

## **Living between Exhibit, Retail and Domestic**

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The research activity carried out by the Doctoral Students in Interior Architecture and Exhibition Design at the Politecnico di Milano, starting from January 2007, concerned the work in progress in the Interior Architecture field at the most prominent universities and research institutions worldwide, as witnessed by this volume and the corresponding convention, and originated from the desire of inserting their basic education and individual researches into an ample context, which may gauge itself against the global dimension of contemporary reality.

First and foremost, the investigation exposed the state of fragmentation in which the scientific community that gathers around disciplines related to Interiors lingers: a sort of archipelago of isolated monads, or at most clustered according to linguistic or territorial homogeneities, with relatively few relationships among themselves. A preliminary task of critical recognition of the state of the research highlighted then the emersion of some themes that expose a deeply social character in this discipline, so tightly connected to the everyday individual and collective lives; in the last fifteen years, this reality has been enduring fast and profound transformations, which inevitably recirculate the traditional acquisitions of the project culture in Interiors.

On one side, we can observe how new technologies have been playing an ever-growing role in the elaboration of the design process, not only as far as possible solutions are concerned, but rather as new ways for defining conceptual themes and modalities, and delving deep into the contents and related forms thereof, so as to define new usage scenarios. All this is especially apparent in the scattered communication processes related to techniques and ways for exhibiting; this sector is strongly expanding in metropolitan and «advanced» areas, as a component of business and cultural functions, in retails, in expos, as well as museums and temporary exhibitions.

On the other hand, we are faced with the eternal issue of the «man's house» and its deep significance for the existence and quality of life. The living emergence that affects extended regions all over the world prompts the

subject of living as the focus of a common reflection, although in different modes and measures, both in developing and so-called «Western block» countries. To everybody a home still appears as an utopia that is pretty far from coming true, even in more opulent nations (with the possible exception of Northern European countries, and partially Northern American areas); now more than ever, it looks like the discipline of Interiors is being stimulated to supply new answers that keep into account all cultural and economical constrains of the individual geographical realities.

The issue of sustainably solution emerged, as strictly connected with the previous two, representing the most constraining element when we look towards the future, yet at the same time also constituting a stimulus to renew studies and investigations on local living and building traditions (which marked a certain architectural streak, mostly in Italy, throughout the Sixties and Seventies) and the enormous wealth of specific and meta-design solutions that they encompass. Besides these emergencies, we were also able to detect the existence of a flourishing theoretical speculation activity, which keeps ostensibly aloof from the events of real life to refer exclusively to the world of ideas. We are dealing with studies and researches whose investigation object is the discipline, in its three declination proposed by the research that was accomplished throughout the PhD programme and by the convention (that is, Domestic, Retail and Exhibition), as well as its rules and developments.

Particularly in the exhibition sector, and partly in the retail domain, we can observe an hybridisation as imposing itself even more stronger, or even a subjection of Interiors to Performing Arts, as an offspring of a cultural hegemony that the world of Arts currently owns with respect to the world of Architecture. On one hand, these disciplinary transits enrich our reflection hints, and open our vision toward different horizons, but on the other hand they run the risk of merging the specificity of Interior Design into that of different operational domains, with a consequent weakening and a looming total eclipse of identities. Certainly, the Art domain is not the only one bordering with Interiors. Social and Psychological Sciences, as well as Economic Sciences, respectively represent as many opportunities for hybridisation or inter-disciplinary hegemony. Synthetically, we can maintain the establishment in recent years of a concept of operative knowledge and modalities that move by following networking strategies and favour inter-disciplinary connections.

From the design point of view, this multi-scale and multi-disciplinary Interior connotation prompts for issues of intervention articulation, which call for an involvement of ever-growing competences that must cooperate in adjusting the architecture of spaces, installation technologies, communication

systems (whether it is business, cultural or informational communication), to the users of living and to the audiences that attend the places where exhibitions are held; this will require a constant tuning of the relationship between each element and the interior environment of the individual portion (room, shop, hall, etc.) and to the general encasing represented by the building. Such a range of issues may find its tools for reflection and its design experiences in an audience of researchers and scholars that is getting more and more ample and correlated.

It is not a coincidence that, within the research programme that was carried out in the first phase of PhD, the mapping task was immediately integrated by the project of a web platform that could be able to serve as an interexchange lieu for worldwide research. Indeed, such a Forum was permanently aimed at scholars, researchers and all those who deal with design practice-theory and are affiliated to research institutions and universities, in order to function as a shared archive. The database should include material (protected by copyrights), and aims at becoming an indispensable reference site for the development of research on Interiors worldwide.

The international and inter-disciplinary foundation of the research lies in the keywords that emerge both from the first sounding step elaborated by the researchers-doctoral students, and the feedback represented by the papers that reached the International Call promoted by the “Places & Themes of Contemporary. Interior Research Worldwide” conference, which drive on one side to a geographic widening, and on the other side to a cultural broadening of disciplinary inspection. The InteriorsForumWorld conference 2008 was summoned in order to stimulate a direct contribution to the investigation themes that occupied the PhD Programme. Following the Call, approximately 200 abstracts were gathered and winnowed by a double-blind review process that led to the redaction of a list of about 150 authors for as many potential papers. Upon delivery, the papers were in turn subjected to a further revision process, again on a double-blind basis, which allowed for the identification of the interventions to be featured at the convention (21 speakers) and included in the attached publication, as well as a selection of the other contributions for the CD that comes with the book. Such a decision is justified by the value of several of the delivered manuscripts: to prevent dispersion of the scientific works of a number of scholars, we choose to gather all the same the best of the contributions that were not selected for the presentation and edit them in a digital publication, which accompanies the printed material and represents somehow an ideal extension of it.