A PHILOSOPHICAL APPROACH TO DESIGN. THE DESIGN OF PHILOSOPHY

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This paper is based on my interest of approaching Design from a philosophical perspective, namely from phenomenology and hermeneutics. Considering my contribution in the frame of an exploratory paper, I mainly can arise questions and 'intuitions' rather than propose answers or solutions. Moreover, my research about this topic is a on going work and the way seems very long and very demanding. By developing such an approach to Design, I believe that it will be also possible to develop a new argument: that what I mean by the *Design of Philosophy*. Hopefully, this and other concepts will be clarified during the progress of my research. In effect, it is not yet possible to present all the insights in this paper.

A MUTUAL REFLECTIVE EFFECT

In the questioning for meaning towards a closer relation between Philosophy and Design I ask: what partnerships can be established between content revealed via discourse, argument and concept (Philosophy) and content materialised in cultural artefacts as markers of time and markers of experience (Design)?

"'Human' is the mark man leaves upon things, it is his work, be it a remarkable masterpiece or the anonymous product of an epoch. The continuing dissemination of works, objects and signs is what makes civility, the habitat of our species, its second nature… *each man is man+thing*, each man is a man as long as he can recognise himself in a number of things, as long as he can recognise the human essence invested in things, himself turned into a thing." (Calvino, 1999:49).

The premise of the recovery of *poietic knowledge* as *fundamental knowledge* has consequences for the monopolistic model of modern technological rationalisation. Taking Heidegger's hermeneutics of the factical life as reference, we have to recognise the finite and temporary nature of discourse and action. We are preceded by something that makes us belong much more to history than history belongs to us. Because every individual can use language, because his/her development and education have occurred in a given community, every individual assimilates a set of values, attitudes and beliefs that are deeply rooted in him/her

and, consciously or uncounsciously, interfere with his/her relation with the world.

Design interpretations depend on the diversity of historical, geographical and cultural contexts, on economic and political conjunctures, and most certainly on individual patterns inherent to the relationship each designer establishes with his/her activity. Therefore, Victor Margolin, recognising the multiple aspects that gravitate around design, has claimed that *Design is all around us: it infuses every object in the material world and gives form to immaterial processes such as factory production and services.* (Margolin,1989:3)

Philosophy has been taken, from the beginning, as the matrix of knowledge in Western culture, which has resulted in an approach to, or a withdrawal from, other forms of knowledge whenever they have to be confronted with a specific legitimisation of their conceptual universe. However, even when, justified by the unity of more and more specialised knowledge, the emancipatory process requires that its own epistemological field be defined, its relations with Philosophy may be kept through a critical, focused, and accurate meta-discourse.

Let us consider three relational patterns between Design and Philosophy:

_ disconnected, partial, and disorderly circumstantial appropriation of philosophical knowledge by Design discourse. Philosophy is viewed as an ornament and an instrument.

_ conceptual appropriation of philosophical knowledge, in order to add epistemological consistency to Design discourse, just like other fields of knowledge resort to the thought patterns of a philosophical model to find the limits of their conceptual territory. Philosophy is the *Philosophy of*; in the present case, *Philosophy of Design*.

_ original appropriation of philosophical knowledge, in order to add ontological consistency to Design, which means taking Design beyond its disciplinary, epistemological, but also praxic and pragmatic limits, thus assigning to Design the role of questioning the destiny of the individual as that *being-there* in the world (a world of nature, of culture, of artifice, of alterity, of authority, of freedom). A new perspective then opens up to thinking, one to which I think we can refer as *Design of Philosophy*.

Why Design of Philosophy? Design practice, as knowledge prior to the knowledge captured by design epistemology, emerges as a creator of new territories which open themselves up to philosophy as possible ground for renovation through the construction of another worldview (*Weltanschauung*) and another consciousness of the heterogeneous scope of conceptual thinking.

If Philosophy and Design do not confound their natures, they can have a mutual reflective effect: Design, as project, construction, making, is anticipation, it invents the future; Philosophy, as thinking, word, argument, adds consistency to the future. The universe of the emerging signs, codes and symbols of the spirit of time (Design) and the universe of the consciousness of the spirit of time (Philosophy) come together in their possible answers to the Hannah Arendt's question, *Where are we when we are thinking?* In effect, that is not a question for a contemplative subject. The subject is a perceptive being, perception is given on a horizon and knowledge is a cross of complex elements. Therefore, no hermeneutic proposition about the interrelations between Philosophy and Design – *Philosophy of Design* and *Design of Philosophy* – can ignore the ontological texture interweaving the world, men, their creations and their destinies.

In the next item, I intend to underline how the connexion between subject and thing is so deep that it offers the opportunity to think how much Design shapes the world.

SECOND SKIN: ARTEFACTS AND LIFE

"I want never to forget what things have given me". (Selle, 1997: 37).

Things, objects, artefacts are rooted in our lives to the bone, and it is not possible to imagine life without these daily companions. The state of artefacts mirrors the state of cultural relations between individuals, and it would be very naïve to judge them only in terms of the manifestation of power of a market economy which requires, for its survival, a fast replacement of the protagonism of some artefacts with others.

The symbiosis of artefacts with life has ascribed them to the quasi-ontological status of 'second skin', and, when they become immaterial and lose the importance of revealing themselves as the consistency of the natural way of feeling the world, it is because the world may be felt through simulacrum, and the skin of objects is a presupposed limbo where the interface between the world and the individual is woven. A reflection upon the behaviour of individuals towards things is, after all, a manifestation of the present state of life. Victor Papanek, in his reflection *upon the spiritual*

in design, claims that what gives it its spiritual value may be either the designer's intention or the use given to the created artefact, thus reinforcing his view that what you make, shapes what you are and what you become. (Papanek,1995: 57). In Otl Aicher's view, the world is like a product of a civilisation; it is constructed, projected by individuals and, so, there are good and bad projects [or, better said, successful and unsuccessful projects]. In the same work, *Die Welt als Entwurf* [*The World as Project*], he also claims that, in a project, the individual becomes what he is (Aicher, 1991: 196).

Design thinking in contemporary society cannot ignore the categories that define the profile of human being in the new territory of the information/communication society. We are to question the meaning and significance of the statement I am me in a context of the receive-return movement, which technology not only allows but also encourages. After the agony of ideologies and utopias in general, whether religious, artistic or naturalistic ones, we are now witnessing a reproduction of alienation mechanisms which, contrary to the ones we can find in the past, act with greater subtlety because they come disguised in the most seductive promises: creativity, freedom, knowledge, success, pleasure… singularity. It may prove interesting to consider the relationship between the demagogy of abundance (of sensations, artefacts, noises, signals, propositions) and the possibility of the human being as the creator of his/her own destiny.

An object is not only a functional object; it is an event, an occurrence (*ein Ereignis*), a silence to fill, a feeling to discover. There is a techné, a public taste, a fashion, principles of projection and of construction. But how about the destiny of these artefacts? The artefact is not only an object of use, it can be felt, it participates in the world of the addressee (*Umwelt*) and is a world (*ein Welt*) in itself. The work always shows something of the subject, both of its creator and of the one it finds in its path. It is in this sense that the *pathos* of the work appears, its *blank meaning* (Pombo, 2001: 126) the unpredictable and unthinkable meaning that it carries with it.

From the point of view *of the world as a project*, it is my interest to continue developing research in the field of *Design of Philosophy*, based on the statement that design designs the world. In consequence, I intend to contribute, from that perspective, to an actual critic to the act of designing.

The world, as a plurality of phenomena, is the main way of asking why things appear and why they take a certain form instead of another. Phenomenology and hermeneutics enable description and clarification of the contexts of the artefacts. Objects do not pose only questions of form, but participate in multiple contexts, establishing a dialectic in which they attribute and receive meaning.

Artefacts manifest simultaneously a *Zeitgeist*, a conception of the world, a relational horizon, a movement that is super-structural and transcendental to it, a way of life and a hypothetical possibility of transforming it. Design for the future is a statement that applies for a critical reasoning towards the understanding of Design.

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