
Roots of Design Futures in art, architecture, and design

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ABSTRACT

Design Futures is herewith proposed and discussed as a conceptualization of existing methodological streams in corporate design history, in the analysis of Italian Design Districts, and in other creative industry fields, inspiring a fundamental tension to anticipate what will come next, which artists, architects and designers naturally embody. Purpose of this paper is to identify some examples of anticipatory movements, to then contextualize them in their historical background, thereby scoping the domain of Design Futures at least at the level of a first draft, in progress. In the rich history of art, architecture, and design, the selection herewith presented is purely exemplificatory and not intended yet as a systematic, complete, critical review on universal terms.

Keywords -Design Futures; Strategic Design; High Design; Foresight; Futures Research

1. Introduction

At the time of writing of this paper, Royal Philips NV has rolled out a restructuring plan to minimize the size and the role of Philips Experience Design. The refocusing of the Dutch corporation, once the largest technology enterprise in Europe, into a smaller size High Tech medical company, has erased the natural diversity of a portfolio, which once included consumer and business-to-business divisions and business units. High Design was conceived in the early 1990's, as a response by designers to the faith in scientific research and engineering, which characterized industrial practices before postmodernism. Nevertheless, through the decades Philips Design generated a lot of advancements in the practice of design, including several theoretical and methodological developments, e.g. the High Design approach.

While the portfolio of interdisciplinary dialog between design and foresight only expanded, the last two decades saw the end of postmodernism and more recently, of globalization. On the one hand, these paradigm-changing processes positively opened new possibilities for BRIC's and other emerging countries. On the other hand, the world negatively slipped into geopolitical turmoil and, increasingly, war as an extension of politics. On top of these macro-trends, the impact of innovation, from cybercrime to climate change, became the engine for generational conflict and increasing insecurity. The spotless optimism of High Design is therefore no longer justifiable, as we bitterly discovered how preferable longer-term visions might contradictorily generate dystopian shorter-term conditions, in line with the complexity of Post Normal Times (Saddar, 2017). From this foundation, Design Futures stretches to Dr. Marzano's recent work with LaSapienza, Rome, on the "dark side" of design, focused on incorporating dystopia in futures thinking (Bevolo, 2022-a). Further than 1990's High Design, Design Futures has therefore the ambition to adopt Design Research approaches to explore major planetary, societal, and political conflicts and challenges, incorporating trauma and dystopia in its very body of reference.

The convergence of fine arts, design, and cultural sector practices into beneficial business insights was explored by the author of this paper in his first independent book (Bevolo, 2010): a new synthesis of future visions through design and humanities seems more necessary now, than ever before. With unforeseen macro-scenarios developing in this “brave new world”, designers and design are increasingly challenged to think beyond marketing and sales within corporate diagrams. With Artificial Intelligence being a reality, which potentially challenges the very nature of both foresight and design (Bevolo & Amati, 2020), with digital worlds increasingly becoming standard realities, from Fortnite to Metaverse (Bevolo, 2021-b), Design Futures has the ambition to restore qualitative research and cultural studies at the heart of applied creativity, extending its reflection beyond the limits of the Anthropocene, to include the natural environment. This paper explores some possible historical and contemporary references from art and architecture, and it sketches some possible lines of development for Design Futures, with a constant reference back to High Design as the foundation of Design Futures. Delimiting external borders of Design Futures, instead of defining its core processes, is the focus of this paper.

2. Argument

The key propositions at the argumentative foundation of this paper, are captured as below:

- a. Design is not isolated in culture and society; on the contrary, design is a creative force in a dialectic relationship with cultural trends and social drivers (Julier, 2000);
- b. Historically and theoretically, design exceeds the footprint of marketing and sales or other insular corporate and business functions, with a structural ability to anticipate the future beyond the organization of labor determining its operational conditions;
- c. Innovation is based on technology roadmaps and paradigm-changing leapfrogging at various horizons and with different timelines, however without design, technology often ends up in solutionism (Morozov, 2013);
- d. Foresight and futures research are dignified disciplinary fields (Lombardo, 2008), with their own literature, validated methodologies, academic representation, professional and scientific associations, therefore they constitute a separate body of reference in the context of both business consulting and social sciences (Bell, 1997 / 2003);
- e. The integration of design approaches and Foresight methods elevates the strategic nature of design beyond conceiving and Imagineering, towards a practice-driven and applicative view on longer-term, planetary futures.

In synthesis, the aim of Design Futures is (also) to reframe “design” in the context of history, where thought leading schools like Bauhaus or thought leaders like Bruno Munari (Munari, 1971, 2001) expanded the very notion of what design is, well beyond the simple contribution to consumption cycles.

3. Methodological reflection

Being tasked with envisioning and crafting the material world to be (Flusser, 1999, 2009, 2010), designers are inventors of what is next and, as such, they have the opportunity, if not the ethical duty (Fry, 2011), to reposition themselves as future-makers. How to pursue such an ambitious goal? It is not the purpose of this paper to detail or even scope the methodologies at the heart of Design Futures. Suffice to state that the core of what is proposed as Design Futures lies in the High Design approach (Bevolo et al., 2011), envisioned, and implemented in the two decades between 1991 and 2011, under the thought leadership and managerial direction of Dr. Stefano Marzano (Marzano, 1998). High Design

represented a pivotal moment and actual movement within Philips, whereby one might say that their 80 years of history reached a climax in terms of thought leadership, organizational relevance, and creative edge (VV.AA., 2005). Departing from such outstanding tradition, at its heart, Design Futures advocates the anticipatory role of the work by designers and architects in close cooperation with multidisciplinary consultants across competencies, from psychology, philosophy, and anthropology, to humanities, e.g. science fiction (Hassler-Forest, 2016), storytelling, and cinema. One might observe how the Italian tradition, since the Renaissance, of framing architectural, and artistic practices into humanities and a social vision played a role in paving the way for High Design. Meanwhile, since the early 1990's, several disciplinary developments occurred, both in foresight and Futures Research and in Strategic Design: speculative design (Dunne & Raby, 2013) and speculative futures (Hoffman, 2022), CLA (Inayatullah, 2015); experiential futures (Candy, 2019), and more positions, whereby Design Futures finds complementary reflexivity and methodological benchmark. Further specifying methods and tools of Design Futures would deviate from the focus of this paper, where exemplification references will be made to ground Design Futures and its framework within High Design, in fine arts history, contemporary architectural practice, and design vision.

4. Fine Arts: Futurismo

The Futurismo movement of the first half of the XX Century was a multidisciplinary current in international arts and design, which developed from literature, painting, and sculpture, to cover architecture, fashion, food, lifestyle, and new media of its time, namely photography, radio broadcast, and cinema. Its main protagonists were F.T. Marinetti, its ideologist and leader; Boccioni, Carra, and Balla (painters and sculptors); Antonio Sant'Elia (architect, who never built but established his legacy by visionary drawings); and, in a second moment, Fortunato Depero (painter and graphic designer). Labeled as: "The other Modernism" by Cinzia Sartini Blum (Sartini Blum, 1996), Futurismo was the first international arts movement created in the first decades of the 1900's Italy, followed by Arte Povera, in the second half of the 1960's and the 1970's, and by Transavanguardia in the early 1980's. Futurismo was politically a right-wing movement, playing in the field of Italian nationalism, reactionary movements, and military interventionism. Politically, the movement was a competitor of the first Fascism, and then affiliated to the regime, although with its own internationalist views and positions. Mainly for these reasons, Futurismo suffered a critical and cultural stigma from the 1940's to the 1980's, when it was relaunched to the masses by means of a milestone retrospective at Palazzo Grassi, in Venice. At the same time, its highly experimental aesthetics and truly international spirit was continued in the 1950's and 1960's in fine arts through Concrete Poetry, Non-objective Art, Non-representational Art, and in fashion, design, and advertising.

There are five traits of Futurismo, which play a role in inspiring Design Futures: a) an intrinsic tension towards the future, with a strong vision for what is preferable (although, of course, not in line with what F.T. Marinetti envisioned); b) an experimental drive to reach beyond the limits of conventions within disciplines and sectors (Perloff, 1986); c) the subsequent ambition to incorporate all aspects of life within their artistic practice; d) the ability to work at the forefront of media of their times, like cinema (Lista, 2001), developing innovative publicity, and propaganda techniques, for longer-term impact; and e) the establishment of a body of theoretical literature, in the form of "manifestos", (Apollonio, 1970) describing and prescribing the applications and implications of Futurismo to specific sectors and practices. The tradition of Futurismo still lives in museums worldwide, from MoMA to LACMA, as well as in concepts like FuturDome, Milan (Bevolo, 2010), a "living museum" where

contemporary art and design are programmed within a creative community of studios in a philologically restored courtyard, and in a program defined by Istituto Internazionale di Studi sul Futurismo, or ISISUF, Milan, the art foundation created in the 1950's, by Carlo Belloli, described by F.T. Marinetti in 1944 as the "future of Futurismo".

Several ideas and ideals of Futurismo completely diverge from the ethos of High Design, e.g. faith in technology; radical rejection of past culture; and aggressive right wing politics. On the contrary, High Design was people-centric, culturally inclusive, and characterized by a belief in sustainability on environmental, social, and personal levels. However, some aspects of the movement might be relatable to High Design. High Design was inspired by a conscious tension towards preferable futures, anticipating people's social values, cultural trends, and aesthetic preferences. In its drive to integrate technology into people's lives, High Design experimented with innovation across emerging digital roadmaps, bending and merging applications with lifestyles. It must be specified how historically High Design served corporate programs and the consulting projects across as diversified Philips sectors as consumer electronics, domestic appliances, personal care, medical systems, lighting solutions, semiconductors, and components, integrated by collaborations within diverse domains, e.g., mobility, fashion, sport apparel, and more. In pursuing public relevance, High Design adopted a conscious communication strategy, whereby publications, conferences, media presence, gallery exhibitions, museum roadshows, and media presence were leveraged to bring the message across, while receiving feedback from press, specialist audiences, and common people, to fine tune insights and ideas. Lastly, High Design was grounded in several books, publications, and other printed features, including Ph.D. monographs, whereby concepts, trends, and visions were contextualized in coeval theory and articulated in actionable methodologies. Design Futures aims at building upon such a visionary foundation by adopting both the mindset as well as strategies and tactics crafted by Dr. Stefano Marzano and his worldwide teams in their tenure.

5. Architecture: AMO at OMA

Just like Boccioni, perhaps the most gifted painter, Antonio Sant'Elia, the architect associated with Futurismo, died relatively young, leaving behind a body of work in drawings only. Even without being able to embody his vision into concrete buildings, Sant'Elia played a relevant role to inspire 1960's architectural studios and international firms. At an ideal opposite end of architectural history, Office for Metropolitan Architecture, founded in 1975 by Rem Koolhaas, have established themselves as both thought leaders (through publications, e.g., the book "S, M, L, XL" design with Bruce Mau (Koolhaas & Mau, 1995); education, e.g., several courses held at thought-leading architectural schools; and major museum events, e.g., "Countryside, The Future" at the Guggenheim, New York) and as master builders, by signing off several iconic projects that determined the birth of trends in design. Within this paper, the specific research branch at OMA, identified as AMO, will be briefly introduced as a key reference for Design Futures. AMO focuses on research, based on design methodologies whereby demographic, economic, social, technological, environmental, political, and other knowledge domains find synthesis in storytelling, concepts, and communications. Multidisciplinary teams converge into solutions whereby rigorous analysis is embodied in thought leading books but also curatorial projects, e.g., the 2014 Venice Biennale; installations; shows, e.g., the Prada catwalk seasonal events; and design projects. Of relevance to AMO is the current tenure as the Director at AMO by Samir Bantal (Bevolo, 2021-c), Moroccan / Dutch trendsetting leader, with deep insights into the Arab speaking world, as well as into the latest trends in fashion, e.g., his collaboration with the late Virgil Abloh on Off White retail. Thanks

to his multicultural roots, established in The Netherlands as a second-generation Mediterranean immigrant, Bantal, who also contributes at board level to key institutes like the Design Academy Eindhoven, manages AMO with his unique combination of architectural pragmatism and intellectual charisma.

Architecture itself as a discipline and a practice is deeply changing (Bevolo, 2019) by opening its processes (Ratti, 2014). High Design articulated programs in urban futures (Bevolo, 2017) for lighting innovation (Bevolo & Rosenius, 2014), which are a solid foundation for a dialog between the different disciplinary silos of strategic design, concept design, product system design and urban architecture. To some extent, the research conducted under the OMA AMO flagship might resonate with what presented in the former paragraph, e.g. the ability to be communicated in a relevant fashion, setting agendas; the elasticity to stretch from societal issues to fashion or commerce, connecting them in innovative insights; and the drive to incorporate relatively unexpected topics and themes in the big picture. These qualities were also reflected in High Design. As much as co-creation, co-design, and dialog are at the heart of Design Futures, individual inspiration and an intellectual edge are necessary factors. Just like Samir Bantal brings at the heart of his practice and contribution his multicultural roots, Dr. Marzano himself designed the fundamentals of High Design based on his Italian background, from his humanist roots in Milan, to his exposure to the informal ways of working of Italian Design Districts (Verganti, 2009), namely in his native Lombardy. In this respect, High Design, unlike earlier corporate industrial design practices, was always characterized by a plurality of testimonials, or individual voices, including speakers and spokespersons from regions as diversified as Europe, Asia Pacific, the Americas, and India (Bevolo, 2022-d) enabled and empowered to represent the approach on conference stages, in educational settings, and in media.

6. Design: Bruce Mau / Massive Change Network

The necessity to shift our focus from dominating ideologies to native cosmogonies is well represented by the intellectual work by Bruce Mau, who developed his practice from graphic design, to thought leadership in court. The biography of Mau incarnates the actual power of the individual in evolving from design practice to game changing world-building. Having risen at guru status within 1990's graphic design with his "S, X, L, XL" with Rem Koolhaas, Mau did not just capitalize on his creative leadership in editorial and visual design but inspired by his dialog with Sir Norman Foster, and by his maverick sensibility moved on to system thinking. His groundbreaking mid 2000's "Massive Change" show in Vancouver, Toronto, and Chicago heralded a grand vision for the future. Based on a research trajectory by the highly multidisciplinary Institute Without Boundaries, as documented in his book, co-authored with Jennifer Leonard, "Massive Change" (Mau, 2004) marked a departure point to rethink the role and the methods of design for a changing world. Mau moved from Toronto, and his Bruce Mau Design Studio, to Chicago, where, together with his partner, Bisi Williams (Bevolo, 2022-b), he founded Massive Change Network, a novel enterprise conceived to address new questions arising from corporations, countries, and a world in deep need to redefine context by verbal and visual renewal. His MC24 (Mau, 2004) distilled the 24 principles that make his approach to design repeatable for the rest of us. In his latest book, "The Nexus" (Ottino & Mau, 2022), with Dr. Julio Mario Ottino, Dean at the Northwestern McCormick School of Engineering, Mau went on to explore the history and the necessity of a new convergence of art, science, and design (Bevolo, 2022-c). The radical optimism that characterizes Bruce Mau's practice is based on the drive to go beyond contemporary frameworks of sustainable development, recuperating, and reinvigorating the philosophical roots of Canadian First

Nation tribes as the starting point of Design-for-Life (Bevolo, 2021-a). The human-centric view of design that served the industrial age might therefore move beyond humans, to include the interests and the needs of all forms of wildlife, which make our natural context at planetary level.

High Design was people-focused but also sustainability-driven well ahead of trends, thanks to the intense and passionate commitments of its leadership and its teams. Mau took further steps in anticipating cultural movements pertaining to decolonization, climate change, and the fundamental need to define and design the new stages of economy and society. Design Futures has the ambition to inspire and deliver solutions or at least to scope and sketch challenges at the heart of our “life essentials” (Bevolo, 2021-d), namely air, water, energy, shelter, and shelter. In line with Mau’s intuitions and visions, this has proven increasingly necessary for any foresight practice. As a design-rooted discipline, the action-oriented nature of Design Futures acknowledges participation in society as a necessity, beyond any reductionist vision of science or commercial allocation of the design competencies to the marketing processes and departments of corporations.

7. Conclusions

This paper is meant to be a first foundation; therefore, conclusions will be open ended. It is an incomplete picture by design deemed to connect and contextualize High Design as a future-forming approach to prominent roots in the past and in the present. However, one direction in development might be highlighted. Beyond any illusion of reductionist positivism, a forward oriented Design Futures practice must consider diversity and inclusion as a deeper principle than representation, enabling the full acknowledgement of personal history and personal values as a source of richness in the texture of analysis, and of value in terms of research. This will be increasingly relevant as the BRIC’s and more regions and countries will strongly emerge as new drivers and polarities of relevance, both economically and culturally. Because, to some extent, all scholarly output might be described as biographical work in disguise, new biographies will drive Design Futures to rethink the future beyond the status quo determined, so far, by dominant cultures in terms of cosmogonies, epistemologies, and socio-cultural values.

This synthesis of Design Futures reflected its acknowledged roots in High Design as well as its humanistic focus in rebalancing technocratic and market-driven notions of design and foresight, with a particular accent on the “H” of SSH (Social Sciences and Humanities). Design Futures finds its natural harbor in education, given the prominent rise of Design Thinking in academia worldwide, combined with the emergence of futures literacy. Most of all, in the forthcoming decade, new generations of digital native students will effortlessly and brilliantly unlock the potential of new technologies, from the metaverse to Artificial Intelligence. Design Futures aims at inspiring those students, who represent the next generation of professionals and scholars in creative industry, and beyond, to mold their talents into context and through vision, for the pursuit of a higher good and a common welfare, reconnecting us, humans, to our societies through our cultures, and to life on Planet Earth.

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