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LANDSCAPE
ART VS
DESIGN



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PAD

via Festa del Perdono 1 – 20122 Milano – Italy
via Roma 171 – 90133 Palermo – Italy
info@padjournal.net – editors@padjournal.net

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**MAPPING THE
MEDITERRANEAN
THE DESIGN
THIRD SPACE**

Visual Territories and Communicative Landscapes. Mapping and Configuration of Complex Phenomena

Vincenzo Cristallo & Miriam Mariani

Sapienza University of Rome, Department of Planning, Design and Technology of Architecture

Keywords

Visual Territory, Communicative Landscape, Transfiguration, Mapping, Complexity.

Abstract

Joel de Rosnay (1977) defines a “complex system” as an organism composed of a large variety of components that have specialized functions (Bettini, 2014). Starting from its metaphorical value, the territorial system is complex by definition, or rather a multiform organism that, besides representing a symbolic archive of shared memory, is a real and rhetorical place whose resources and assets are the result of the historical combination of environmental, human and cultural factors that have marked life and development over time (Cristallo, 2004).

The reading of a territory is therefore a multiple action since it simultaneously envisages the interpretation of its characters and the construction of “meaning areas”. Understanding the territory is therefore equivalent to codifying the signs, alphabets and visual grammars that make up a stylistic and narrative figure capable of reproducing a “communicative landscape”. Landscape in the sense of “perspective and visual reconstruction”, made up of natural and anthropic characters and also those offered by a sort of long, empirical, and sometimes “poetic”

look, to compose a relational vision. Resuming what was claimed by Capra, namely that “relations must be mapped” (Capra, 2015), since it is not possible to measure or weigh them, therefore quantify them (qualitative and relational approach) the paper aims to illustrate reading models and visual restitution of the “concept of territory” in physical and metaphysical terms. An exercise that starts from a didactic and research experience developed within a representative process that identifies the passage from a “communication geography” (objective surface phenomena) to a “communication mapping” (phenomena’s conceptualization and relation).

1. From *Visual Territory* to *Communicative Landscape*

Considering the territory as a “complex system”, in accordance with what was previously defined by De Rosnay, means first identifying the multiple parts that contribute to composing the complexity of the whole. These parts, as they are also complex subsystems, need to be read hierarchically and according to a configuration of relationships (Cipro, 2015). Starting from a definition of the concept of “territory”, literally “geographical area, portion of land or land of a certain extension” (Treccani, 2019), the physical, geographical and, in a certain sense, materiality of the system emerges. Direct knowledge of the territory derives from the experience within it, just as its perception by an observer depends on the tools that he possesses to interact with it. The reading of the territory, therefore, is somehow filtered by the observer’s perceptive and cognitive structures. As Gregory Bateson argues, “the relationship between mind and world is such that it is the observer who gives contours to things. There is implication and, so to speak, co-emergency between observation and boundary” (Mori, 2014). However, considering the territorial system as a complex system, it is necessary to ask whether it is therefore enough to experience the territory in order to become really and deeply aware of it, or is it necessary to identify further instruments that provide for the interpretation and mapping of the relations that exist within the system.

Tightening the objective on the territory, in order to identify its parts, means defining *landscapes*, or focusing on “circumscribed areas, bounded and observed from a certain point of view” (Treccani, 2019), each of which can be found in a context

of stratifications and pre-existing with which they dialogue and relate. In a certain sense, the definition of landscapes constitutes the passage of scale from the territory to its parts, from the generic to the punctual, in order to identify delimited fields of action within which to construct meaning areas?

The passage of scale from territory to landscape constitutes the evolution from the *perception* of the territory to its *interpretation*, the transformation of a *visual territory* into a *communicative landscape* (Cristallo, Mariani, 2019), the *ri-semanticizzazione* (as attribution of new meanings) of a place through a complex observational, cognitive and planning action (Spirito, 2015).

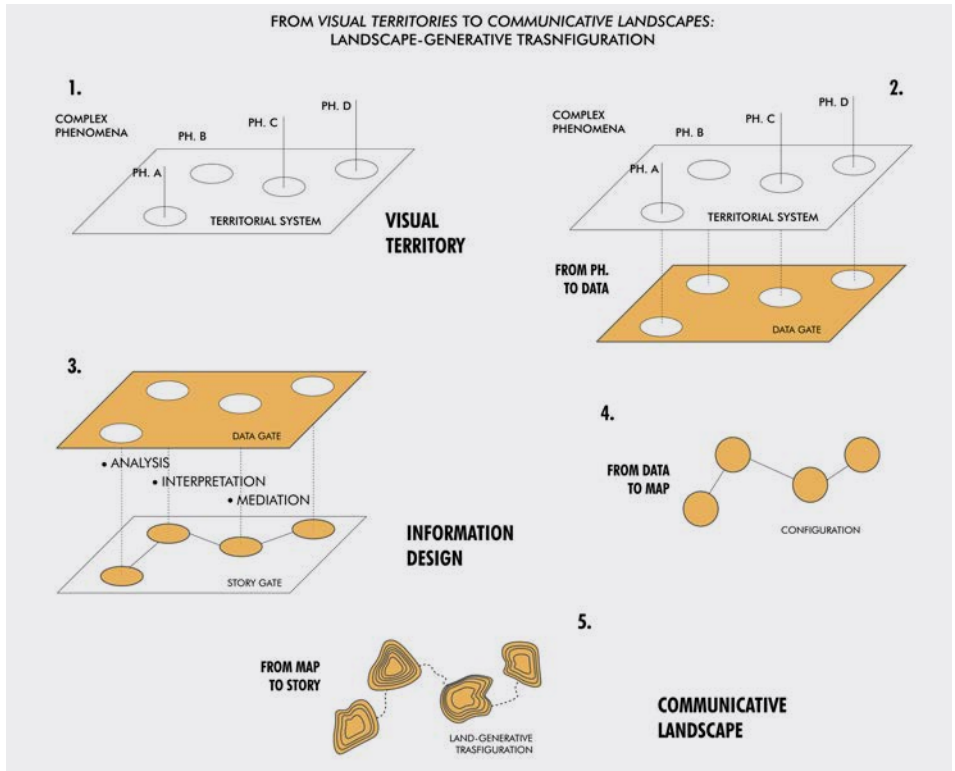


Figure 1. Design Vincenzo Cristallo, Miriam Mariani, *Landscape-Generative Transfiguration's Steps*, 2019.

In more general terms we can speak about “communication mapping”, taking up what was claimed by Capra: “Relationships must be mapped” (Capra, 2015), which makes explicit the need for a new scientific approach to relationships (as well as individual objects), since it is not possible to measure or weigh them, therefore quantify them, passing to a qualitative and relational approach, based on the analysis of processes.

The production of maps as a “searching act for the sense of place”, as “a set of identities with boundaries” (Amoruso, 2012), constitutes a project operation whose phases involve the identification of images, first mental and subsequently translated in a form, through a communicative code. However, it is necessary to consider what was stated by Alfred Korzybski about the relationship between language, map and territory: “A map is not the territory it represents but, if correct, it has a structure similar to the territory that gives an account of its usefulness” (Mori, 2014, p. 19) and adds Luca Mori: “(...) we do not really know the territory, but maps, and maps of maps. [...] Besides, we do not access the territory except through a selection of differences, remaining confined to the mapping mode” (Mori, 2014, p.30). Thus, it emerges how the mapping instrument can be considered an “intermediate world” between the observer and the territory, halfway between phenomena and their representation (Iacono, 2005).

Mapping places based on a cognitive process, taking up what was stated by Kevin Lynch in “The image of the city”, makes explicit the relational nature of the so-called “environmental images” starting from the imageability of the place, or its

figureability (Lynch, 1969). This reflection brings with it the figurative or, better to say, representative problem of perceived environmental images: the need to elaborate a “system of visual language that uses colour, shape, line, hierarchy and composition to communicate clearly and appropriately” (Woolman, in Lima, 2011, p.11).

Within the reflection on complex systems, Ross Harrison identifies as one of the key features of such systems, in addition to the “relationship”, the configurative nature of the same, understood as a hierarchy of internal system levels (Cipro, 2015). Considering literally the term “configuration” as “representation of something according to a certain disposition and a certain form similar to another object” (Treccani, 2019), the communication issue emerges strongly, both in the physical and in the metaphysical elements. It is in fact necessary to remember both the components, the tangible and the intangible, which constitute the territory system, in particular the relationships that constitute its structure. What visual restitution is, therefore, the most appropriate, together with the mapping of phenomena, in order to make the territory system communicable?

2. Mapping and *transfiguration*

The discipline of Information Design, as a process of reading and interpretation of phenomena and their restoration through visual syntheses, makes it possible to simplify very complex information to make it accessible through a communicative project. The elaboration of information is, today, a key research field about the project on the territory: contem-

porary society must be considered as the society of the immaterial, of the so-called “fifth dimension” (Cosenza, 2012), contextually to the exponential evolution of the information dimension and communication through the use of Big Data. Bertin states: “graphic representation is one of the basic sign systems conceived in the human mind in order to memorize, understand and communicate essential information” (Bertin, in Lima, 2011, p.2). The management of huge amounts of data has led to the need to investigate suitable representation tools to reduce their complexity and facilitate their understanding, the primary interest of the Data Visualization field.

For the visualization of territory’s phenomena, visual communication is based on the codification of narrative languages that allow the systematization of collected data. The coding of these languages represents the configuration phase of phenomena, having as objective the correct and easy communication of the same, through the shared understanding of the signs through which they express themselves. For this reason, the choice of visual signs cannot ignore their recognizability, however it is clear that they represent the metaphorization of reality, the filter through which science on the one hand and culture on the other, see and interpret phenomena. These signs become the mouthpiece of contemporary landscapes and their complexity, an expression not only of semantic information, but also of aesthetics (Eco, 1962), through the original and different organization of elements of already known visual grammars. More than a narrative configuration, the phenomena mapping through the tool of Data Visualization, constitutes a transfiguration, understood as

“metamorphic device par excellence (...), hypertext with various possibilities of navigation and scrolling” (Valeriani, 2004, p.33). The concept of “transfiguration” brings with it the reference to the heuristic value of the graphic composition. In an interview with D. Sheff we read: “When two distinct elements are subtracted from their element and merged together, (...) the thing born of this combination is an entirely different fact, a third intelligence with its own life” (Valeriani, 2004, p.47).

In order to clarify the concept of “transfiguration” in the field of Information Design, let’s talk about the information mapping project for the bestseller “The Game” by Alessandro Baricco, realized by the group 100 km Studio by Andrea Novali and Luigi Farrauto, graphic designers specialized in maps and *wayfinding* projects. In “The Game”, the map design is an aid in visualizing ideas and concepts, therefore in their communication to the reader. The transfiguration operation, in this case, consists in representing concepts that are completely different and far from the geographical reality, attributing to them a navigable, visible nature, tangible, from immaterial to material, from metaphysics to physics. They transfigure them in the form of geographical maps composed of portions of land, mountain ranges, rivers and islands. Even the temporal element is translated into space: on an imaginary time line, or rather a route, various concepts and their evolutions are positioned, like organisms, constructing a non-linear visual narration, but based on the construction of different maps, each summarizing a specific aspect of contemporaneity that we try to describe, on which different paths are drawn from time to time. In recent decades, what Baricco

himself has defined as a true “paradigm shift”, “a shrewd mutation” of society, which has led individuals to conform to a “mass individualism” marked by digitization and by the evolution of increasingly advanced and “dematerializing” technological systems and tools (Baricco, 2018). This dematerialization of reality brings with it, therefore, the representative problem of it, of its concepts, of its evolutions. From here, the need to transfigure these concepts, to concretize them, and therefore, net of its interpretative nature, the cartographic representation does not correspond to a simple objective transposition of the territory, but to its conceptual synthesis (Baricco, 2018). “The Game” maps are, therefore, the contemporary world’s maps, useful for a better understanding of the so-called “digital fortresses that now mark our landscape (...) as geological information” (Novali, 2019), results of a land-generative transfiguration.



Figure 2. Design 100km Studio, *The Game*, 2018.

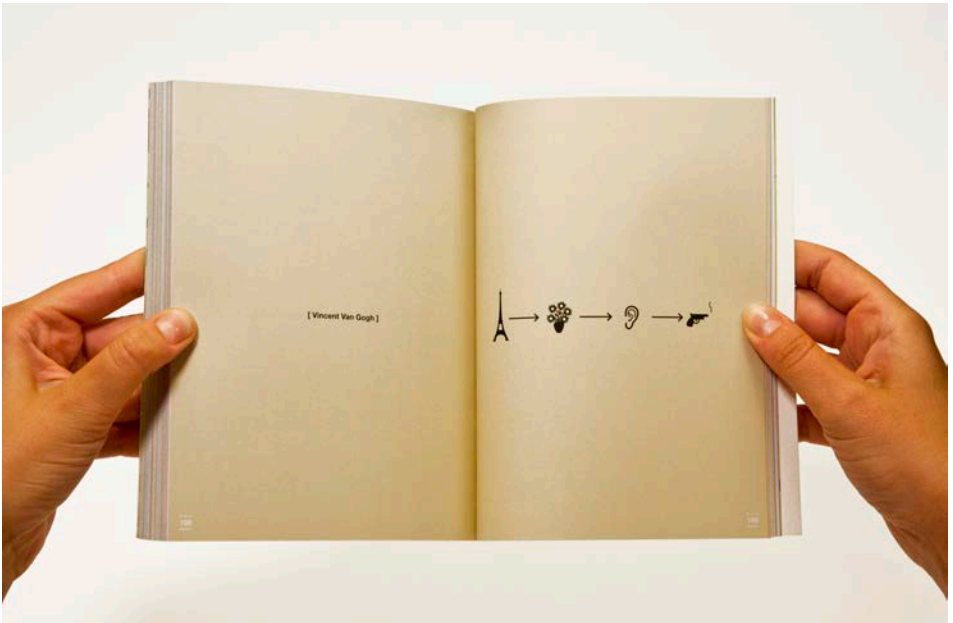


Figure 3. Design H-57 Studio, *Vincent Van Gogh - Shortology*, Shortology.it, 2012.

Taking up the concept of “transfiguration” as a “device” proposed by Valeriani, we can associate the attribute of “open work” (Eco, 1962) the Data Visualization tool, in particular through the infographic poster. Or better, as Valeriani’s “passing” work, made to be “for everyone”, based on simplicity and iconographic universality. An iconic example of so-called “passing works” is Keith Haring’s metropolitan graffiti series, to which we can add the Shortology case, from the H-57 Studio group. Both examples see the use of a system of pictograms, organized in a narration, result of the study of contemporary phenomena, reworked in a visual synthesis. The objectives of these narratives are simplification (never obvious), immediacy and comprehensibility, deriving from a wise use of the pictogram, as well as the values of composi-

tion, colour and narration. Each “scene” of the narrative, both in Haring’s graffiti and in Shortology productions, constitutes a cross-section of the contemporary, placing it in the foreground, extrapolating it from its context (reality) into an abstract and conceptual dimension.

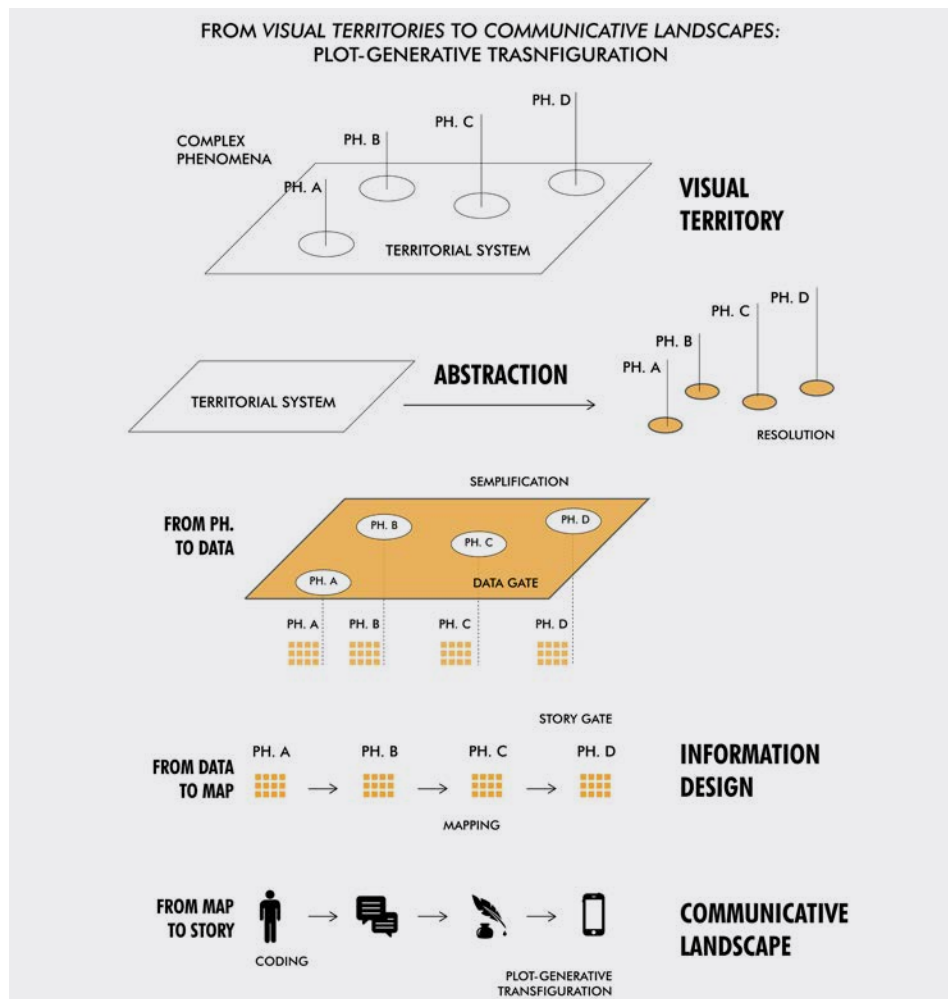


Figure 4. Design Vincenzo Cristallo, Miriam Mariani, *Plot-Generative Transfiguration's Steps*, 2019.

However, despite the abstraction, we can see (between a pictogram and the other) the background where this narrative takes shape, the scenario of the contemporary that is reflected clearly and unmistakably, among the visual symbols (plot-generative transfiguration). In fact, in this case, abstraction is understood as a process that allows the introduction of new symbols that broaden the previous field of investigation (Treccani, 2019) allowing to share a message, and which is configured as a creative act based on simplification and interpretation. The elaboration of an infographic language constitutes, as suggested by Paul Cox, the result of a process based on resolution, simplification, mapping and coding (Corraini, 2016), or a process that starts from the observation of reality (from qualitative and quantitative data) to its representation, through an operation of abstraction. This process sees graphics as a vehicle for coding information, therefore with the function of cognitive support (Cairo, 2016).

3. From *Data Visualization* to *Storytelling*

Baricco's text and the graphic and visual interpretations conducted by 100 km Studio were the starting point for a critical reflection, and subsequently a didactic-design experimentation - on the theme of the graphic representation of complex phenomena in the framework of Information Design - all of the Final Synthesis Course in Design of the Master's Degree in Design, Visual and Multimedia Communication, 2018-2019, at Sapienza University of Rome. In particular, the aim of the course was to understand the possibility that Information Design can operate transversely in several areas of communication through methods, tools, fixed and interactive visual

manifestations, of different genres and origins. That is acting through graphic and visual “representations”; data and information transpositions; processing of narrative sequences that require a communicative project that begins in the development of specific alphabets, grammars and visual syntaxes consistent with the object/subject to be communicated.

That is to say to intuit that the massive diffusion of complex, repeated, unpublished and dissimilar information – about causes and meanings – today requires an operational dimension that simultaneously combines the development of “data” and the corresponding language to be adopted to communicate them considering that there is an operation to make the transition from data visualization to storytelling possible). This ongoing process has been a critical key implemented by the “use” of a series of seminars (Inside Design - Lecture Series) that has seen professionals, researchers and scholars of Information Design telling the multiplicity of infographic communication as a “symptomatic manifestation” for mediate the dynamism and reversibility of the contemporary visual and multimedia project in the presence of data to be represented and disseminated. This was followed by a series of laboratory exercises which saw students discussing various political, social and cultural topics (Data Book, Data Film, Data Event, Data Map, Data Future and Data Service) on which to carry out documentation, comprehension and graphic-visual transfiguration operations. Peculiar is the theme of the fourth exercise entitled “Data Map”, for the possibility of connecting the mapping theme in different descriptive keys, expanding the definition of “knowledge territory” (iconic

events of world history) marked by physical and metaphysical values. In other words, to establish that mapping is equivalent to increasing the level of knowledge in the sense of democracy and the information sociality. It is not a coincidence that the work, supported by a large and substantial documentary apparatus, then ended in the possibility of returning a synthetic visual narration typical of the *manifesto* (infographic *manifesto*) which, by its nature, intends to communicate data and emotions without betraying the sense of chronicle and history. An itinerary halfway between teaching and research that has brought Information Design to the attention of students as a tool of “knowledge and conscience” to understand causes and consequences - as well as forecasts, opportunities and development of visual communication strategies - around an equitable and lay dissemination of knowledge.

4. Conclusions

Taking up the words of Reif Larsen, from “The Selected Works of T.S. Spivet” (2010): “A map is not limited to mapping, but it makes freedom and formulates meaning; it creates bridges between here and there, between different ideas that we did not know to be connected previously” (Larsen, in Cairo, 2016, p. 263). The heuristic value of the map as a visual representation that gives new meanings (*ri-semantizzazione*), in fact, is found in the possibility of exposing data and “allowing them to be analysed, explored and made discoveries” (Cairo, 2016, p. 31), attributing to the object map not only the value of a tool for designers, but much more as a tool for the public. The territories’ representation (physical and metaphysical) and, as illustrated above, their *figureability*, can be

summarized with a journey in stages, a sort of crossing of progressive gates, real “access doors” for communication. In particular, it is a matter of identifying Data Gates (from the territory to the data), proceeding by configuring Story Gate models (from the data to the information), to then stage examples of Storytelling (from information to narration) such as to make the complexity of spatial data intelligible¹ (Cristallo, Mariani, 2019). Thus, a purely perceived territory becomes a communicative and communicable landscape, transfigured in its appearance but not in its content. This is how the complexity of a system is interpreted and summarized, simplified in its form, but not reduced in its meaning: “It is not the landscape that really exists, but exists only in an aesthetic interpretation of the world we call landscape (...). Interpretation is a form of complex knowledge” (Saggio, in Zagari, 2013, p. 74). Design, including Information Design, presupposes hermeneutics as the structure of the project (De Fusco, 1990): on the basis of what “appears”, what “means” is interpreted and consequently represented in the form of languages that have a cognitive and perceptive value such as to constantly contribute to the formation and transmission of a culture of visual communication.

1. The themes related to Data Gate, Story Gate and Story Telling, have been the subject of research and study within the cycle of interdisciplinary seminars entitled *Communication and representation. From Data Visualization to Infographic* conducted within the Final Synthesis Laboratory in Design of the master's degree in *Design, Visual and Multimedia Communication*, La Sapienza University of Rome, 2018/2019, teachers Vincenzo Cristallo, Ida Cortoni, Maria Grazia Berlangieri, tutor Miriam Mariani.



Figure 5. Design Students, La Sapienza University of Rome, *Synthesis Manifesto for Data Map Exercise*, 2019.

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V

BIOGRAPHIES

Matteo Aimini

He is currently assistant professor of landscape architecture at the University of Trento, in the past he has carried out teaching and research activities at Iuav and POLIMI. PhD in Landscape Architecture, over the years he has been dealing with the interaction between the shapes of built environment and landscape in Italy and abroad, particularly in South East Asia.

matteo.aimini@unitn.it

Alberto Bassi

Historian and design critic, Alberto Bassi is full professor at Università Iuav di Venezia; he published essays and books, including *La luce italiana* (Electa, 2004), *Design anonimo in Italia. Oggetti comuni e progetto incognito* (Electa, 2007); *Food design in Italia. Il progetto del prodotto alimentare* (Electa, 2015), awarded with Compasso d'oro ADI 2108; *Design contemporaneo. Istruzioni per l'uso* (Il Mulino, 2017).

bassi@iuav.it

Marco Borsotti

Architect and PhD in "Interior Architecture and Exhibition Design". Associate Professor at the Department of Architecture and Urban Studies of Politecnico di Milano. He is member of AIMAC Interior Architecture, Museums, Built Environment, permanent research group. He takes part in several research activities and international conferences on the topic of Exhibition, Contemporary Living and Contemporary Sacred Architecture.

marco.borsotti@polimi.it

Giuliana Califano

Product designer, teacher of technology and technical drawing in secondary school of Rome, 2019/20. Research fellow in Design at Università Iuav di Venezia. Starship-Health Innovation fellow at the European Institute of Innovation and Technology (EIT). Material experience researcher at the Polymer, Composite and Biomaterials Institute (IPCB) of CNR of Pozzuoli. Specialized in digital manufacturing at the D.R.E.A.M. Academy of Città della Scienza of Napoli. Master degree in Design at the University of Firenze.

gcalifano@iuav.it

Lucilla Calogero

PhD in Design Sciences, currently she is a research fellow at Università Iuav di Venezia in the department Culture del Progetto. She is adjunct professor in Interaction Design at Iuav and in Graphics for Multimedia at Università degli Studi di Verona. Her research interests concern the design of interactive digital systems in the field of visual communication with a focus on information design and data visualization.

lcalogero@iuav.it

Vincenzo Cristallo

Architect, PhD in Architecture and Environmental Technology, postgraduate specialization in Industrial Design. Associate Professor in Industrial Design at "La Sapienza" University of Rome. He has taught design at the University of Genoa, the Politecnico di Milano and the University of Naples "Federico II". The books and essays published document a research activity oriented to the study of the contemporary phenomenology of design sciences and the analysis of the relationship between design and territory in the relation product and system-product. Editorial board of the international magazine *diid Design Industrial/Industrial Design*.

vincenzo.cristallo@uniroma1.it

Miguel Georgieff

Member of Coloco, an independent collective born in 1999. Since 2006 it formally constitutes a landscape firm that brings together landscape architects, urban planners, botanists, gardeners, artists who collaborate with a vast network of experts, from botanical activism to ecological engineering. Over time, the experience has led to discussions with professionals, local authorities, associations or singular personalities with the aim of creating and supporting integrated projects, bringing together public services, associations, activists and volunteers to explore new relationships in reflection and collective construction. Coloco also plays an important role in broadcasting and teaching in the form of seminars,

or both academic and informal public conferences. Exploration, strategy, activation, construction, transmission are the phases of Coloco's projects in order to support the relationship between people and the places where they live, all unique and all together. Situations and requests vary indefinitely, but commitment is the same: creating places whose quality is measured by their ability to accommodate the enormous diversity of life.

<https://www.coloco.org/>

Tommaso Listo

Master degree in Philosophical Sciences at the University of Milan. Specialized in Digital Humanities at Ca' Foscari University of Venice. Research fellow in Design at Iuav University of Venice. From 2019/2020 PhD in Architecture, History and Project at Polytechnic of Turin.

tlisto@iuav.it

Michele Loiacono

Scuola del Terzo Luogo was born and developed during several editions of Incontri del Terzo Luogo, moments of research on the "undecided" spaces of the city, spaces in which not everything is totally chaotic and wild, but where not everything is already planned. Starting in the fall of 2012, an informal group of people started a journey within these spaces that has facilitated comparison, actions on public space, experimentation, relations with the context and various forms of life with special regard to the topic of the garden. The reference place that gave life to this path, supporting it with its own resources, is Manifatture Knos, an undecided space in the city of Lecce, that has been recovered after a long period of abandonment and returned to the city as an independent cultural center. Scuola del Terzo Luogo wants to deal with new forms of pedagogy by challenging conventional teaching models, where giving political dignity to indecision becomes the modality of intervention on the common good, or the practice through which we take care of places.

www.manifattureknos.org

Miriam Mariani

PhD candidate in Planning, Design and Technology of Architecture at PDTA Department, "La Sapienza", University of Rome.

miriam.mariani@uniroma1.it

Martina Marolda

She is currently working on the correspondence and on the publication of the sculptor Vico Consorti (1902-1979) at the University of Siena, following the assignment for the research project *Siena anni Trenta: ipotesi per una mostra* (2017). In 2016 she joined the national project *Diffondere la cultura visiva: l'arte contemporanea tra riviste, archivi e illustrazioni* (Progetto Nazionale FIRB 2012). In March 2016 she received her PhD at the University of Florence with a thesis titled *Le immagini al potere, le immagini del potere. La rappresentazione fotografica dell'architettura contemporanea nelle riviste italiane di settore (1928-1943)*. Graduated in Contemporary Art History at the University of Siena in 2011 with the thesis *Adrian Paci. Da Albanian Stories (1997) a The Encounter (2011)*, she is also specialized in video art. She is interested in the architecture of the Sixties in Italy and Europe, a theme that she has treated in her research *L'architettura pneumatica. Ricerche negli anni Sessanta tra avanguardia e utopia* (2007). Her recent research interests include new media in relation to visual arts, with special reference to architectural communication in Italian, French and German magazines in the Twenties and Thirties and in relation to power and totalitarianism.

martina.marolda@hotmail.com

Matilde Marzotto

She is an art historian. In 2007 she published "Arte Open Air. A Guide to Contemporary Art Parks in Italy". She curated lectures and workshops focusing on the relationship between aesthetics, art and landscape, in collaboration with FAI Fondo Ambiente Italiano, Fondazione La Raia and Orticola di Lombardia. In 2014 she founded 'lookaroundart', an entrepreneurial initiative aimed at bringing a wider audience closer to contemporary art. Currently, together with the management of the 'lookaroundart' project, she continues her teaching activity in public and private institutions such as IED-Istituto Europeo del Design and Politecnico di Milan.

mmarzotto@fastwebnet.it

Graça Magalhães

Artist and assistant professor of the University of Aveiro (UA). She teaches Drawing in the Design degree and Graphic and Plastic Expression in the master course in Contemporary Art Creation. Currently she is director of the master course in the same university. She got a Ph.D. thesis in Design from the same UA. She is also integrated member of the ID+ Research Institute for Design, Media and Culture, UA and collaborative researcher of i2ADS Research Institute in Art, Design and Society, University of Oporto. She usually participates in national and international congress and projects, academic publications about drawing and image and commissions and boards. As part of your academic background she got several scholarships from Portuguese institutions (Portugal Ministry of Foreign Affairs and Calouste Gulbenkian Foundation) and also foreign institutions (Monbusho - Ministry of Education of Japan). She worked as artist in Portugal and other countries. She lives in Portugal since 1993.

gracamag@ua.pt

Anna Mazzanti

Assistant Professor in History of Contemporary Art, at Politecnico di Milano – Department of Design. She is responsible since 2017 for the group of research D.E.SY (Designing Enhancement Strategies and Exhibit SYstems for the Italian House Museums and Studios). She deals with museology, environmental art, history and art criticism of the 20th century. Board member of the Foundation Hic Terminus Haeret - Il Giardino di Daniel Spoerri and expert involved by several projects about environmental art in Tuscany.

anna.mazzanti@polimi.it

Giovanna Costanza Meli

PhD candidate in Art History at "La Sapienza", University of Rome.

Paola Menzardi

Ph.D. candidate at the Department of Architecture and Design at Politecnico di Torino, she previously obtained a M.Sc. in Systemic Design. As part of the doctorate she spent a period as visiting researcher at i-DAT, Institute of Digital Art and Technology at University of Plymouth (UK). Her research field is Design for Territories through which she wants to investigate strategies and design activities aimed at triggering effective development and valorization processes to revitalize inner areas and minor territories. Her interests turn to practices of participated cartography, to co-designed modalities of representation and narration of territorial specificities and local identities. She is currently working on the post stages of community maps in order to identify potentialities to make them proceed into integrated actions for territorial development and promotion of sustainable tourism.

paola.menzardi@polito.it

Pier Paolo Peruccio

Ph.D. in History of Architecture and Urban Planning; Architect and Associate Professor in Design at Politecnico di Torino. Peruccio is Vice Head of the Design School at Politecnico di Torino, director of the SYDERE (Systemic Design Research and Education) Center in Lyon, France and Coordinator of the II Level Specializing Master in Design for Arts (<http://www.design4arts.polito.it>). He is currently working on several research projects concerning the history of sustainable design, systems thinking and innovation in design education. He is co-editor of book series (Umberto Allemandi and Electa Mondadori publishing houses), author of several books on design history and more than 100 articles on industrial and visual design published in international magazines. He has taught courses and workshops in Europe, USA, Latin America and Asia.

pierpaolo.peruccio@polito.it

Sonia Pistidda

Architect and PhD in Architecture, Urban Design, Conservation of Housing and Landscape. Researcher at the Department of Architecture and Urban Studies of Politecnico di Milano. She is involved in teaching and research activities in the field of preservation, protection and enhancement of cultural heritage, participating in important cultural activities and international projects. Since 2019 she is co-director of the Master Design for Development. Architecture, Urban planning and heritage in the Global South, promoted by the Department of Architecture and Urban Studies.

sonia.pistidda@polimi.it

Sergio Sanna

Member of Ground Action, a collective of experts in the field of architecture, landscape and art, which is inspired by all those collective, active and participatory practices of space making such as, for example, the international experiences of the operational workshops. Its activity is configured as an on-site and open air research atelier, aimed at triggering or accelerating the re-evaluation processes for peculiar places, claiming the performative value of the action in the public space and in the landscape. It promotes sustainable design by using recycled materials and the direct and concrete realization of the installations using impromptu ways and forms. According to its method, Ground Action helps to create the opportunity for a dialogue with administrations, other local institutions and all those subjects active in the area capable of providing specific support and knowledge.

<https://www.groundaction.eu/>

Raffaella Trocchianesi

Architect and Associate Professor at Department of Design, Politecnico di Milano, she teaches Interior Design Studio at the School of Design and Design Research Context and Resources at the PhD Programme in Design. Director of the specialization Master IDEA_Exhibition Design, 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, the relationship between design, humanities and arts.

raffaella.trocchianesi@polimi.it

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Progetto grafico is an international graphic design magazine founded in 2003 and published by Aiap, the Italian association of visual communication design. A point of reference for such design in Italy from its start, it has also been fully translated into English since 2012. • In December 2017, Jonathan Pierini and Gianluca Camillini became the current editors. • The new *Progetto grafico* offers a critical look at graphics and visuals through a narrative broken up into fragments. Its aim is to offer articles connected in different ways so as to foster a series of transdisciplinary, historical and contemporary considerations. This multiple viewpoint, ranging from very distant to very close, seeks to look at the real both in the broadest terms as well as in a more specialist context. Our belief is that observation, whether of artifacts or representations, as well as production of visuals or graphics can add to today's cultural debate. • Contributions can include visual material, essays and interviews. Each issue intends to explore the storytelling opportunities of the journal.



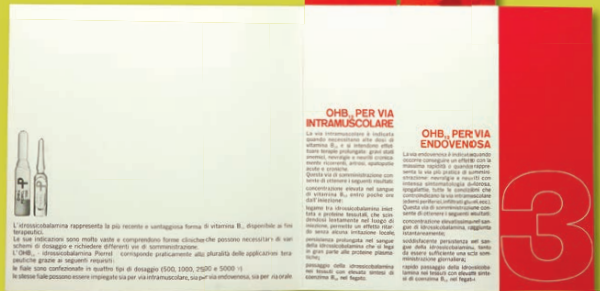
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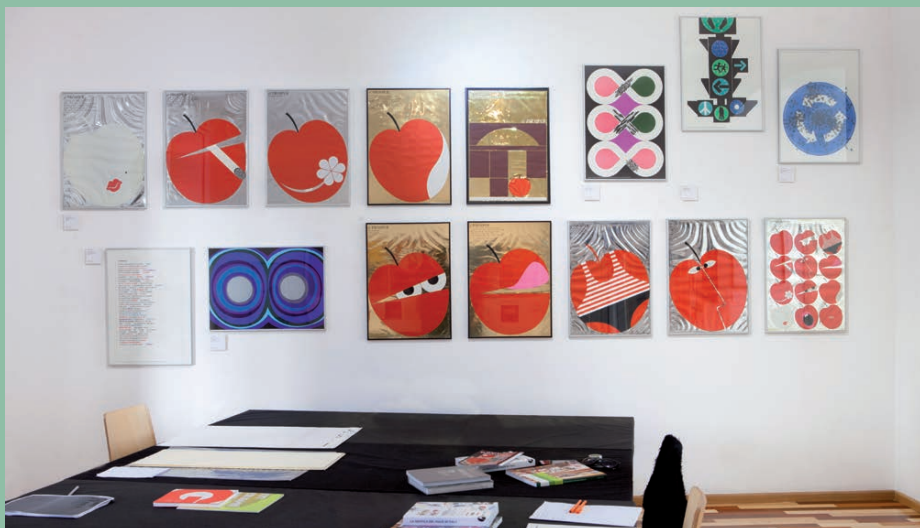
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