

CALL AIS/DESIGN CONFERENCE 2023

November 24-25, 2023, Campus Durando - Politecnico di Milano

At the Roots of Expanded Design. What Futures for Design History?

Alle radici del design espanso. Quali futuri per la storia del design?

The VI AIS/Design 2023 International Conference aims to discuss the futures of historical studies and the teaching of design history in relation to contemporary phenomena.

The main topic originates from criticism of the almost repetitive view of historical research, which focuses on the same episodes, authors, and problem cores. It seems reluctant to open up to new horizons, approaches, timeframes, and interpretative perspectives, as well as to the issues that design is facing in the present day (Pasca, 1995; Fry, 2009; Pasca, 2014; Fry et al., 2015).

During the *I International Conference on Historical Design Studies* (Milan, 1991), Vanni Pasca – past president and co-founder of AIS/Design – summarised his thoughts by quoting Tomás Maldonado, who – citing, in turn, Marc Bloch – expressed his conviction on the need to “understand the past by means of the present” recalling that “misunderstanding of the present fatally arises from ignorance of the past” (Maldonado, 1987, p. 110; Pasca, 1995).

In 2012, Pasca to further engage design historians in the debate – especially eminent international personalities such as Victor Margolin, Anna Calvera, Clive Dilnot, Carma Gorman, Kjetil Fallan, Susan Yelavich, Grace Lees-Maffei, Tevfik Balcioglu, and Jonathan Mekinda – questioned the educational approach to design history and the importance of disciplinary autonomy by emphasising the need for reflection on the modalities and the objectives necessary to enhance the role of design history (Pasca, 2012). The exchange of letters highlighted how, at a national and international academic level, there is a contradictory cultural attitude towards the teaching of history and in accepting the humanities as founding components of the areas of design.

A culture excessively centred on techniques, methods, and procedures risks distorting the established multidimensionality of design – and its educational pathways – if the indispensable centrality of design history is not affirmed, especially considering the current conditions and their rapid change.

Analysing one of Pasca’s latest writings (2018), a crucial observation emerges: “Today, it seems safe to say, the ‘existential relevance’ of design has been greatly attenuated. Mario Perniola had titled one of his books, *L’arte espansa* (*The Expanded Art*, 2015). A similar definition could be suggested for design as well. With the third phase of the industrial revolution, **design has also expanded.**” And it continues to expand in its various disciplinary and applicative declinations. Recent and current phenomena testify to this **expansion of design** as intended before. Just to mention a few: Design Art; the revival of craftsmanship in an anti-industrial interpretation and the spread of “maker” culture; Social Design; the relationship between design and new materials and technologies; the design of digital tools and environments; Service Design. These phenomena underline the evolving role of design, which needs to be thoroughly analysed to understand and address the rapid and profound changes taking place.

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Pasca's essay sounds like a challenge to design history's responsibility to observe and study the past retrospectively with a rigorous research method. Contemporary issues offer useful cues for identifying new lines of historical research which can help to understand actual phenomena and support to better inform design practices in the future.

Already Tony Fry (2009, p. 122) sharply criticised the work of design historians as "a particularistic concern" and "historically decontextualised," lamenting that design history had failed to connect the past to its role in creating possible and sustainable futures. This challenge is now being proposed from several sides, particularly in design education.

After all, the lesson of Bloch, recalled by Pasca along with that of Maldonado, clarified the goals and modalities of history as a fundamental tool of awareness and understanding of the past and present to face the future.

Therefore, the VI AIS/Design International Conference's main objective is to identify, recompose, study, and write the different histories related to the concept of "expanded" design and contextually explore the possible futures of the discipline of design history and its teaching.

CALL FOR PAPER

The call raises some key questions for the development of historical studies, their teaching, and the construction of a critical vision of design disciplines' past, present, and future.

How does design history relate to the present phenomena, changes, and problems? What types of products, systems, processes, and phenomena hitherto excluded from major histories are relevant today? How to teach design history to new generations of students?

Based on these questions and in relation to the clusters below, the exploration requires the methodological approach of historical studies and disciplines to avoid incurring contemporary critical readings lacking the necessary depth and rigor.

Cluster 1 – Histories of Expanded Design: historiography, disciplinary histories, and case studies, from origins to critical aspects of the present.

What are the new themes, research trajectories, and emerging strands in Italian and international design history? What historical phenomena of design resilience, resulting from critical contingencies such as wars, climatic or economic crises, social dramas, and pandemics, have led design to expand by moving toward new practices?

Some possible areas of investigation are given as examples:

- Histories of design for sustainability;
- Histories of materials, materials design, and materiality;
- Histories of digital design;
- Histories of service design and design for social innovation;
- Histories of design-art, self-made design;
- Histories of design and gender issues.

Cluster 2 - The didactic of design history between past, present, and future. Predictions, contributions, and evolutions of the teachings of design history and its educational models.

What futures for design history teachings? What themes and readings allow design history teachings to be updated with respect to contemporary problems and critical issues?

- Evolving themes, readings, and interpretations of design history in relation to education;
- Methodologies, models, and tools for teaching history in design curricula;
- Best practices of courses, teaching, and outcomes in design history didactics.

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Special track

Vanni Pasca's Contribution to the History and Historiography of Design.

Two years after Vanni Pasca's passing, the conference aims to remember him through a critical reading of his contribution to historical studies and teaching. We invite to submit proposals investigating his experiences and thoughts, opening a debate on his figure.

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USEFUL INFORMATION

Curators: Giampiero Bosoni, Marinella Ferrara, Francesco E. Guida, Chiara Lecce (Politecnico di Milano) with the collaboration of Letizia Bollini (Free University of Bozen-Bolzano)

Venue: Design School, Politecnico di Milano, Campus Durando (Milan)

Important deadlines:

- 03.04.2023: abstract proposals submission
- 03.05.2023: communication of abstract acceptance
- 03.07.2023: full paper submission
- 04.09.2023: communication of the peer-review results
- 09.10.2023: camera-ready paper submission
- **November 24-25, 2023: Conference**

How to submit:

Interested authors can send, **by April 3, 2023**, a proposal in Italian or English to: convegno@aisdesign.org. The proposal must be composed and delivered in a .doc/.docx file, following the instructions and using the downloadable form [here](#).

The conference editors are available to discuss proposals for contributions with authors within the given deadlines. Simply send a message to convegno@aisdesign.org.

How to participate:

The conference will be held in presence and online.

Participation as a speaker at the conference is free of charge for AIS/Design members in good standing with the 2023 membership fee. Participants who are not already AIS/Design members in 2023 may make a liberal donation to AIS/Design. For how to make this donation, you can email convegno@aisdesign.org.

Instructions for joining AIS/Design or renewing your membership dues are available at

<https://www.aisdesign.org/v2/iscrizione/>

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