

TRANSCIENCE AS A DESIGN CHALLENGE. ITALIAN RADICAL  
NARRATIVES ABOUT THE ROLE OF DESIGN PROCESSES IN/FOR THE  
INCORPOREAL TRANSFORMATIONS OF CITIES (1969-1974)

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**Abstract**

The capacity of design culture to interpret changes and mediate different fields of research and action by integrating material, immaterial values and experiences, is becoming increasingly relevant, considering the deep transformations generated by the contemporary crisis, wars and migrations. The concept of transience therefore appears to be the only condition and dimension we can design, influence, shape, test, experiment and consume, but also use to narrate the not-linear relationship between design – as a culture of doing, producing, mediating, building relations, anticipating – and the transformations in cities and societies.

This paper therefore intends to propose a transverse and inclusive interpretation of transience mediated by design, examining narratives of design-centred approaches in Italy, considering performative and temporary expressions as designed artefacts, with an influence on the development of urban spaces, and where spontaneous initiatives have been expression of latent processes of creativity and culture. The period under examination primarily covers the decades of 1960s and 1970s, a period in which the search for overlapping between disciplinary boundaries, the aggression of the overall vision of the project – which proposes a circularity between scales – and the climate of protest with movements and activism, brought with them the need for change. Moreover, the relationship between design, crisis and sustainability was a transversal theme that led design cultures to weave collaboration with different forms of knowledge and to explore transverse processes and methods.

The design discourse around sustainability continues, today, to be fuelled by new instances of triple transition pervading the European landscape, in a process of continuous refinement of methods and practices that introduces new tools, with an eye to digital and new technologies, cross-fertilised by a variety of

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disciplines, because the forces conditioning change in contemporary and future societies are many and sometimes unexpected.

**Keywords:** urban transformations, temporality, activism, immaterial dimension, culture and creativity, Italian design history, 1960s and 1970s.

### Designing the Transition

Various strategic visions aimed at enhancing the intangible dimension of cities have been adopted over the past three decades, demonstrating the need to view them with inclusive approaches that take into account not only the built heritage, but values that are harder to measure, because they are intangible, ephemeral, and constantly evolving.

Dimensions relative to collective intelligence<sup>1</sup>, creativity and the development of knowledge and cultural products<sup>2</sup>, the widespread adoption of qualifying media<sup>3</sup>, awareness of the themes of sustainability and circularity<sup>4</sup>, reception and dimension of inclusiveness<sup>5</sup>, present a mosaic of data<sup>6</sup> that can contribute to mapping the impact and the relationship that is established between citizens as producers of knowledge, and experience, culture and the environment. Contemporary cities, which are subject to non-designed processes of ongoing mutation caused by pandemic, economic, energetic, political and migratory crises, must deal with increasingly complex challenges and ambitious transitions, to comply with the policy standards dictated in programmes, plans and strategies promoted at the European scale.

In the spring of 2020, favoured by the first lockdown to contain the spread of the Coronavirus, the suspension of time in the life of the city provided a snapshot at a quasi-global level that showed how mutations in the behaviour of the territory (due to the effects of climate change, wars for raw materials, pandemics) and not-human behaviour (especially rewilding and urban reforestation processes) are neither permanent nor irreversible, but are intimately bound to the transformation of individuals' lives and behaviour.

This raises considerations on how awareness on a global scale of the transformative power of individual behaviour has and can still influence the constant and timely transition of the relationship between individual-community-territory.

It is important to specify that the concept of transition implies the presence of a third median between the two extremes. This median factor allows an evolution of the thought of a predictable, designed, standard-compliant future. One very clear example is the 17 Sustainable Development Goals, with outcomes established, planned and approved by the United Nations General Assembly in the 2030 Agenda, that aim to foster three major sustainable transitions: environmental, economic, and social. This intentional tension underlies a designed movement "in between" two extremes – the before and after – that based on our methodological approach coincides with the concept of transience.

Mutation, on the contrary, is a sudden, non-designed movement that alters and reshapes the urban phenomenon, sometimes involuntarily<sup>7</sup>. It therefore appears as a non-linear, unforeseen, uncalculated, non-designed movement. Over the past twenty years, we have witnessed an acceleration in the pace of mutation in cities, of sudden change, influenced by the ease of access to information online

that makes it possible to communicate, and to compare – in real time – actions and conditions in global contexts, underscoring the differences, the competition, the abuses and wars. Thus, transition is a progressive movement that aspires to become permanent, arising from an intention, from a project, while transience, which is one of its attributes, expresses the ephemeral condition of transiting between two phases in time, the before and the after.

The concept of transience therefore appears to be the only condition and dimension we can design, influence, shape, test, experiment and consume.

The effort to systematise the distinctive characteristics of transience can in itself become a design process aimed at new knowledge.

- Design is its agent;
- It is experimental, and tested by trial and error;
- It is fluid, unstable and produces prototypal forms of change;
- It appears as ephemeral, temporary, impermanent;
- It is closely tied to the behaviour of individuals;
- It is influenced by their will and disposition towards change;
- It is an intermediate space between needs and their fulfilment;
- It is intentional, therefore political;
- It does not provide practical outputs, but is a scalable act of design;
- It is a process oriented towards involving actors, towards striving for innovation, towards the creation of models;
- It leads to the adoption of a multidisciplinary perspective.

Transience is therefore a process that is in an intrinsic state of flux, tying together different dimensions in time. It is an agent in the transformation of cities, societies and their values.

This paper therefore intends to propose a transverse and inclusive interpretation of transience mediated by design, as a culture of doing, producing, of building scenarios and relations, and anticipating change through the formulation of prototypes. In fact, design, in its broadest sense and its many fields of application, looks at the dynamics of change from multidisciplinary perspectives, considering people through their adaptive relationship with the ever-changing social, cultural and economic territory. Design as a project and as a mediator is therefore a perfect embodiment of the concept of “transience”: it is in this interval of the transition between A and B that the project comes to fulfilment, aiming to improve experiences, to transform emerging needs into opportunities to innovate products and services, taking a prototypal approach that can help to interact with the unexpected challenges raised by the dynamics of transformation, by time, resources and space.

Design can thus transform the potential for change (transience) into the materialisation of change (mutation) through the development of processes (transition). As human beings we are constantly designing, deflecting and seeking to avert destabilising mutations, while welcoming designed prospects for transformation. The cities that we desire to live in are therefore the result of a multitude of designed actions, both individual and collective, but also of unexpected relations and ephemeral events.

## Background and Methodology

How has the historiography of design considered the role design plays as a mediator of the constant interaction between citizens, culture and urban spaces? Is there a narrative of design as an interface between the city and its citizens? How have spontaneous initiatives for the revitalisation of cities represented latent processes of creativity and culture? How has the dimension of temporality and impermanence influenced the development of urban spaces?

After introducing the interpretation of transience in relation to transformations in cities, the paper examines narratives of design-centred approaches in Italy, considering performative and temporary expressions as designed artefacts.

This choice requires two clarifications. The first regards the subject of this study. The usual subdivision between the fields of application of design – the authors underscore that in Italian, industrial design and architectural design are designated by separate and independent words especially when referring to disciplinary fields – has commonly been interpreted on the basis of the scale of the designed object, ranging from the regional dimension of the city (urban project), to that of individual buildings and structures (architectural design), to “urban furniture” and the industrialisation of architectural components (product design)<sup>8</sup>. Is the discourse about scale therefore sufficient or might it be possible to reconstruct new genealogies and hypothesize possible chronologies?

It might be surprising to note that Italian design histories do not include narratives of the role designers have played in the transformation of cities. After the 1980s, the historical syntheses typical of the early historiography of Italian design tend to vanish, and the translation of foreign authors comes to a stop, despite the concurrent rise of university programmes in the field of design nationwide. A brief review of the major historical syntheses of the last forty years makes it possible to recognize a series of signals that offer a glimpse into the ways that public space and the city, understood as a social construct<sup>9</sup>, are shiny introduced into the histories of Italian design, referring to issues that concern collective creative processes<sup>10</sup>, the timeframe of design<sup>11</sup>, services for citizens<sup>12</sup>, the desire for sociability and the cult of connection<sup>13</sup>. However, only in recent years a historiographical interest in key concepts such as temporality, social innovation, common goods, and sustainability has emerged, as a way to move past an interpretation commonly linked to the scale of the designed object<sup>14</sup>.

The second is a matter of periodisation. The narratives under examination mainly cover the decades of the 1960s and 1970s, the age of what is called Italian radical design<sup>15</sup>: a time when the search for overlapping disciplinary boundaries (in creative practices such as art, design architecture), the re-examination of a comprehensive vision of design – which proposed a circularity between scales – and the climate of protest stirred by activist movements, brought with them a need for change. Moreover, the relationship between design, crisis and sustainability was a pioneering and transverse theme that led design cultures to seek collaboration with different forms of knowledge and to reflect upon transverse processes and methods<sup>16</sup>.

From a methodological point of view, the paper looks at the programme of *Transitional Design Histories* recently developed by Maria Göransdotter<sup>17</sup>. It may

be taken as a common approach to investigating the phenomenon, considering processes, themes and actors, rather than outcome and products, while, at the same time, creating a link between past, present, and future. This perspective seems particularly relevant based on certain assumptions that are also valid in this paper. According to the author, industrial design and design history share a ‘common ground in that their respective queries spring from challenges in the present’<sup>18</sup>. Moreover, by developing theories and practices of designing, the emphasis shifts to ‘how design should be done – in which constellations, with which methods – to support transformations, rather than beginning with questions of what design results or design objects should be like’<sup>19</sup>. This implies a definition of design history as ‘an archaeology of ideas and approaches that have shaped the methods, tools and processes introduced into the design practice’<sup>20</sup>. Moreover, the author affirms that ‘critical approaches in design history can lead towards an understanding of design issues and practices in relation to the contexts of the past, and in the light of present-day concerns such as production, consumption and mediation, and the processes that create meaning and value’<sup>21</sup>. Instead of helping to account for past practices that could affirm or dispute definitions of design and designing, the ‘purpose is to make histories that contribute to expanding the conceptual spaces of thinking and practicing design’<sup>22</sup>. Starting from this background and methodological framework, the paper covers a periodization between 1969 and 1974 and illustrates three examples of how Italian design cultures have interpreted the concept of transition, materializing and testing prototypes of changes that involved cities and have led to transformations in design approaches. They all share elements that characterize our concept of transience: time factors (temporary, provisional, performance, speed of prototyping and transience), relational factors (the ability to mediate with users, citizens, and consumers) and scalability (the replicability of the design action). At the same time, they interpret them in the light of three characteristic aspects: the spontaneous, the political and the participative nature of transience as agent of change.

### **Transience as a Spontaneous Act: Behavioural Design and the City as a Learning Environment**

The first of these examples concerns the concepts of behavioural design and learning environments as they relate to the approaches of radical design, which emerged in the multidisciplinary exhibition “Contemporanea” organized in 1973 in the underground parking of Villa Borghese (designed by Luigi Moretti) in Rome, curated by art critic Achille Bonito Oliva. The “Architecture and Design” section, curated by Alessandro Mendini, featured a multimedia event which projected five hundred slides onto fourteen screens to outline, as quoted in the subtitle, the “World map of architecture and radical design from 1960-1973”. At that time, Mendini was a central figure in the so-called second wave of Italian radical design movement<sup>23</sup>. After publishing the manifesto in “Casabella” magazine (no. 367, 1972), he became the undisputed guiding light on the national scene and the lodestone for a series of initiatives that, as widely discussed in recent historiography, gathered the contributions of individual professionals and groups who sought to elaborate a critique of the role of design in contemporary society.

These actions led primarily to theoretical-intellectual speculations and design experimentations with a strong prototypal and temporary connotation: ephemeral works and writings are the major legacy of this age of Italian design. This specific connotation led to a widespread use of mediation channels, as demonstrated by the number of new publishing initiatives, such as the magazines “Se” (insert of “Abitare”), “Inpiù”, “In”, “Fascicolo”, “Brera Flash”, and by the participation of historic and consolidated platforms for dissemination: Mendini himself was appointed director of “Casabella” between 1970 and 1976 (no 349 - no 412), which became the principal medium of communication for Italian radical design. Finally, events such as exhibitions, workshops, temporary installations, often organized spontaneously within non-institutional contexts, also played a prominent role.

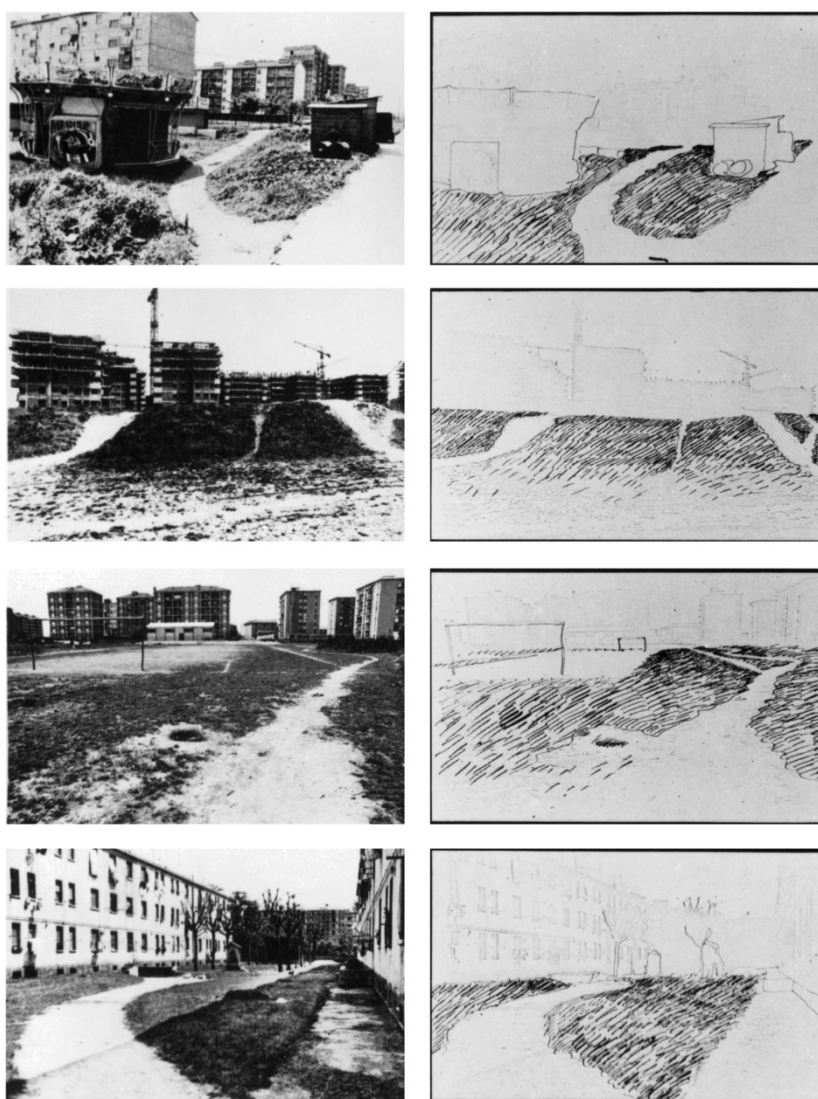


Fig. 1 Tracce [Tracks]. Ugo La Pietra, courtesy Archivio Ugo La Pietra, Milano.

The exhibition titled “Contemporanea” was one of these types of action. It featured a rich, and heretofore little recognized survey that illustrated the evolution of the debate over the role of creativity within the changed conditions of

the country in the 1960s and early 1970s. In thirteen sections, Mendini presented a reflection on the 'forgotten man,' a concept illustrated by the designers in installations, essays, and immaterial products. The interpretation of design it proposed eschewed the paradigm of specialisation to embrace a broader understanding of the creative skills of individuals. It challenged the social vocation of design practice and reflected upon 'long-term problems, such as solidarity, the proper use of human and environmental sources of energy, and a different quality of work,'<sup>24</sup> and hence, upon the impending consequences of human beings' actions for the contemporary and future society.

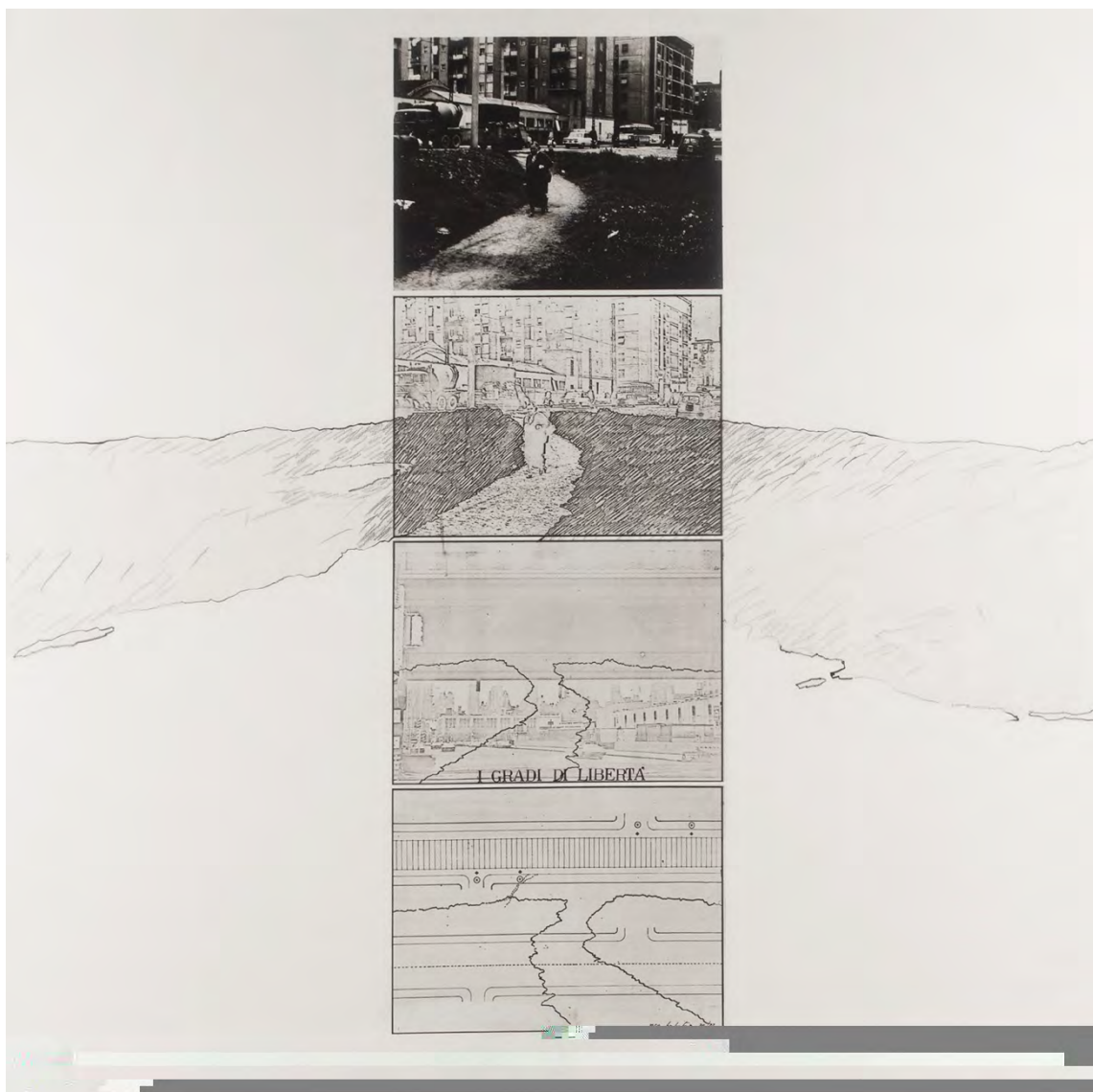


Fig. 2. I gradi di libertà [The degrees of freedom], 1970-72. Ugo La Pietra, courtesy Archivio Ugo La Pietra, Milano.



Fig. 3. Il Commutatore, Sistema Disequilibrante – Modello di comprensione [the Commutator, Unbalancing System], 1970, Model of Understanding. Ugo La Pietra, courtesy Archivio Ugo La Pietra, Milano.

For example, Gruppo Strum (born in Turin in 1966 by Giorgio Cerretti, Pietro Derossi, and Riccardo Rosso) offered a critique of places of repression and the function of social protest; Lapo Binazzi focused on ‘non-design’ and the phenomenon of survival, presenting projects by the U.F.O. group, of which he was a member; Andrea Branzi dedicated his contribution to the manifesto of Radical Architecture: ‘It doesn’t matter what man’s behaviour will be once he is freed from work, nor what the content of intellectual production will be on the part of the masses; what is important is the use every man will make of his own untested imagination and therefore of his own life’<sup>25</sup>. He illustrated this manifesto with a selection of pages from Stewart Brand’s *Whole Earth Catalog*, demonstrating an interest in the international debate on environmental design. The most significant perspective, according to this analysis, however, was that of Ugo La Pietra. He theorised reclaiming the values of the urban landscape, introducing the theme of ‘The reappropriation of the city’<sup>26</sup> (Fig. 1, Fig. 2). This choice may have arisen from



his earlier research into the “Sistema disequilibrante” “System for undermining balance”, 1960s (Fig. 3), which he later expanded in the late 1970s with the production of experimental films, understood as ‘a means to analyse and decode the environment, record the traces of original creative activity, deconstruct and reconstruct the *topoi* of urban architecture, develop instructions for behaviour that could give rise to one’s personal city’<sup>27</sup> (Fig. 4).



Fig. 4. Recupero e reinvenzione [Recovery and invention]. Ugo La Pietra, courtesy Archivio Ugo La Pietra, Milano.

For La Pietra the 1970s would be the moment to test the theoretical premises he expressed in the late 1960s: the need to move past traditional models of communication, testing new art forms in connection with society. He illustrated the contents presented in the “Contemporanea” exhibition in an essay titled ‘The reappropriation of the city’, published in the monograph issue that “Casabella” dedicated to the event. In this short text, he expressed the need for a new individual and collective perception of space, based on behavioural and mental,

not physical, operations. It was only by reclaiming the use of urban space, wrote La Pietra, that it would be possible to chart a new role for humans in the process of transformation. The traces of spontaneous or temporary changes, like the traces of behaviour, the preferential itineraries that grow out of routine, the form generated by experience, non-predetermined creativity and participation therefore constitute the lens through which to view projects that sought to re-establish the role of the community in the city and a new bottom-up design attitude springing from unplanned and mutable approaches (Fig. 5).



Fig. 5. Immersione-uomouovosfera, 1968. Ugo La Pietra, courtesy Archivio Ugo La Pietra, Milano.

These projects indicate how design cultures can develop approaches to change that are based on individual creative capabilities, through processes that aim less to produce results or design outputs than to foster debate about behavioural design and the city as a learning environment.

### **Transience as a Political Tack: Cities as Theatres of Design Activism**

The second example revolves around the political and collective dimension of the urban context that was the focus of experimentation in the early phases of the radical experience. As the “Contemporanea” exhibition demonstrated in synthesis, the temporary may be considered as a subject of design. The city was transformed into a territory for wide-ranging experimentation in which to develop practices and processes focusing on bottom-up participation. But these events did not take place exclusively within an institutional or pseudo-institutional context: the anti-authority protest movements in 1968, which constituted a watershed moment between a before and an after, between a disputed concept of tradition and a push towards innovation, were the signs of a sea change that also included creative actions, driven by the protagonists of the time. Elena Dellapiana, in commenting on the relationship between design and politics during the protest years, sustains that: “This moment of “lofty” debate was interpreted by professionals in training or just entering the tight design job market, as a possible intellectual deviation that would prevent the designers from fulfilling the legitimate and necessary role of “system watchdogs”, who could transform utopian visions and revolutionary concepts into operative solutions. The theme of feasibility, articulated in the categories of “utopia” and “revolution”, made it possible to reconsider the political role of the designer from a different point of view, as it converged with the widespread protest movements that animated Italian streets and academies<sup>28</sup>. A few episodes in which creativity was a protagonist in a political dialogue that brought together art, architecture and design, can be mentioned: consider the fate of the XIV Triennale di Milano titled “The Large Number” curated by Giancarlo De Carlo, Tommaso Ferraris, Alberto Rosselli, Albe Steiner, Vittoriano Viganò, Marcello Vittorini and Marco Zanuso, whose opening was postponed several weeks in June 1968 after it was occupied by workers, artists and citizens; or the self-convened conference at the spontaneous lecture organized in April 1969 at the Architecture School in Turin titled “Architettura: Utopia e/o rivoluzione” (“Architecture: Utopia and/or Revolution”). There is one particular event however that seems worthy of note, because it is the result of recent historiographical interest capable of reconstructing the terms of a temporary, ephemeral, contextual, prototypal experiment that has yet to be fully investigated. The event titled “Campo Urbano. Interventi estetici nella dimensione collettiva urbana” (“Campo Urbano. Aesthetic intervention in the collective urban dimension”) organized on September 21<sup>st</sup>, 1969 in Como (Italy), featured the actions, installations and performances by a wide community of creative professionals, including Ugo La Pietra, Bruno Munari, Gianni Pettena, Enrico Baj, Davide Boriani, Gianni Colombo, Gabriele De Vecchi, Dadamaino, Luciano Fabro, Giulio Paolini, Paolo Scheggi and Grazia Varisco, among others.

At the invitation of Luciano Caramel, the critic, art historian, professor and cultural organizer, a group of artists, designers, architects and musicians created short-lived events<sup>29</sup>. They all took place in the space of a day, and the legacy they left behind were the critical reviews of the local press and the photographs of Ugo Mulas<sup>30</sup>. Their works summarized the performative level of a design-driven form of activism and were intended as prototypes of transformations. As the press release for the event stated, its political value lay in the need to bring the artist into direct contact with the community of an urban centre, with the spaces in which it habitually lives, with its habits, its necessities. Roberto De Paolis has recently offered a synthesis of the installations on exhibit, highlighting the contrast with the setting of Como, the city that was a symbol of the rationalist architecture of the Fascist era, but was also the theatre of the policies promoting artistic and cultural activities by a City Administration with a progressive vision<sup>31</sup>.

The description of some of the performances may provide a better understanding of the nature of this event. Bruno Munari, co-curator of the festival, created two works. The more significant piece was the daytime work, titled “Visualizzazione dell’aria di piazza duomo del 21 settembre 1969” (“Visualisation of the air in piazza duomo on September 21<sup>st</sup> 1969”) in which he involved users and passers-by, asking them to self-produce strips of paper in a wide variety of shapes, following specific instructions from a handbook on how to cut and fold the paper, which they would then throw down from the Brolletto bell tower. The installation “Tempo libero. Struttura temporale in uno spazio urbano” (“Leisure time. Time structure in an urban space”) by Edilio Alpini, Davide Boriani, Gianni Colombo and Gabriele Devecchi featured the participation of firemen and the use of electric welders to simulate a flash of light that would look like lightning on building façades doused with fire hoses. In his installation “Allora: copro una strada ne faccio un’altra trasformo gli spazi originari cambio le condizioni di comportamento” (“So: I cover a street and I make another I transform the original spaces I change behavioural conditions”), again Ugo La Pietra stimulates considerations on the perception of urban spaces by users, introducing, on the main street, a triangle-shaped roof that becomes a new urban space consisting of an interior and an exterior dimension, to be used in contrast with the routine dynamics of life in this city. This temporary act evolved in the years to come into designed artefacts, such as the series “Arcangeli metropolitani” (“Metropolitan Archangels” 1977) and “Attrezzature urbane per la collettività” (“Urban Equipment for the Community” 1979).

Despite the lack of critical acclaim for this event by both the official cultural entities and the institutions and city administrators, the event bears witness to the value of a transitory act on the margins of institutional formalisation, with respect to a theme as ample as that of the relationship between creativity and the public. Here, the political values reflected the need to familiarise the designer with the collective dimension of the urban context and the everyday spaces, needs, and lifestyles of the city’s inhabitants.

## Transience as a Collective Ambition: Participatory Practices and Approaches for the Intangible Dimension of the City

The third example looks at the development of methods for participatory practices, through the work of architect Riccardo Dalisi who, from 1968 to 1971, suspended his professional practice and devoted himself to group design experiments, including the experience with the Global Tools collective. His experimentation during this time, significantly influenced by the relationship between design, creativity, and pedagogy, followed a spontaneous methodology, aimed at improving the social conditions of disadvantaged communities.



Fig. 6. “Riccardo Dalisi ‘71-‘74. Il Rione Traiano e la partecipazione come progetto [The Rione Traiano and participation as a project]”. Exhibition at Circolo del Design Torino.  
Photographers: Luca Vianello and Silvia Mangosio.

It seems useful in particular to illustrate the experience of working in the neighbourhoods with the children of the Triano district in Naples between the years 1969 and 1974: a working-class district built in the late 1950s that struggled with poverty, marginalization, and a social emergency (Fig. 6). The interest lies less in the results, than in the process adopted by Dalisi, with the direct involvement of the children and staff that became a manifesto for the transformation of an urban area through the use of widespread creativity (Fig. 7). This effort was also materialized in workshops that sought to verify, on the one hand, the degraded condition of the urban spaces while organising, on the other, the active participation of the children ‘animated’ by Dalisi and a group of university students, through socio-educational processes the purpose of which was to tend towards a progressive social transformation by means of creative cultures.

As Susanna Parlato and Paola Savatore write, “The children of Traiano, as well as their mothers, are involved in making drawings on paper, on fabric, on wood and in creating household objects”<sup>32</sup>. Dalisi explains this process in an article in issue number 365 of *Casabella* in 1972: ‘Humble technique coincides with the ideology of the creative value of the community. According to this ideology, technique is a specific human dimension which generically coincides with the capacity to dominate the objective world, transforming “limits into tools”. [...] Humble technique is in a state of hidden revolt (and will be so openly in the future), not to replace and destroy, but to expand and restore the sphere of creativity on the job and in productivity. It therefore demands a structural change in the relations of production and management’<sup>33</sup>.



Fig. 7. “Riccardo Dalisi ‘71-‘74. Il Rione Traiano e la partecipazione come progetto [The Rione Traiano and participation as a project]”. Exhibition at Circolo del Design Torino.  
Photographers: Luca Vianello and Silvia Mangosio.

As manifested in the exhibition organized by the Design Center in Turin in the summer of 2022<sup>34</sup>, the principal outcomes of these experiments were simple embroidery on fabrics, drawings of objects such as chairs, based on the children’s ideas, and experimental prototypes that came out of the workshops. However, as mentioned above, the primary interest was to examine not the result of the project, but rather the process adopted in the work of the Neapolitan architect.

These activities led to a reflection upon the boundaries between designers and users, not only in terms of roles, power, expertise and accountability, but also in terms of agency in designing. But mostly they highlighted the intangible dimension of participatory practices (which were being theorized at the time by other Italian designers such as Giancarlo De Carlo): these practices are neither

products nor artefacts, but processes that, in some way, have led to an understanding of innovation without leaving a permanent trace in the cities' environments. We can thus recognize the seeds that led to the acknowledgment of the role of living workshops in metropolitan events, the role of doing as a collective challenge, the role of collective creativity in addressing the problems and solutions in living environments, the tension towards a sustainable dimension of change.

## Conclusions

The cases discussed in the paragraph above were used by the authors to open the discussion: though they represent a reaction to a specific social and historical context, they are timeless milestones in the history of design, in which we find the seeds of the movements and design approaches that consider transition to be a phenomenon of extreme interest, but address it by acting on transience because it is experimental and prototypical, in design for man and society.

The potential of change expressed by the transience represents for the authors a key to interpret the contemporary processes of triple transition, in which design for collective action represents a field of research and experimentation on several levels and with different degrees of involvement.

This field of research-action on transitions was fuelled by the realisation that new design-driven, even prototypical, approaches are needed to investigate the dynamics of contemporary complex social problems and to guide the development of system solutions, in which the temporal and relational variables emerge.

Innovation itself is a systemic process in which, for example, technological innovation interacts with social and institutional changes in a co-evolutionary manner: that is, through their interaction the interacting elements themselves also change and implies the inclusion of a range of technological, social, behavioral, economic, ecological and political factors in the analysis. The concept of the triple transition, digital, ecological and social, which guides innovation trajectories at the European level, through the European Green Deal, explores the complex network of synergies and trade-offs between the three domains, but also between the multitude of different disciplines and knowledge flows, underlying a designed transformation based on the three characteristic aspects of transience considered as agent of change. The spontaneous, the political and the participative nature are inevitable aspects of actions we are called to perform, and which require unprecedented collaboration between various forms of knowledge, combining technical and humanistic culture with every productive sector, including those in the creative field.

Despite this ambitious premise, the European Commission has also become aware of the gap between the design project of the triple transition and society's perception, understanding and absorption of it. Therefore, in 2020, one year after the launch of the Green Deal, the Commission promoted the birth of the New European Bauhaus (NEB), to associate a course of action with this time of significant investment that would rely on the creation of interfaces between Europe and its citizens, to build the European city of the future. The effort to introduce co-design processes and practices to build the strategy of the NEB is comparable to our concept of transience, and it is a symptom of the impossible task

of finding single-sector answers following pre-established patterns. Instead, it stimulates peer-learning methods, involving creative professionals, researchers and the communities that characterize the European Union in a call to share practices that can be also temporary, bottom-up, self-managed and prototypal, applying to relational factors, and for this reason channeled into the “Get Inspired” repository<sup>35</sup> to promote, by means of example, sustainable solutions to the states of polycrisis<sup>36</sup> that we are dealing with at the global level. The processes to define the European Green Deal and the NEB bear witness to the growing adoption of the approach to design and its tools and the emerging inclusion of co-design, participatory approaches and creativity in the new financing programmes of the European Community.

The NEB itself was the subject of prototyping<sup>37</sup> and generated by a widespread movement, increasingly aware that different cultures and shared identities not only are as important as decisions involving carbon emissions, public health, the environment broadly understood, materials and technology, but that these aspects are intrinsically related and each one represents a potential response to the other<sup>38</sup>. New approaches to the design culture based on a transience perspective are promoted at the urban and peri-urban scale, driving a methodological transfer and stimulating designers, artists, architects, cultural institutions, research centres and universities to collaborate and to consider processes above products. NEB imagines design for the city as a result of synergies between art, culture, social inclusion, science and technology for the creation of resilient new futures.

The aim is to test new systems, markets, cultures and behaviour, primarily through the possibility of experimenting, especially through participative practices in transitory and temporary contexts, aesthetics, forms of expression and new styles of living, building and working in the city of the future. To scale and support the NEB movement, the creation of the ninth EIT Knowledge Innovation Community<sup>39</sup> dedicated to Culture and Creativity (C&C) arises from the European reflection on the need to give cultural and creative production a central role in the economy of its Member States. The constitution of the EIT KIC C&C is the result of a discussion among its 50 partners including cultural institutions, universities and research centres, artists, creative associations and networks, entrepreneurship in the sphere of culture and creativity, which considered the issues of new forms of rapid transfer for innovation, supporting change between the various sectors as well as a change of mindset and individual behaviours, stimulating prototyping and cross-fertilisation of knowledge to foster sustainable solutions<sup>40</sup>. It also considered how to include civil society in this process – different communities, different generations and a wide range of cities and regions – which were thus to become a designing part of the change.

Today, the concept of transience appears thus to be the only condition and dimension we can design, influence, shape, test, experiment and consume, but also use to narrate the not-linear relationship between design as a culture of doing, producing, mediating, building relations, anticipating, and the transformations in cities and societies.



## NOTES

- <sup>1</sup> Pierre Lévy, *L'intelligenza collettiva. Per un'antropologia del cyberspazio* (Milano: Feltrinelli, 1996).
- <sup>2</sup> Charles Landry, and Franco Bianchini, *The creative city* (London: Demos, 1995).
- <sup>3</sup> William J. Mitchell, *La città dei bits. Spazi, luoghi e autostrade informatiche* (Milano: Electa, 1997).
- <sup>4</sup> William McDonough, and Michael Braungart, *Cradle to Cradle: Remaking the Way We Make Things* (New York: North Point Press, 2002).
- <sup>5</sup> Giuseppe, Guerrera, *Fondare città. La città dell'accoglienza* (Palermo: Grafill, 2001).
- <sup>6</sup> Carlo Ratti, and Matthew Claudel, *La città di domani. Come le reti stanno cambiando il futuro urbano* (Torino: Einaudi, 2017).
- <sup>7</sup> Stefano Boeri (Ed.), *Multiplicity USE: Uncertain States of Europe* (Milano: Skira, 2003) and Flaviano Celaschi, "Tempo, corpi, macchine, progetto nella città-canovaccio" in *Design e mutazioni. Processi per la trasformazione continua della città*, ed. Elena Formia, Valentina Gianfrate and Elena Vai (Bologna: Bononia University Press, 2021), 17-26.
- <sup>8</sup> Alessandro Deserti, "Design and the Transformation of Cities," in *Human Smart Cities. Rethinking the Interplay between Design and Planning*, ed. Grazia Concilio and Francesca Rizzo (Cham: Springer, 2016), 63-79.
- <sup>9</sup> Enzo Frateili, *Il disegno industriale italiano, 1928-1981: quasi una storia ideologica* (Torino: CELID, 1983), 41, 51-57.
- <sup>10</sup> Andrea Branzi, *Introduzione al design italiano: una modernità incompleta* (Milano: Baldini & Castoldi, 2008, I ed. 1999).
- <sup>11</sup> Matteo Vercelloni, *Breve storia del design italiano* (Roma: Carocci, 2008), 155.
- <sup>12</sup> Alberto Bassi, *Design* (Bologna: Il Mulino, 2013), 112.
- <sup>13</sup> Gabriella D'Amato, *Storia del design: dal Novecento al terzo millennio* (Milano: Pearson, 2020), 278.
- <sup>14</sup> See for example the issue 12-13, volume 7, 2020, "Social Design. Design e bene comune" of the Italian *Ais/Design Journal. Storie e Ricerche* or the forthcoming issue "Il design e i limiti dello sviluppo" (2023) of the same journal.
- <sup>15</sup> A renewed literature about Italian Radical Design started to appear at the beginning of 2010s. It is possible to mention some significant book published in Italy: Paola Nicolin, *Castelli di carte. La XIV Triennale di Milano, 1968* (Macerata: Quodlibet, 2011), Bruno and Paolo Tonini (Editors), *Il radical italiano nel contesto internazionale dell'architettura utopica e visionaria 1957-1980* (Gussago: Edizioni dell'Arengario, 2011); Andrea Branzi, *Una generazione esagerata: dai Radical italiani alla crisi della globalizzazione* (Milano: Baldini & Castoldi, 2014), Pino Bruggellis, Gianni Pettena, Alberto Salvadori (Editors), *Radical utopias: Archizoom, Remo Buti, 9999, Gianni Pettena, Superstudio, UFO, Zziggurat*, edited by Pino (Macerata: Quodlibet, 2017). This specific episode has recently attracted also interest at an international level, as the following books and essays testify: Catharine Rossi, *Crafting a Design Counterculture: The Pastoral and the Primitive in Italian Radical Design, 1972-1976*, in *Made in Italy. Rethinking a Century of Italian Design*, eds. Grace Lees-Maffei and Kjetil Fallan, (London and New York: Bloomsbury, 2014), 146, Maria Cristina Didero, *SuperDesign: Italian radical design 1965-75* (New York: R & Company: Monacelli Press, 2017), Beatriz Colomina (Ed.), *Radical pedagogies* (Cambridge, Mass.: The MIT Press, 2022), Pia Rigaldiès, *Radical Pop: le design politique a Turin de Mai 68 aux années de plomb* (Villeneuve d'Ascq: Presses Universitaires Septentrion, 2022); Dellapiana, Elena, and Fiorella Bulegato. 2020. "From Architecture to Design and Back: The Architectural Roots of the Italian Design System". *Res Mobilis* 9 (10):13155. <https://doi.org/10.17811/rm.9.10.2020.131-155>.
- <sup>16</sup> Elena Formia, "Mediating an Ecological Awareness in Italy: Shared Visions of Sustainability Between the Environmental Movement and Radical Design Cultures (1970-1976)," *Journal of Design History* 30, no. 2 (2017): 192-201.
- <sup>17</sup> Maria Göransdotter, *Transitional Design Histories* (Umeå: Umeå Institute of Design Research Publications, 2020).
- <sup>18</sup> Maria Göransdotter, "Transitional Design Histories: Present-Ing History in Design," *Nordes 2021: Matters of Scale*, no. 9 (2021): 187.
- <sup>19</sup> Göransdotter, "Transitional Design Histories: Present-Ing History in Design," 188.
- <sup>20</sup> *Ibid.*
- <sup>21</sup> Göransdotter, "Transitional Design Histories: Present-Ing History in Design," 189.
- <sup>22</sup> Göransdotter, "Transitional Design Histories: Present-Ing History in Design," 188.
- <sup>23</sup> Catharine Rossi, "Crafting a Design Counterculture: The Pastoral and the Primitive in Italian Radical Design, 1972-1976," in *Made in Italy. Rethinking a Century of Italian Design*, eds. Grace Lees-Maffei and Kjetil Fallan, (London and New York: Bloomsbury, 2014), 146.
- <sup>24</sup> Alessandro Mendini, "Editorial," *Casabella* XXXVIII, no. 386 (1974): 9.
- <sup>25</sup> Andrea Branzi, "Radical Architecture," *Casabella* XXXVIII, no. 386 (1974): 46.
- <sup>26</sup> Ugo La Pietra, "The reappropriation of the city," *Casabella* XXXVIII, no. 386 (1974): 33.

<sup>27</sup> Most of these documents are available in the online archive. “La riappropriazione della città, 1977,” Ugo La Pietra, accessed March 30, 2023, <https://ugolapietra.com/cinema-dartista/>

<sup>28</sup> Elena Dellapiana, “Design tra libertà, utopie e politiche culturali,” in *Italia: design, politica, democrazia nel XX secolo*, ed. Elena Dellapiana, Luciana Gunetti and Dario Scodeller (Torino: Politecnico di Torino, 2020), 239.

<sup>29</sup> As for the previous case study, it is important to note that these actions testify a strong connection about creative disciplines: the boundaries between design, art, tactical urbanism are not clear. This was true also in other international contexts: for example the counterculture movement of the American East Coast, but mostly the close French territory where important Italian figures worked. Just to quote some examples, the contacts among Germano Celant and Pierre Restany, late 1960s.

<sup>30</sup> The catalogue of the event is the main source available: Luciano Caramel, Ugo Mulas and Bruno Munari (Eds.), *Campo urbano. Interventi estetici nella dimensione collettiva urbana. Como 21 settembre 1969*. [Fotografie di Ugo Mulas, progetto grafico di Bruno Munari] (Como: Cesare Nani, 1970).

<sup>31</sup> Roberto De Paolis, “Campo Urbano 1969. Interventi estetici nella dimensione collettiva urbana,” *Ais/Design Journal. Storia e Ricerche* 7, no. 12-13 (2019-2020): 179-204.

<sup>32</sup> Susanna Parlato and Paola Salvatore, “Riccardo Dalisi al Rione Traiano. Il riscatto sociale attraverso l’esperienza d’animazione,” *Ais/Design Journal. Storia e Ricerche* 7, no. 12-13 (2019-2020): 168.

<sup>33</sup> Riccardo Dalisi, “La tecnica povera in rivolta,” *Casabella* XXXVI, no. 365 (May, 1972): 47.

<sup>34</sup> *Riccardo Dalisi '71-'74* (Torino: Circolo del Design, 2022).

<sup>35</sup> See the repository “Inspiring projects and ideas,” NEB, accessed March 30, 2023, [https://new-european-bauhaus.europa.eu/get-inspired/inspiring-projects-and-ideas\\_en](https://new-european-bauhaus.europa.eu/get-inspired/inspiring-projects-and-ideas_en).

<sup>36</sup> Adam Tooze, *Shutdown: how COVID shook the world's economy* (New York: Viking, 2021).

<sup>37</sup> Margherita Ascari, Valentina Gianfrate and Lorela Mehmeti, “Towards Design and Creativity in the European Work Programmes,” *diid — disegno industriale industrial design*, no. 73 (2021): 24–33.

<sup>38</sup> Mariana Mazzucato, “Mission- oriented innovation policies: Challenges and opportunities,” *Industrial and Corporate Change* 27, no. 5 (2021): 803-815.

<sup>39</sup> Jeroen Huisman and Dorrit De Jong, “The Construction of the European Institute of Innovation and Technology: The Realisation of an Ambiguous Policy Idea,” *Globalisation, Societies and Education* 6, no. 3 (2014): 291–307.

<sup>40</sup> Fabio Donato, “Cultura, patrimonio culturale e creatività nelle politiche della ricerca europea/Culture, cultural heritage and creativity in European research policies,” *Il capitale culturale*, no. 24 (2021): 341-359.

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