "Botanica" project – that has been commissioned by the Plart Foundation in Naples – the focus was on the origin of plastic materials in the pre-industrial (or pre-Bakelite) period, namely before oil entered plastic production processes.

The investigation of these raw materials led to the discovery of unexpected textures, sensations, and technical possibilities offered by natural polymers extracted from plants or derived from animals.

Although it was born within theoretical research, the project evolved towards the production aspects, testing some of the materials identified in the research phase according to engineered and systematized dimension.

Another part of the design experiences has concerned the work done on the local dimension to understanding how the connection in between production, place and context, and to emphasize the social attention that the designer's action should have today.

With the "De Natura Fossilium" project, the Studio explored the lava material of Etna and Stromboli, questioning the link between tradition and local culture and the relationship between objects and the idea of cultural heritage.

The aim was to change the concept of place as a tourist attraction/show towards an idea of place as a source of raw material. With the help of the volcanology centre, some glass masters, and several other professionals, the Forma Fantasma conducted exploration on the possible applications of these ashes for the production of glass-based material and volcanic fibres for fabrics.

The result was a collection of glasses, tables, stools, watches, and textiles with a linear, almost brutalist narrative line, made of lava material with different degrees of definition, from the rocky one to the polished crystal.

Similarly, with "Botanica", the "De Natura Fossilium" project also had a further phase of development that led to experimenting with the material on a larger scale, seeing the use of volcanic ash used as a glaze for tiles. The most significant aspect of this type of application is that, unlike other chemicals and metals for glazing tiles,

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which require an invasive and expensive extraction from the subsoil, volcanic ash is a non-extractable material able to significantly reduce the costs of the production process and the impact on the ecosystem.

Considering the reconfiguration of production processes, and the need of reduction of the design activity effects on the planet, we can no longer ignore that Design is effectively supporting a system that is leading us towards (probable) extinction.

For this reason, in many areas, we are learning to to "survive through design" (Papanek, 1972).

Through more critical and transformative design speculation, one of their most representative work regarding this paradigmatic shift is "Ore Stream".

A work commissioned by the Australian National Gallery of Viktoria in Melbourne and subsequently expanded for the Broken Nature exhibition curated by Paola Antonelli and inaugurated in 2019 at the Triennale in Milan.

Starting from an analysis of the economic sector in Australia, mainly based on the extraction of minerals, the project set the goal of investigating what does it mean to extract minerals, and how Design, through the creation of desirable objects, irreparably increases an "unconditional consumption", and as a consequence, the ecological disaster.

In particular, this project focused on the topic of electronic waste (which represent the largest and fastest-growing waste stream globally).

It analysed how much the optimization of products, the simple disposal, and the recovery of raw materials, can contribute to drastically reduce the extraction of precious metals from the subsoil (e.g. gold, silver, tantalum and so on).

Furthermore, the abatement of mining activities, in addition to producing an immediate economic effect (the reuse of minerals is less expensive than the procurement of new raw materials), would allow further advantages. It would guarantee to have, on the one hand, an impact in social terms, thanks to the reduction of possible armed conflicts in the countries where mining activities are involved. On the other hand, the abatement would guarantee more excellent protection in terms of air and soil healthiness, often jeopardized by incorrect storage of the extracted minerals.

To reply to these questions, through a shared platform of information and a collection of furniture made with recycled parts of the electronic devices,

The "Ore Stream" project intends to be a critical and political complaint to the electronic industry, and its overproduction, as well as, a denounce to that logic of obsolescence made be possible by reckless practices of Design.

<sup>[1]</sup>The paragraph 'Design as an attitude' is edited by Loredana di Lucchio. The paragraphs 'Joe Velluto: resilient actions' and 'Forma Fantasma: resilient reflections' are edited by Angela Giambattista.

<sup>[2]</sup>The term Anthropocene, to indicate the current geological era characterized by the intense conditioning by human activity on the natural ecosystem, dates back to 2000 by Crutzen and Stoermer (see http://www.igbp.net/download/18.316 f18321323470177580001401 / 1376383088452 / NL41.pdf). It is an evolution of a concept, previously expressed by the geologist Antonio Stoppani, in 1873, as anthropozoic era; by the Russian geochemist Vernadskij, in 1996, as no sphera; by Andrew Revkin, in 1992, as an anthrocene.

[3] The dialogues are the result of talks between the protagonists and the author, Angela Giambattista, during Joe Velluto's "Responsible Vision for Responsible Design" seminar on May 13, 2020, and the "Forma Fantasma. Open online lecture" by Forma Fantasma on April 23, 2020, organized as part of the Sapienza Design Webinars 2020 with the scientific coordination of prof. Lorenzo Imbesi.

<sup>[4]</sup> Studio Joe Velluto is a design studio born from the collaboration between Andrea Maragno and Sonia Tasca to generate a positive impact on society through a design approach aimed at research, experimentation, and debate, with an inclination towards meaning, awareness, and the common good.

<sup>[5]</sup> Forma Fantasma Studio, founded by the Italian designers duo Andrea Trimarchi and Simone Farresin, through experimental investigations on materials, explores themes such as the relationship between tradition and local culture, the critical approach to sustainability, and the meaning of objects as a cultural channel. Recognizing the designer's role as a bridge between craft, industry, object, and user, the Studio aims to create links between research-based practices and the broader industry.

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