

Borders and Bridges Boundaries as an opportunity

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Abstract

The boundary is an ephemeral concept, an imaginary line that marks the terms of a territory.

The term boundary is related to the concept of limit that indicates both a sign not to be exceeded and, by extension, a value that conditions a behavior or a performance. The Italian word “confine” that means boundary comes from the Latin cum-finis; the etymology of the term indicates something that separates but, at the same time, that unites, something that has an end but that creates the presuppositions for something else.

The border, therefore, is not only a limit but an opportunity; crossing the border is a gesture that gives us the awareness that nothing is taken for granted, immutable and that everything can change in the relationship with otherness.

Cultural wealth is built first in a direct relationship with the material and immaterial resources of a place but also through “contaminations” that come from external knowledge and are acquired and made their own through a local reinterpretation. Globalization has cut the threads of such contaminations, drying the sources of diversity in the project and giving us back the shared universal languages that guide the aesthetics of objects. The recent pandemic has shown us how the creation of virtual connections has contributed to enrich the scenarios of research by giving it a multiplicity of views. The same mode can be used for applied research.

Borders and Bridges is a pilot project of exchange between international universities that is born with the aim of developing practices of transdisciplinary cultural contamination in the context of an exchange through the internet between international universities. The design discipline has in its D.N.A the ability to connect and develop proposals that create synthesis between the vision of project activities and that of social sciences. The idea of the project is to work on borders as lines of opportunity for the elaboration of elements of

innovation through the tools of the design discipline. The dual objective is, on the one hand, to promote new methods of exchange in the educational field, and on the other to promote the encounter between cultural systems.

The design, in fact, is free from borders, "has always had the ability to look at different fields and disciplines favoring cross-contamination" (Cappellieri A. Tenuta L. 2019).

Keywords: Borders, Connections, Cultural Diversity, Contaminations

1. Introduction

The twentieth century has been the progress of the rational logic of industry and the emergence of a new discipline, Design, which is entrusted with the project of the industrial product. It defines a new aesthetic, outlined by the school of the Bauhaus first and by the school of Ulm then, which decrees the detachment between what is produced industrially and what is manufactured manually, between the geometric purity of the industrial product and the decorative expressiveness of the handicraft product. The *Ornament is a crime* by Adolf Loos, that establishes the birth of a new aesthetic for the industrial product, starts a progressive disappearance of the decorative aspects in favor of a strengthening of the formal aspects resulting from the functions. A tendency to simplification that in the subsequent modification of the tools of investigation and representation of the project (the launch of digital graphics with the supremacy of the three-dimensional over the two-dimensional) moves even more attention towards the form (three-dimensional modeling causes an imbalance towards the design of shapes and makes the application of decorations on surfaces complex). The correspondence form-function is the guiding concept on which throughout the twentieth century was founded a differentiation between design and art and between industry and crafts. The design expresses aesthetic and formal languages of simplification, fundamental for the industrial product but not congenial to the handicraft product where the simplification excludes the craftsman's wisdom and the stratification of tacit knowledge. In a new dialogue of design with art and craftsmanship it is absolutely necessary to define new aesthetic languages, identify tools and methods for a return to diversity in order to encourage

and support a new area of research that can promote a meeting between design culture and local identity.

2. State of Art

The widening of the vision of the design towards the territories of the handicraft that in Europe takes off at the end of the sixties, brings to the evidence the problem of the project aesthetic languages. The languages with which design at first deals with the relationship with material cultures are languages of simplification that often interrupt the expressive continuity of tradition and cancel the value of the contribution of "know-how" to the project. The theme of languages is the main theme of the connections between craftsmanship and design. From the *Ornament and Crime* of Loos that establishes the birth of a new aesthetic for the industrial product design has pursued a progressive cancellation of the decorative aspects in favor of a strengthening of the formal aspects. A tendency to simplification that, in the reorganization of the investigation tools of the project and in the transition from the two-dimensional of the manual drawing to the three-dimensional of the virtual modeling, has shifted more attention towards the form (3D modeling causes an imbalance towards the generation of the casing discouraging complex processes such as the application of decorations to surfaces)

The renewal and adaptation of the decorative apparatus today represents a complex challenge for a new vision of design. The task is on the one hand to reread the forms, decorations and symbologies that come from the phase of acquisition of knowledge, on the other that of the elaboration of new signs, expression of a diversity, that can strengthen the relationship of objects with places. Every diversity is born and defined in the comparison with otherness. The identity that can feed a new season of the project is the identity of which Maurizio Bettini speaks, which does not correspond to the static image of the fixed roots in the land from which they receive nourishment, but to the dynamic image of the river whose flow is

continuously fed by the introduction of new tributaries. *"Ours is an expanding society, an increasingly horizontal society, in which the cultural models and products of other communities enter more and more frequently in parallel or in series with ours. We could therefore suggest looking for imaginary people capable of defining tradition no longer in vertical terms - from bottom to top or vice versa - but rather in horizontal terms. Tradition could very well be imagined as something that - horizontally - unites with other distinctive traits, and together with them helps to form the identity of people. If you really have to resort to images and metaphors, to talk about collective identity - and I fear that, handling such a vague and ambiguous concept, you cannot do without - in place of those of the tree/ roots or summit/ descent, so vertical, one could resort to the image, very horizontal, of river/tributaries"*.

Starting from these premises has been developed research in two initiatives (Pending Cultures and Borders and Bridges) whose purpose was to experiment on a large scale the construction of new design languages starting from the possibilities offered by the technologies of internet to cross cultures to generate new languages. Both projects work on the idea of Boundary. It is an ephemeral concept, an imaginary line that marks the terms of a territory. In fact, there is no physical line in nature that clearly separates one space from the other, but it is the character of metamorphosis that predominates. It is man rather than having transformed this character of diversity into a condition of separation. A limit (a concept to which the Italian term border refers) that indicates a sign not to be exceeded, but by extension, a value that conditions a behavior or a performance. Globalization then emphasized this idea of opposition, isolating realities rather than really looking at the world as a system of connections. But if we look at the etymology of the term, from the Latin *cum-finis*, we realize that the border indicates something that separates but, at the same time, that unites; something that has an end but that creates the conditions for something else.

The boundary is an ephemeral concept, an imaginary line that marks the terms of a territory. The term boundary is related to the concept of limit that indicates both a sign not to be exceeded and, by extension, a value that conditions a behavior or a performance. The Italian word “confine” that means boundary comes from the Latin *cum-finis*; the etymology of the term indicates something that separates but, at the same time, that unites, something that has an end but that creates the presuppositions for something else. Boundaries can be limits or opportunities. In our view, the border represents an unlimited opportunity for possible connections between different identities. Hence the will to build bridges that can connect diversity. Among the many real Borders and Bridges works on imaginary borders (those that unite and do not divide) geographically distant realities but often close to ideals. It is a matter of approaching the concept of border to the idea of "contamination", as a process that takes a piece from one side and the other to sew them together. It's bringing the hallmarks of one language into another. Diversity is in fact a sign of personalization, a special character that enriches the common language, but at the same time makes recognizable products, their culture and their territoriality.

3. Project

The idea behind the project is to create connections between designers belonging to different cultural systems in order to develop new contamination languages. In this sense, the goal is twofold, on the one hand to promote new teaching methods, and on the other to experiment the encounter between different knowledge systems in order to develop new languages and apply them to certain specific types of objects. The program, developed by a research group within the Design Campus of the University of Florence, has had a three-year development and has involved first a network of university professors and researchers belonging to 18 international university institutions and subsequently 650 students (in the three years) from the universities involved in the research.

Pairs of students of which one Italian and one foreigner developed four-hand projects working mainly on the elaboration of dialogue languages starting from iconographic elements belonging to their respective cultures. The quality of the work was made possible by a double system of control over the projects carried out by Italian teachers and teachers of the country of origin.

The aim of the project was mainly to verify the students' different predisposition to the reworking of signs and forms generated by specific cultural references and therefore a design system that did not start from the blank sheet but from a network of signs, colors, materials, types belonging to their culture. These references were then crossed to generate mixed objects, on the borders between craftsmanship and art but allowed by the generative design process to enter fully into the experimentation of design.

The work plan has been divided into phases.

In the first phase, the group of teachers, through meetings and contacts via email, elaborated the general theme and the procedure that each teacher later proceeded to illustrate to the students of his own university. In addition to the general theme of the initiative, a specific theme has been agreed for each year.

Each professor at foreign universities then selected a group of ten students (preferably bachelor students in the third year of the course) to participate in the project and sent the list of their emails to Italian teachers.

In the second phase, each Italian student was randomly paired with a foreign student. The Italian student has received exclusively the email of the foreign student without knowing sex, language, nationality. From there on, for each pair of students a dense intersection of connections began that led first to get to know each other and then to focus on the topics of research and project. For these contacts different media (email, whatsapp, wechat, skype) and different languages (mainly English,

Spanish and Italian) were used. During the elaboration of the projects the students were followed by the teachers at the respective universities. At the expiry date established each pair of students sent their project based on a template sent by the organizers of the program. A Facebook page was the virtual meeting space between all the participants in the project.

In the third and final phase, the projects received were placed in a Dropbox folder accessible to all teachers in the group who evaluated the projects. Thirty projects are selected from a cross-ranking. The couple of authors of each project are given 30 days for prototyping. The thirty projects received together with the prototypes are exhibited in an exhibition in Florence. Foreign students are also invited to the exhibition, hosted by their project partners. A selected commission of designers, university professors, representatives of the world of culture and production awards at the exhibition some prizes to the best projects. A certificate of participation has been sent to each author.

Borders and Bridge has been a project that in its founding ideals has clearly represented the changed historical scenario of recent years, and through digital tools and virtual space has exceeded those physical limits that have now become more evident. The pandemic has brought world citizenship into an almost alienating state, in which space has been confined to the confines of one's own home, sometimes one's own room. Those imaginary boundaries hypothesized between very distant geographical areas are the basis of a new everyday life, where diversity is equivalent to quality. This is the culture of creative contamination, a universal language that embraces multiple identities; tracing boundaries no longer as lines of separation, but bridges that unite.

4. Conclusions

The main objective of the program is to investigate the opportunities offered by new communication technologies creating processes applied in this case to work on new languages but replicable in others. The secondary objectives are:

- the definition of a specific design approach for the enhancement of cultural diversity and therefore a design system involving an individual research phase and following a cross between the results obtained for the development of the project.
- the creation of a network of connections that could exploit the opportunities offered by new communication technologies by creating processes that could then be replicated in other experiences
- the international scope of the initiative with a value attached to the exchange of experience and knowledge

Since the start of the project, different dissemination systems have been adopted. The project was mainly channeled through several web pages which represented both information and networking tools for research participants.

Secondly, the presentation of prototypes and papers at the end of each research year has been a tool for disseminating results and disseminating research ideas and objectives. On the occasion of the inauguration and the conclusion of the exhibitions, days of research have allowed to deepen the topics covered and we are working on a book that tells the experience and will represent a further stage of the dissemination process.

5. Acknowledgements:

We would like to acknowledge the support of the following reviewers who contributed to improve both: the content and the expressive for of this article,

Non-Anonymous Peer-Reviewers

Prof. Andrea Mecacci - University of Florence

Prof.ssa Alessandra Rinaldi - University of Florence

Beta-reader and Peer-Editor

prof. Vincenzo Binetti - Professor of Italian Studies, Department of Romance

Languages and Literatures, University of Michigan

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