UD18

INVISIBLE DESIGN

7º ENCONTRO DE DOUTORAMENTOS EM DESIGN
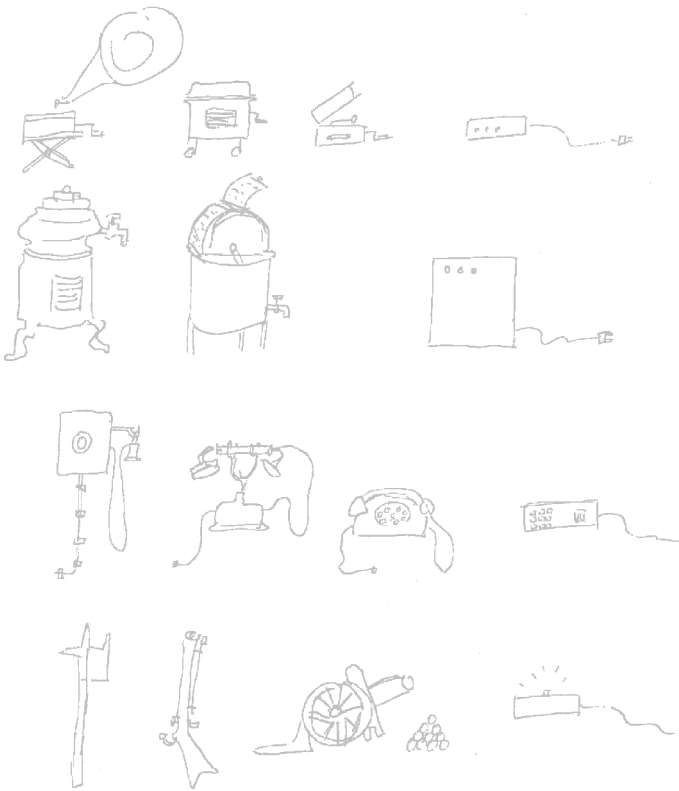
7TH MEETING ON PHD DESIGN RESEARCH

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FACULDADE DE BELAS ARTES
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Fundação para a Ciência e a Tecnologia

IN VISIBLE DESIGN

The Trymph of good form
Drawing: Lucius Burckhardt

The different prisms though which it is possible to observe the question of (in)visibility *in* and *of* design justify the relevance of this theme for UD18, seeking to foresee possible investigation routes and testimonies from the participants.

More than a literal interpretation of the world *invisible* – that which cannot be seen – the purpose is to explore the layers of visibility that coat the world around us and the role that design and designers play in the reconfiguration of that world.

At a time when we assist an unprecedented technological progress, marked by the automation of industries and services, globalization and by complex populational and cultural dynamics... What is gained and what is lost with this changes? What it remembered and forgotten? What is seen what is (in)visible?

The existence of **acquired concepts**, that are not questioned and thus remain **invisible**, can trigger a more active intervention from design. To classify the world according to categories of objects makes invention or improvement processes to occur only within the refinement of forms and performances, where improvement opportunities are easy to identify and verbalize (micro); hence overlapping the reach of entire systems (macro). Could we redesign concepts such as "night", "hospital" or "house"?

Operating on an organizational-institutional level, "design for tomorrow can take into consideration the global system, invisible, composed by objects and interpersonal relationships", challenging dogmas and pre-conceived ideas that contributed to the marasmus of the systems that rule over our society.[1]

1 Lucius Burckhardt – Design is Invisible (1980) in *Design is Invisible: Planning, Education and Design* (2017), Silvan Blumenthal and Martin Schmitz (eds.). Basileia: Birkhauser Verlag GmbH.

2 Maria Teresa Cruz – O Artificial ou A Era do Design Total (2011) in M. Villaverde Cabral, J. L. Garcia, H. M. Jerónimo (org.) *Razão, Tempo e Tecnologia. Estudos em Homenagem a Hermínio Martinho*, Lisboa: ICS – Imprensa de Ciências Sociais, Universidade de Lisboa, 2006.

Similar to what happens in the fields of biology and genetic engineering, in design we also assist to the miscegenation of 'organisms', more compact and complex in construction, but more intuitive in their utilization and capable of performing functions beyond those in the genesis of the primordial object.

See how the phone has become a ''pocket computer'' with a paraphernalia of functions performed by other objects (watch, calculator, thermometer, calendar, camera). However, this **hybridism** can be questioned: are the shapes and functions (design) being reduced to a minimum common denominator?[2]

Such objects tend to become invisible, or immaterial, migrating to the cloud and transforming into virtual content. This **dematerialization**, beneficial "alchemy" to the environment and sustainability, allows oneself to possess less material goods, but to access more efficiently to digital services and content. Money itself is no longer represented just in gold or bills, but in digital credit and currencies, like Bitcoin, something that has long been happening with the access to music, with the .mp3 and podcast formats.

However, it's ironic that nowadays new records are being set in LP and vinyl sales. Why do we miss the tangible object and its shape? This could be an inherent desire to stimulate our senses through the physicality of things. Besides this sensorial need, our mental capacity could also be compromised.

3 Karen Pinkus – *Dematerialization: From Arte Povera to Cybermoney through Italian Thought* (2009) Johns Hopkins University Press, Diacritics. Number 39 Volume 3 (63-75). Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University.

4 *Lo and Behold, Reveries of the Connected World* (2016) Documentary directed by Werner Herzog.

The vast quantity of information produced, disseminated and stored daily as data, and the little time available to assimilate it, has led to a greater dependence from technological devices and digital platforms.

This involvement by the omnipresence and velocity of technology translates into a **digital amnesia** caused by the cognitive inertia that comes from the self-indulgency, superficiality and speed with which we slide through the news feed, not stimulating the critical spirit, the memory or the ability to develop deeper associations and logical exercises. Notwithstanding the added value that these devices represent, it is necessary to reflect on the impact of their use[4].

Consequently we might question if new technologies are making the role of design more invisible? Technological progress, besides intertwining the physical with the digital world, has simultaneously allowed the creation of new business models and a **new production paradigm**.

Industry 4.0, the 4th industrial revolution or the revolution of intelligent systems, arrived to promote new methodologies, practices and technologies, accelerating the stages of investigation and development (I&D), as a consequence of production optimization.

[5] Bernard Lassus – *The Landscape Approach* (1998) University of Pennsylvania Press.

In a moment when human activity is shaping the surface of the planet more than ever before, understanding our landscape has become a vital an increasingly more complex task. Behind the curtain of visible landscapes there are aspects, such as the passage of time, historical roots, the singularity of contexts, the relationship between local and regional scales of places, and other characteristics that go beyond conventional perception, creating an **invisible landscape[5]**.

Aknowledging this dimensions allows an understanding of the space and time continuum of places and, no less important, it contributes for a reflection on how to approach the future.
By making visible what previously was not, design is essential to articulate and communicate their potential. How will designers deal with this task?

As design further expands itself in society transdisciplinarily, through its *cultura del pregettto*[6], it allows to mediate, rethink, reorient, reavaluate and create new experiences and configurations. From the expanding interaction between countless actors from different areas emerge new ways of cooperating in search of common objectives and sollutions, questioning edifying and transversal concepts towards an improvement in the quality of human life and mankind's relationship with the world.

The permeability at the frontiers of design is increasingly more visible in the quest for enlightened and concerted answers, establishing dialogues with other disciples and areas of knowledge, sometimes even of apparently contradictory origin. What to expected from this discourse? As the visibility of frontiers grows more tenuous among different areas and disciplines, translating into more cooperative solutions, could the design process articulation become so narrow that it turns invisible?

Below:
1. Human heart
2. Schematic representation of the human heart
3. Heart Cone chair, Verner Panton (1958)
4. Coração de Viana (traditional Portuguese piece of gilded jewelry)
5. Keith Haring, *untitled*, 1980's
**6.** Artificial heart

[6] Enzio Manzini – *Design Culture and Dialogic Design* (2016). MIT, Design Issues. Volume 32 Number 1, Winter, p. 55.

[7] Christopher Frayling – *Research in Art and Design* (1993/94). Royall College of Art, Research Papers. Volume 1 Number 1. London: Royal College of Art.
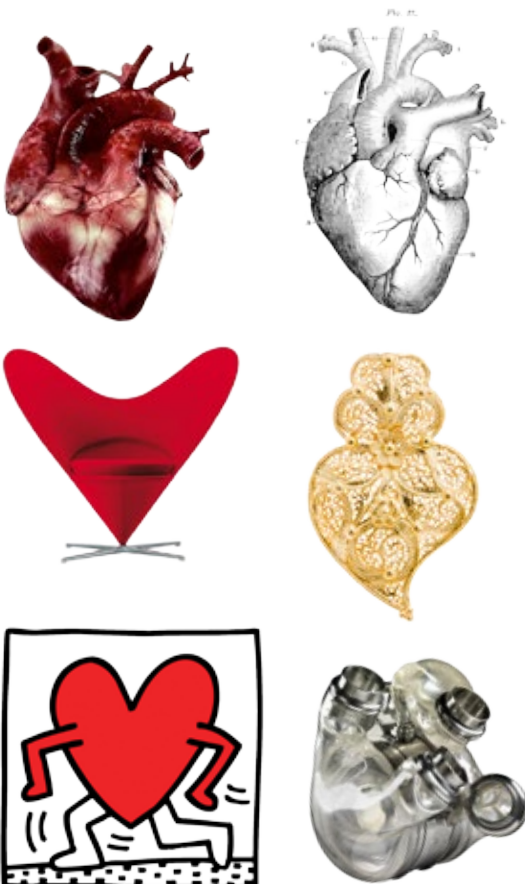
According to the three types of **design research** – into / for / through[7] – research for design might be the most difficult approach to legitimize, due to its invisibility, as it represents a mean to achieve an end. In this sense, the methodologies applied during the design project are the reflection of the process, the hypotheses and theories.

As design tries to become more autonomous from the research methodologies applied in social sciences, a special demand emerges: that of perceiving how knowledge is generated through practice in design research: will it be based or led by practice (practice-based research or practice-led research)?
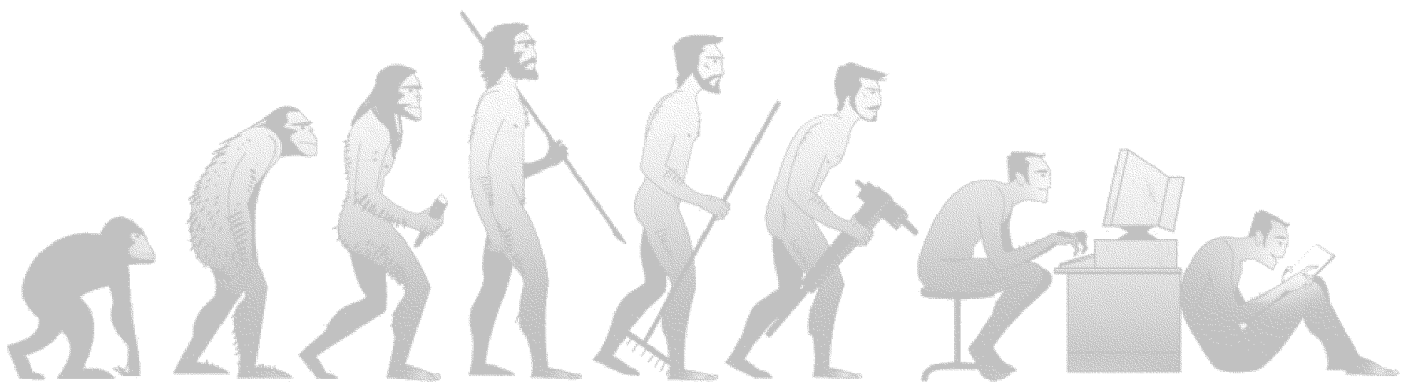
The 4th and last of major tehnical revolutions (that of artificial intelligence), converges digital, physical and biological technologies that will, fundamentally, transform the way we live, work and relate to each other, leading to a new paradigm.

The *technological darwinism* under which we live submerged, imposes on us a strict and permanent control, triggers the nostalgic idea of a primitive time, an attempt to recapture more simple and genuine experiences, giving back to Man his perception of freedom.

The constant need for territorial, professional and emotional hypermobility may conceal an inherent need and/or condition of Man himself from his radical dissatisfaction, a congenital misfit.

The generalization of artificial intelligence will bring countless and profound changes to human life, by eventually overcoming cultural tradition through the assumption of new social behaviours (dietary, ludic, affective, reproductive), more conditioned by the imperative of health and collective well-being.

Observing the frequent association between the perception of human happiness and manifestations of sentimental irrationality, it is likely that the artificial hyper-functionalism will promote the human mobilization towards the original primitive and spiritual behaviour.