

Chapters 4 and 5 provide an insight into general processes of design, and interior design in particular. Despite confirming that design processes vary, there does seem to be some blurring between design as abstraction and process and design as material practice. This in itself is not a problem if the 'critical' approach examines these relative to various theoretical formulations. For example the problem of linear design processes is dealt with by outlining a general model and noting the limitations of such abstract models in reality. However the detailed examination of a design process (Chapter 5) immediately reverts to a linear model that mirrors traditional practice. What it does not do is examine 'critical practice' or 'research-led practice' that might adopt new techniques and technologies to advance design outcomes. Further the premise for design is based upon slightly dated 'principles' such as proportion, balance, symmetry and axis – that underscore 'classical' readings of architecture. While I am not against the historical significance of such ideas, and their impact on the built environment, we also have to look at the effects of new mathematics informed by non-Euclidean geometry, and rapid prototyping. What design currently has is the ability to compute complex mathematical forms very quickly, and thereby offer an alternative framework around parametric design, and file to file manufacturing. Having said that, the case studies in this chapter leave a lot to be desired, they are certainly not exemplary projects, and should have illustrated a more critical approach to either the traditions espoused, or offered new formulations.

As the book shifts into the more 'elemental' sections on Space, Colour and Light, the historical tone that introduces each chapter gives way to the didactical. When describing the contributions of philosophers and psychologists to the understanding of space the author's position is not clear on how such ideas inform thoughts on spatial organisation and wayfinding. That is, the examples lack discussion about how theories might inform design practice, even the broader aspects of interior design practice (urban interiors, performance, narrative, installation and art practice). In a similar manner the chapter on Colour provides a short introduction to colour history/theory and psychology, before reverting to an empirically driven statement about colour planning.

To some extent these later chapters exemplify a problematic raised by the challenge of the book: how do you present a critical introduction to a discipline that is only just beginning to articulate its activities? To some extent a good concluding chapter would have been more effective than leaving the reader adrift after the final chapter on 'The business of interior design'. It might have been worth examining current design teaching and research emanating from tertiary institutions.

Despite these questions I have raised, *Interior Design: a critical introduction* deserves a readership. While I have no doubt it will assist first year students orientate themselves to the expectations of traditional practice, interior design clearly needs a second, more inspirational volume that unpacks a more critical academic and research orientated approach to the discipline.

## Publication Review

Inventario: Tutto è progetto / Everything is a project

Creator: Beppe Finessi Editor: Corraini  
<http://www.inventario-bookzine.com>

Reviewed by Eleonora Lupo, Polytechnico di Milano, Italy



The list as 'representation' system is an expedient presentation alternative to the showing of a finished form, which is referential and closed in on itself. In literature, Umberto Eco's reading of Homer's Iliad, among a number of citations related to biblical scriptures, illustrates the contrast between the description of the shield of Achilles and the power of the Greek army. The first description is shaped by enumeration of the shield world [even if the incredible number of represented scenes makes it difficult to reproduce it visually], The second is a list or a catalogue 'made of countable items that we can not enumerate' specifically the ships of the Greek army, and suggests the physically infinite perceived through the indefinite.<sup>1</sup> The need to postulate an 'aesthetic infinite' of an objective kind is related to the shortcomings of the inventory and not to a subjective feeling about the sublime to which the representative modality of the list responds.

The recent Italian publishing project, *Inventario*, situated between book and magazine is curated by Beppe Finessi and published by Corraini with the support of Foscarini. Drawing reference from the example sourced from Eco's writing translated to the physical and material field, the subtitle *Tutto è progetto / Everything is a project*, expands upon the infinite list when it

says 'everything is design'. In fact, the rhetoric of representation through 'visual lists' that permeates the history of the entire production and experience of the arts and human creativity, from the painting collections of Giovanni Pannini, to the lists of wonders, to the *Bilderatlas Mnemosyne* by Aby Warburg, returns in the name and on the cover of Issue No. 1, is a visual inventory, a 'collection' of flower pots, adopting and interpreting in such a way a modality, now back in vogue, to tell the stories of artefacts through catalogues or reviews. At the scale of the object of use the editorial work of Clive, Hansen and Mendell in the book *Hidden Forms* questions, through the photographs that are almost synopses, the significance of collection and storage for the definition and specification of the values of the objects.<sup>2</sup> Unlike the logic of the list that corresponds to a primitive, yet necessary, form of organisation in which many different properties align without establishing any hierarchical relationship among them (in a similar logic to the set theory), the inventoried collection corresponds with an 'order' of sensory experience that has a very specific function. The value derived from collecting in relation to the category of completeness as opposed to utility is flanked by the value of classification ordered by type, category and exemplar, according to taxonomic rules.

If the scientific classification of things is structured on the basis of formal, structural or functional configuration, in *Inventario* these 'rules' are the result of an innovative and sophisticated approach to interpret and narrate the world of design: an original leitmotiv that traces interdisciplinary paths between design, art, architecture and photography. Stories of designers, exemplary works, analysis of recent projects at the different scales from objects, interiors and buildings assume all the risk in order to convey an independent and deliberate critique offered from time to time by a variety of different critics and designers.

By this logic columns such as 'Normal wonders' are included, borrowed from Alessandro Mendini to indicate the astonishing collections of everyday objects, 'Bagatelle' collections around a seemingly minor issues such as swings, 'Absolutes' emblematic works, 'One thing leads to another' about forgotten objects, 'Judicious pairing', on the relationships between art and design

or 'The Architecture of Art' on those situations of art and architecture interface and 'Good design' about nature and design and finally on the photographic practice in 'Other Gazes'.

Moreover, even as the inventory is primarily a quantitative and qualitative recording of a given collection, at the same time *Inventario* functions to easily find, track and retrieve, typically a quality of the archive. Sorting and filtering can actually make possible the act of effectively preserving to allow consultation when needed. Therefore *Inventario*, more than a list, becomes a repertoire of design forms where the repertoire, compared to the archive, has a use-value that is related also to the future possible. New forms can be inspired by or come from the intertwining of traced paths, and not just limited to the documentation value. In this sense, *Inventario* is a co-existent approach to the synchronic and diachronic repertoire: it intertwines the typological and classificatory matrix with the temporal dimension of historical research, building lists and taxonomies that are collections over time, or 'evolutionary series' of forms of project. Presentations such as 'New Masters' and 'Near Future' are included on the production of the most interesting protagonists of the project, both established and emerging. 'Inventories by Authors' or 'Construction by Clues' describe in detail the multifaceted production of selected architects and designers [in the first issue, Attilio Stocchi and Guy Rottier, respectively], or 'Theory' on methodological and disciplinary aspects.

But if this were not enough to describe this editorial approach that pursues critical research on how to represent and organize the variety of project, there's more. And it's all in the word 'represent'. *Inventario* is designed as a visual device to show its "collections". In fact it consists exclusively of columns, [boxes designed to host only content explicitly sought and ordered in a certain way], which in a sense function as windows in a project of overall exhibition. To sort and display corresponds to a practice that is redeemed by the exclusive specificity of the museological field to expand different forms of communication; above all to those of contemporary artistic production, in which, through what James Putnam calls 'museum effect' the value is attributed to the work of art

through the manner of collecting and presentation according to museological logic.<sup>3</sup>

*Inventario*, moves beyond concern with reflecting upon the status of contemporary forms of art, to adopt a museological practice through the gaze of the scholar and the ethnographer and field researcher of design who can go in depth 'Technical Matters' shows the construction aspects of a project and identify design behaviours beyond the specific discipline 'Life as a project', in which passions, struggles and dreams become projects. From the techniques of display the visual and narrative tricks needed to build around each repertoire a specific story is borrowed, almost like a temporary exhibition, capable of both cross-fertilization and completeness, and able to explore language coherent to content, to set up a catchy yet sophisticated and expressive poetic.

In this sense the *Inventario* project is an 'interior', a series of rooms functionally characterized in which contemporary interdisciplinary research finds the space and visibility to debate the ethics of the aesthetics of the project.

## NOTES

1. Umberto Eco, *The Infinity of Lists*, (New York: Rizzoli International Publications, 2009)
2. Franco Clivio, Hans Hansen and Pierre Mendell, *Hidden Forms: Seeing and Understanding Things (Writings on Design)*, (Basel: Birkhauser, 2009)
3. James Putnam, *Art and Artifact: The Museum as Medium* (London: Thames & Hudson, 2001)