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Multidisciplinary Aspects of Design

Objects, Processes, Experiences and Narratives

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Introduction

This book is the result of a long research process. The work started in 2020 with an exhibition held in Parma (*Design! Oggetti processi esperienze*, CSAC Università degli Studi di Parma), and a book of the same title, edited by F. Zanella (with essays by G. Bosoni, E. Di Stefano, G.L. Iannilli, G. Matteucci and R. Trocchianesi) and published in 2023 (Electa Milano) centered on the role of archives as memory repositories and agents for contemporary design. This first period of reflection was followed by an international conference: *Design! O.P.E.N.* (https://www.designopen.it) held in Parma on May 5–6, 2022. The present volume contains most of the papers presented at the conference.

Starting from the first volume (*Design! Oggetti processi esperienze*), the research was always characterized by a multidisciplinary approach, which became even more multidisciplinary at the international conference held in 2022.

In fact, the conference was organized by a network of scholars from the world of design, philosophy and history of art, whose aim was to intertwine several types of knowledge. Consequently, multidisciplinarity is also the main feature of this second volume whose objective is to reflect, in an integrated manner, on the different dimensions of design, using competencies from the field of design and from that of humanities.

The aim of this project is to create a repertoire of opportunities of exchange and of relation among the culture of designers and the applied marketability of humanists in the project and in the innovation processes, in particular those design processes characterized by an important social and cultural impact.

In this context of exploration and experimentation in the territory of bordering subjects, stands the interpretative model in Fig. 1. It represents the potentialities in the interdisciplinary relations which verify the logics and dynamics in the "behavior" of a designer dealing with some project variables. On the vertical axis, humanities and techniques can be found, and on horizontal one, research and project.

Where these variables intersect, there can be four types of intervention:

– The intersection of techniques and research generates technological experimentation considering techniques and technology fields in continuous and fast evolution.
– Where research and humanities intersect, we are in the field of a historical/social/philosophical approach in which the analytical and critical dimensions of the research itself are developed.
– Between humanities and project, we are in the area on which our project focuses: here the meta-project approach becomes the synthetic expression of the relation among the two poles.
– Finally, between project and technique, we are in the area where the executive component of the project itself emerges.

There have already been significant studies which have stressed the importance of humanities for design and have shown that design can be a stimulus for humanities; this
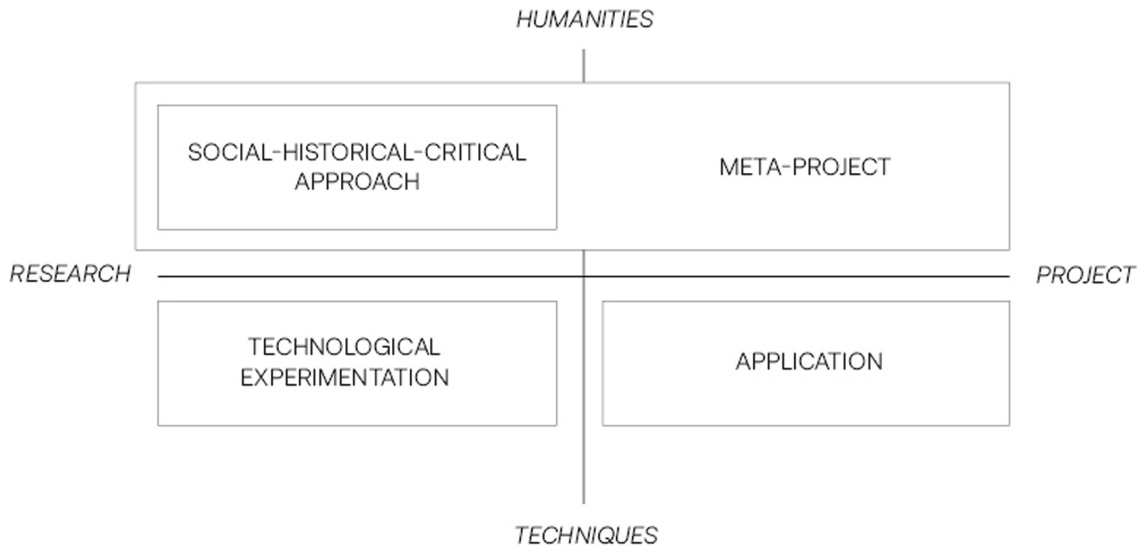
Fig. 1. Potential synergies between design and humanities [1]

is why the conference *Design! O.P.E.N.* intended to be an opportunity for research and debate with the objective of continuing this fundamental line of work.

Some crucial issues which interdisciplinary research must tackle are:

– The research of "new problems for design", that is, the collective need, as a scientific community, to find new directions toward which work must be periodically re-oriented, and this can be done only through a process of joint reflection.
– Research investigating the "meanings" that the product can have for design.
– Research that investigating the "value" that the design product shows.

As far as meanings are concerned, design and humanities integrated research can challenge, in a theoretically sounder way, "sustainability" by enhancing those concepts that are on the boundary between ethics and esthetics. Today, design cannot afford to dismiss ethical reflection, and, in this direction, humanistic culture can help to reinterpret the reflection on the mere functionality, in the more philosophically complex terms of the concept of "suitability for the purpose".

With regards to the analysis of the value generated by the action of design, it may be interesting to speak of "technology of value", which only humanistic investigation can help to process and fill with tools useful to produce not only ex-post critical knowledge, but first and foremost, oriented toward experimentation and to showing new corridors for contemporary design [1].

The volume follows the paths of reflection which structured the conference *Design! O.P.E.N.*, focusing on current themes and issues that are still at the center of the multidisciplinary debate on design, investigated through four keywords: objects, processes, experiences and narratives, which correspond to the book chapters.

The first chapter focuses on object-oriented design, enhancing its functional narrative and experiential values. In fact, objects, beyond their value in use, bear symbolic, anthropological, political and social meanings and worldviews. This section also develops a theoretical reflection on the esthetic categories used to interpret the design object

in relation to the classic dichotomy useful-beautiful, to the category of game, to artistic values and the relation between ethics and esthetics.

The second chapter is on the designer's self-reflective moment which is focused on the analysis and on the definition of processes in various contexts, spanning innovation, social engagement, reflection on emergencies or forecasting. This section investigates how designers develop and test their models, both at production, implementation and research levels. The areas of investigation are those addressing innovation, social engagement and pursuing a reflection on emergencies or forecasting. The section is intended as an arena for discussion on topics revolving around both the different moments in the history of design and the contemporary condition. The contributions collected in the Processes Section reflect the current condition of the disciplinary debate, which is strongly characterized by a profound transformation of design processes due to the comparison with scientific research methods, with a prevailing interest for methodologies and contemporary priorities as the environmental one, or to the dematerialization of processes.

The third chapter focuses on as a theoretical and practical strategy aimed at facilitating and fostering experiential interactions among people, between people and objects or environments. This section aims at investigating the foundations and the implications of a specifically experiential turn in design from various perspectives and in various disciplines. Due to the multifaceted nature of this turn, both theoretical and practice-based research are testified by contributors.

Finally, the last chapter is on narrative. The narrative vocation of design represents a crucial key of interpretation in contemporary cultural expressions such as making history, representing through different media, archiving and exhibiting. This section explores narratives in three different "dimensions": narrative as a scenario (envisioning new contexts, behaviors, uses, spaces); narrative as a tool (creating new ways to trigger innovation); and narrative as a process (framing new methodologies to face complex issues).

Each chapter reflects the results of the conference held in Parma and is constituted by the analysis of concrete case studies and theoretical and methodological proposals aimed at highlighting the "multiverse" character of design. It is organized in the thematic subsection defined for the conference program, just to emphasize the prevailing interpretative trajectories.

Without their help, it wouldn't have been possible to make this event and this volume happen. We hope that this book will become a useful tool of reflection on the theoretical and methodological aspects between humanities and design.

The scientific committee and book editors:

Giampiero Bosoni, Elisabetta Di Stefano, Gioia Laura Iannilli, Giovanni Matteucci, Rita Messori, Raffaella Trocchianesi and Francesca Zanella.

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Contents

PROCESSES. Histories of Processes and Processes for History

Exhibiting Design as a Process

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Abstract. This contribution explores the idea of exhibition formats, both physical and digital, dedicated to design and focused on narrating the experience of the design process. It begins in particular with the analysis of a selection of exhibition models to define the story of Italian industrial design – later simply "design" – as a process and not as an individual product, looking into museums such as the permanent collection of the ADI Design Museum in Milan, as well as opportunities for reconstructions or exhibitions beyond the confines of physical space which rely on the forms of digital archives. In this regard, the two selected case studies shed light on the possibilities offered by the combination of heritage digitisation and data interoperability technologies used to build archives. By making it possible to search a gigantic volume of information relative to materials that belong to different conservators – from institutions to individual users –, these solutions extend the possible construction of new and renewed storylines centred on reconstructing the design process. The cases studied here involve two recent research studies finalized towards two archives: the project to reconstitute the Ettore Sottsass Jr. Archive based on the materials conserved at the Fondazione Giorgio Cini in Venice, conducted by the Università Iuav di Venezia in collaboration with Centro ARCHiVe, and the case dedicated to the Griffo typeface, which retrieves and expands the material preserved at the Tipoteca Italiana Fondazione.

Keywords: history of design · narrative · digital archives · ADI Design Museum · Ettore Sottsass · Tipoteca Italiana Fondazione

1 Exhibiting Design as a Process

This investigation into the possibilities of "exhibiting" design as a process and not as an individual product rests primarily on two key ideas.

The first comes from a conference held in 2007 at the Università Iuav di Venezia titled *Memoria e racconto. Per una museologia del design,* curated by Raimonda Riccini and Alberto Bassi. On that occasion, some of the major directors of international design museums pondered whether it was necessary or even opportune to develop a specific museological model for design, which might stand astride the two more traditional

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The content of the text has been shared by the authors. In particular Fiorella Bulegato wrote the paragraphs *Exhibiting Design as a Process* and *Case Study 2: the Typeline project,* while Marco Scotti wrote the paragraphs *The Digital Models* and *Case Study 1: The Ettore Sottsass Archive.*

modes that, in synthesis, designate the isolated display of an art object or the focus on functionality for a technical object [1].

The second is from a more recent experience that seems to concretely carry out this approach. The newest of the Italian design museums, *The Spoon and the City,* the permanent collection of the ADI Design Museum in Milan which contains the circa 2500 objects of the Historical Collection of the Compasso d'oro award (1954–2020, in progress), tells the story of Italian industrial design – later simply "design" – by enhancing the dimension of design as a process, because the project, as the captions underscore, «is "merely" the result and endpoint of a long process» [2]. Considering design as a process, a series of exhibition devices were used to display the heterogeneous materials – sketches, drawings, models, prototypes, products, communication artefacts, photographs, documents, advertisements and so on – previously conserved or borrowed for the occasion from the many persons who participated in this process (Fig. 1).

Fig. 1. *The Spoon and the City,* ADI Design Museum, Milan (©Elis Gjorretaj)

A process that, to simplify, may be summarized as De Fusco's classic "four-leaf clover" [3] (project-production-sale-consumption), to which we might also add disposal/reuse. The ADI Design Museum therefore proposes a museological "model" to exhibit design and design history which is not new, but is rather unusual for Italy in the way it physically "mediates" the argument.

We believe however that this method may be extended to other forms of exhibiting design, those made possible by the digital archives which are also dedicated to content regarding the history of design [4].

In presenting this point of view, we embrace two of the methodological questions identified by David Huppatz in 2020 [5] which we believe are significant for the design

historians of the near future. In restating, without mentioning him, what Enrico Castelnuovo wrote some years ago – "It is only by conveying the role and interaction between the various agents in the field, the works, the designers, the engineers, the market place, the production, distribution and promotional processes, the clients, the institutions, the public, that we can attain a total history of design" [6], the Australian theoretician and historian emphasises the need to adopt a holistic approach in reconstructing the history of design, and to consider the final result as the outcome of a process of negotiation and compromise between the subjects that concur to its definition (first and foremost, the clients, designers, manufacturers, technicians and users). This process may be investigated by expanding the focus of study to the projects, models, prototypes and relations between different subjects, "documents" that are sometimes, or no longer, deemed to be worthy of attention.

Furthermore, it appears to be no accident that Huppatz finds yet another opportunity to conduct and disseminate – we might say "exhibit" – shared research conducted by international interdisciplinary groups in archives, libraries and digital databases, increasingly accessible and rich in materials, and the methodologies associated with them, based

Fig. 2. Dossiers and documents of the Archivio Ettore Sottsass jr., Fondazione Giorgio Cini, Venezia (Fondazione Giorgio Cini onlus, Archivio Ettore Sottsass jr., Centro ARCHiVe Venezia).

on the collection of data on the global scale, analysis by algorithms, investigations using powerful search engines (Figs. 2 and 3).

Fig. 3. Dossiers and documents of the Archivio Ettore Sottsass jr., Fondazione Giorgio Cini, Venezia (Fondazione Giorgio Cini onlus, Archivio Ettore Sottsass jr., Centro ARCHiVe Venezia).

2   The Digital Models

In the past several decades the forms of digital archives have expanded the opportunities for reconstruction and exhibition beyond the confines of the physical space in the places designated for the conservation and diffusion of documents [7]. The possibilities offered by heritage digitisation and by the technologies for data interoperability, which make it possible to search gigantic volumes of materials belonging to different conservators – from institutions to individual users – have in fact expanded the construction of new and renewed narratives.

Accelerated during the global shutdown caused by the Covid19 pandemic, these opportunities had been summarized as early as 2008 by Jeffrey Schnapp:

"the emerging media domains and practices loosely […] offer new challenges and possibilities for institutions of memory like libraries and museums: novel approaches to conservation and preservation based not upon restricting but multiplying access to the remains of the past; participatory models of content production, re-search, and curatorship; mixed reality approaches to programming and informal education that expand traditional library and museum audiences; enhanced means for vivifying and for promoting active or experientially augmented modes of engagement with both past and present" [8] (Fig. 4).
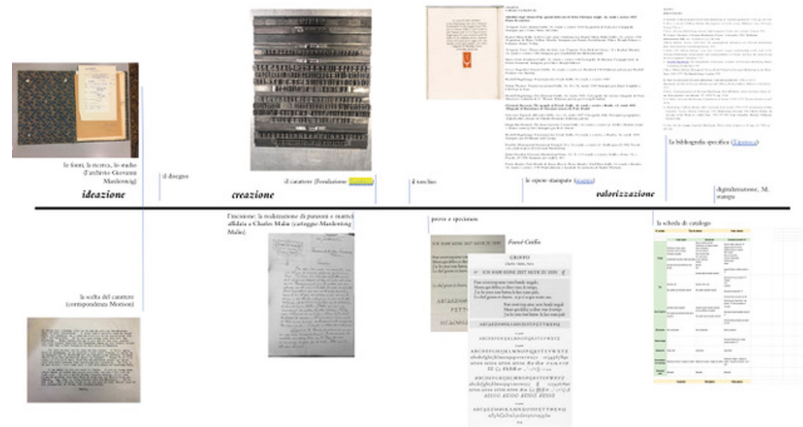
Fig. 4. Typeline edited by Isabella Collavizza, Project POR-FSE 2014-2020 (© Isabella Collavizza).

While their history is relatively more recent [9], archives dedicated to design, especially digital archives, have become a fundamental resource for research in Italy today [10]. They stand at the centre of the debate surrounding both the definition of a work and study methodology and shed light on a specificity that makes it possible to distinguish them, as well as integrate them, with libraries, exhibitions or collections. As digital archivists increasingly adopt an approach that operates between disciplines – bringing together the expertise of researchers, curators, editors and historians [11] –, archives and museum collections dedicated to design in recent years have presented projects developed to test new and original models to avoid the risk of dispersing the materials, facilitate new perspectives for study and animate the archives [12].

Based on an inclusive idea of accessibility [13] – and with certain important harbingers, such as Aiap's Centro di documentazione sul Progetto grafico (Cdpg) – a case such as the Vico Magistretti Archive, one of the few in Italy, represents for example a fundamental tool for the protection, enhancement and dissemination of design understood as a cultural heritage. Not coincidentally, this same institution, based in Milan, promoted the conference *Narrare con l'archivio* [14]*,* underscoring the importance and the possibilities offered by the use of Linked Open Data (LOD) [15] technology to create connections within and beyond the archive.

This is just one example in the attempt to build on reflections about current models for producing knowledge [16] as well as the need for a dynamic curatorial approach, across different media and mindful of the spaces and places that generate and store the archive, to guarantee long-term conservation as well as activation and accessibility based on the shorter timeframes of the documents [17]. A perspective that looks to models of participation and integration to consider and design the archive as a place dedicated to connections, exploring the specific potential of the digital object [18], reinforcing the collaboration between subjects with different knowledge and skills, such as design historians, digital archivists, computer scientists, interaction designers.

The same digital object that the most recent experiences show to have become continuously enriched and integrated thanks to the construction of networks and with tools that involve the communities, based on reflections and practices originating in recontextualization and appropriation [19], aimed at the conservation of the ephemeral, as

testimony and oral sources [20], rethinking the archive through its contemporary definition as a *corpus* of materials, collected in a more or less recent past [21], increasingly open, fluid and interconnected.

3 Case Study 1: The Ettore Sottsass Archive

The reconstruction of the design process, by connecting various fonds, is one of the goals of the research project dedicated to the Archivio Ettore Sottsass jr., conserved at the Fondazione Giorgio Cini in Venice [22]. This study was conducted by the Università Iuav di Venezia in collaboration with the Centro ARCHiVe, a structure within the Fondazione itself which is responsible for the digitisation and inventorying of the Archive with the aim of making it freely accessible and searchable online.

Consisting of over 100,000 documents dated between 1923 and 2016, the collection contains the personal and design material produced by Sottsass in the fields of architecture, interior design, industrial and graphic design, in addition to graphic artworks, posters, handbills, drafts for publications, books, periodicals, university theses, various documents and some objects.

The problem of the dispersion across different archives of materials covering the same subject was addressed in this case by digitally reconstructing the connections between projects, thereby establishing relations between the many fonds that preserve materials regarding Sottsass.

To establish these connections, which means firstly to identify the projects "dispersed" across several archives, we initially chose to restrict the research area to graphic and industrial design, within the section of the archive defined as "Dossier" by Sottsass himself, and meticulously divided by the designer into folders corresponding to individual projects, classified both chronologically and in terms of design categories (in addition to graphic and industrial design, they include art, architecture, interiors, exhibitions and exhibition design, publication design, articles in the press, varied). This thematic limitation was set to enrich the current debate based on materials that largely have yet to be studied or even released, reconstructing Sottsass' experimentation and production in each case: from his private and biographical data to the collaborations and relations with partners, collaborators, clients and companies.

Consequently, indispensable sources to consult, along with the publications and catalogues of the exhibitions that have updated the landscape of available studies and resources [23], were first and foremost the Bibliothèque Kandinsky at the Centre Pompidou in Paris and the Centro Studi e Archivio della Comunicazione (CSAC) of the Università di Parma – recipients of donations made by the designer himself and his heirs at different points in time – and the collections of institutions, manufacturers or collaborators, such as the National Archives in Florence, Museo Casa Mollino, Archivio Cardazzo, Archivio progetti Iuav, Archivio storico Olivetti, Archivio Aldo Londi, Archivio industriale Bitossi, Centro Studi Poltronova or the Archivio Italdisegno-Arazzeria Scassa.

The data sheet developed with XDAMS software carries the references to the materials contained in these fonds, in a digital format if they are available online, as in the case of those conserved at the CSAC in Parma, and will make it possible to publish the

summary of Sottsass' works in industrial and graphic design on the portal dedicated to the digital Archives of the Fondazione Cini [24].

Based on a historical perspective [25] and integrating the research with the expertise of the digital archivists, this study laid the foundations for the reinterpretation and reconstruction of a design method and the processes involved, to shed light on the elaboration of an expressive language in the many areas in which Sottsass conducted his visual and spatial experimentation, and at the same time, to construct a system of his personal and client relationships.

Obviously, the growth in the digitisation of the heritage conserved by various archives and the connections offered by technologies such as LOD would make it possible to "animate" the archive far more productively, and to channel the focus of many "stories", deriving from the query of the materials, more specifically on the reconstruction of the process inherent to design.

4   Case Study 2: The Typeline Project

The second case study involves a research study developed within the project titled *Editorial processes and innovation 4.0: recreating value through the synergy between analogical and digital.* This project, which ended in 2019, was a collaboration between the Università Iuav and Ca' Foscari in Venice, and involved five research fellows, one short-term research fellow, two visiting professors, twelve companies and seven institutions [26]. The general aim was to re-establish the cultural, social and economic value of the book by integrating the practices of design and digital production with those deriving from the rediscovery of letterpress printing and the revival of historical typefaces [27].

Within this framework, one of the themes developed in the project was to determine appropriate ways to access, publish and exhibit typographic materials and processes, and typefaces in particular, artefacts that, together with printing, are recognized by historiography as an accomplished form of design *ante litteram* with respect to the onset of the industrial revolution [28].

The study involved the Fondazione Tipoteca Italiana as a partner. This is a private institution, founded in Cornuda (Treviso) in 1995 by the Antiga family – owners of a major local printing establishment – and is the most important national museum of the art of printing and typographic design [29]. It features not only an exhibition for visitors, but a laboratory area as well in which to hold classes and workshops. Most importantly, it is sustained by a significant archive of types, machines, equipment and tools used to implement various printing processes, as well as design drawings and promotional documents, and a vast specialized library.

The research focused initially on an analysis of the Tipoteca's efforts since the 1990s to collect the wood or lead type discarded by printing shops as they adapted to the digital "revolution", and the relative design materials and specimens dedicated to the glyphs. This acknowledgment highlighted two aspects: on the one hand, the extent to which the current arrangement of the museum exhibition and the physical archive depended on such progressive acquisitions; on the other the lack of a structured classification system or catalogue of the materials, which was still incomplete and relied largely on printed material.

It thus became clear that all the documents conserved at the Tipoteca could only be cultivated, focusing the attention of design history and theory on original or long-neglected forms and sources, by "exhibiting" a historicised reading of the entire printing process through the elaboration of an online digital archiving system based on the digitisation of the materials that characterise each phase of the process.

And thus the project for a virtual archive of the typographic process was born.

To test the project, the Griffo typeface was selected as a case study, in the version cut in 1929 by the Parisian punchcutter Charles Malin for the Officina Bodoni operated by Giovanni (Hans) Mardersteig who, following a meticulous philological study, revived the lower case cut by Francesco Griffo and printed by Aldo Manuzio in 1496, of which the Tipoteca conserves a series of types. The search for documents to reconstruct this history involved the consultation of archives and fonds, such as Mardersteig's personal archive conserved in the Library of the Accademia di Agricoltura, Scienza e Lettere in Verona, or the Stanley Morison Archive at the Cambridge Library, and the digitisation of various documents [30].

The results were organized into a database that led to the creation of a timeline – named Typeline – conceived to establish relations between the various exemplars that contribute to the story of the typographic/printing process: from the historical or archival documentary traces to the design of the typeface (sketches, handwritten notes, letters, drawings, photographic reproductions, specimens, sample sets and more), to the matrices, and the individual pieces produced of both the typeface family and the printed editions that have used it over time.

This archive can be implemented *ad libitum*, for example, with some of the results of the research project itself, such as the "replicas" of the Griffo redesigned with digital technologies and plastic materials with the purpose of preserving the original copies, or the proofs printed on paper with contemporary inks formulated to be more environmentally sustainable.

The "exhibition" formats sustained by a digital archive can thus make it possible to bring together information and materials that would otherwise be dispersed across various entities, often geographically distant and sometimes accessible only to physical consultation, but above all to open the processes that narrate the history of design to "the world connected online". If the technologies were compatible the project, illustrated here briefly but obviously subject to further development, could become a model of "history" that could be constantly updated with newly discovered documents, uses of type or drawn revisitations derived from information found online on the same subject.

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14. Narrare con l'archivio. Fondazione Vico Magistretti, 19 November 2020. http://www.vicoma gistretti.it/it/attivita/eventi?id=179. Accessed 30 Dec 2020

15. Listo, T.: Ramificazioni digitali del design come bene culturale. MD Journal **8**, 28–39 (2019)

16. Schnapp, J.: The permanent library of the now. Know. J. Format. Knowl. **2**, 303–320 (2018)

17. Ibidem

18. Irace, F. (ed.): Design&cultural heritage: immateriale, virtuale, interattivo. cit

19. In this regard one model is the project The Archive of Now, developed by the Harvard metalab in collaboration with Harvard Libraries and S.T.Lee Grant "to make Harvard library digital collections readily available for use and remix, and address conceptual questions about archives, digital search engines, and the use of recontextualization and appropriation in contemporary culture, particularly with regard to archival materials".https://mlml.io/p/the-archive-of-now/. Accessed 20 Oct 2022

20. In particular as the field of design is concerned, see The Bard Graduate Center Craft, Art and Design Oral History Project, an archive of interviews and oral sources dedicated to craftsmen, artists and designers. https://bgccraftartdesign.org. Accessed 20 Oct 2022

21. Schnapp, J.: Animating the Archive. Cit.

22. Università Iuav di Venezia, Department of Architecture and Arts, research fellow Marco Scotti, lead investigator Fiorella Bulegato, co-funded by the Fondazione Giorgio Cini, 2019–2021

23. For a more general overview of the figure of Sottsass, cf. Thomé, P.: Sottsass. Phaidon Press, London-New York (2014); Radice, B. (ed.): Ettore Sottsass. There is a Planet. Exhibition catalogue. Electa, Milano (2017); Zanella, F. (ed.): Ettore Sottsass. Catalogoragionato dell'archivio 1922–1978. CSAC Università di Parma-Silvana editoriale, Parma-Cinisello Balsamo (2018); Brayer, M.-A.: Ettore Sottsass. L'Objet magique. Centre Georges Pompidou, Paris (2021)

24. Expected within the year 2023

25. Bulegato, F., Scotti, M.: L'Archivio di Ettore Sottsass Jr. Ricostruire mondi. Magazén **3**(1), 39–60 (2022)

26. POR-FSE 2014–2020 Project financed by the Regione Veneto, lead investigators Fiorella Bulegato, Emanuela Bonini Lessing, Monica Calcagno; research fellows Rachele Cavara, Nunzia Coco, Maria D'Uonno, Nello Alfonso Marotta, Federico Rita; short term research fellow Isabella Collavizza; visiting professor Priscila Lena Farias (Universidade de Sao Paulo), Joerg Metelmann (University of St. Gallen)

27. Cf. the synthesis in Bonini Lessing, E., Bulegato, F., D'Uonno, M., Marotta, N.A., Rita, F.: Processieditoriali e innovazione 4.0. Recuperare valore coniugando pratiche analogiche e digitali. In: Di Bucchianico, G., Fagnoni, R., Pietroni, L., Piscitelli, D., Riccini, R. (eds.) 100 anni dal Bauhaus. Le prospettive della ricerca in design. Proceedings of the Annual Assembly of the Società Italiana di Design, pp. 251–259. SID (2020)

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Author Index