

MAKING SENSE OF A WORLD IN THE MAKING

ENACTIVISM, SOCIAL AESTHETICS, (UN)CONTROLLABILITY

23 - 26 / 05 / 2023 - SAPIENZA UNIVERSITÀ DI ROMA

ABSTRACTS PARTICIPANTS

TUESDAY, MAY 23

Alva Noë (University of California, Berkeley)

PERCEPTION AS A RELATIONSHIP

In this talk I will explore the idea that to perceive something is to enter into a relationship with it. Perception is a caring attitude, and love itself, an epistemic emotion.

Andrea Pinotti (Università degli Studi di Milano)

NONUMENTS. AN EPIGENETIC APPROACH TO PERFORMATIVE MEMORIALS

In my paper I will address the question of social memory as externalized in memorials. I will firstly explore the hypothesis of interpreting memorials as tertiary retentions or exograms (externalized engrams or mnemonic traces), which add to the phylogenetic stratum of memory an epigenetic transgenerational component. Secondly, I will address the paradox of externalized memory – the memorandum as an oblivion machine –, and the “nonumental” strategies developed by contemporary artists in order to reactivate through performative acts the capacity of memorialization.

WEDNESDAY, MAY 24

Pablo Sendra (University College London)

DESIGNING DISORDER

Is disorder inseparable from a vital city? This question has animated urban theory as well as practice in the last few decades. In 1970, Richard Sennett published *The Uses of Disorder*, arguing that the ideal of a planned and ordered city was flawed. He argued that the modern city created an urban milieu that did not facilitate social interaction, making people fear strangers and unknown situations. Fifty years after the book was published,

this situation has worsened in many urban areas where renewal programs have aimed to remove threats from the public realm and impose different forms of social order and control. After Sennett, many other authors have identified the virtues of non-regulated environments in which improvisation and sociability can happen and other processes of self-regulation emerge. But developers, planners, local authorities, and in some cases, the people themselves still fear the unpredictable. Prescriptive, rigid urban environments result. In this presentation, Pablo Sendra will discuss his book *Designing Disorder* (2020), co-authored with Richard Sennett, where they propose a reorganisation of how we think and plan the social life of our cities. “Infrastructures of disorder” combine architecture, politics, urban planning, and activism in order to develop places that nurture rather than stifle, bring together rather than divide up, remain open to change rather than closed off.

THURSDAY, MAY 25

Hartmut Rosa (Friedrich Schiller Universität Jena)

***UNCONTROLLABILITY, RESPONSIVITY AND RESPONSIBILITY
IN SEARCH OF A ‘THIRD VOICE’ BETWEEN ACTIVE AND PASSIVE***

Modern Society is characterized by its consistent drive to expand the horizon of attainability, accessibility, and availability (“Verfügbarkeit”). This drive is fed on the one hand by the *structural* requirement of dynamic stabilization, i.e., by the fact that this society needs incessant growth, acceleration, and innovation in order to reproduce and maintain its institutional status quo. On the other hand, the driving force is a specific *cultural* conception of the good life which defines the ‘good’ as an expansion of the horizon of the knowable, the reachable, controllable, and usable. It will be the core argument of the presentation that this leads to a twofold social pathology: On the one hand, the aspiration for control and domination creates the opposite of the desired state: It creates monstrous forms of uncontrollability such as nuclear explosions, ecological disasters, viral pandemics, or financial market dynamics beyond control. On the other hand, those parts of life that *are* made controllable, predictable, available, and commodified turn out to become mute, silent and reclusive for the experiencing subjects. Hence, modern subjects are torn between the search for omnipotent activity and the experience of passive victimhood. By consequence, what is needed is a ‘third voice’ between active control and passive powerlessness, between the active and the passive. The paper will suggest ‘resonance’ as such a mode of relating to the world. It is characterized by affective responsivity, ethical ‘responsibility’ and the acceptance of the world’s basic uncontrollability.

Barbara Carnevali (École des Hautes Études en Sciences Sociales – EHESS Paris)

DESIGN AS SOCIAL AESTHETICS

Social Aesthetics is the name of my teaching appointment at the École des Hautes Études en Sciences Sociales in Paris and of my long-term research project. The primary reference and model for my work is Georg Simmel’s project of “sociological aesthetics”, outlined in the essay of 1896, and then applied to his masterful analysis of the modern “*Lebensstil*”.

Social aesthetics focuses on the relationship between *social forms* and *aesthetic forms*. I developed this theoretical approach in the book *Social Appearances. A Philosophy of Display and Prestige* (2020, Columbia University Press). Whereas this essay focused on the “subjective” and “inter-subjective” dimension of social aesthetics (the role of sensible appearances in mediating and influencing human relationships), my new project on design addresses the “objective” side: the contribution of *things* and *environments* to the creation of social forms. In other words, my aim is to outline a philosophical interpretation of design, understood according to the old modernist conception: that is, in continuity with the architecture and as the creation of forms that extend “from the spoon to the city”.

Despite an increasing interest in media and cultural studies, philosophers committed to social criticism, like those belonging to the Frankfurt tradition, commonly consider design to be deeply compromised by consumerism and responsible for negative phenomena such as “social aesthetization” or “aesthetic capitalism”. The philosophy of design, which I uphold, wants to reconsider this idea with a normative purpose. It reconsiders some basic ideas of the Bauhaus school and of the Modern Movement in the light of a specific historical Italian experience: the industrial “economic miracle” of the post-WWII.

My case study is dedicated to Milan’s first subway line, inaugurated in 1964: the so-called M1 or *Linea rossa*, the “Red Line”, designed by Franco Albini, Franca Helg and Bob Noorda. Its celebrated “industrial style” is an ideal incarnation of the idea of a “modernity lite”.

More generally, my intention is to invite my listeners to critically reflect on Milan’s modernity and on the role of the city in creating, through design, a new social model based on the synergy between aesthetics and economics. I also aim to understand the role played by aesthetic forms, such as styles, symbols and brands, in the domain of metropolitan life and identity.

FRIDAY, MAY 26

Chiara Cappelletto (Università degli Studi di Milano)

Elisabetta Modena (Università degli Studi di Milano)

CONCLUSIVE ROUND TABLE