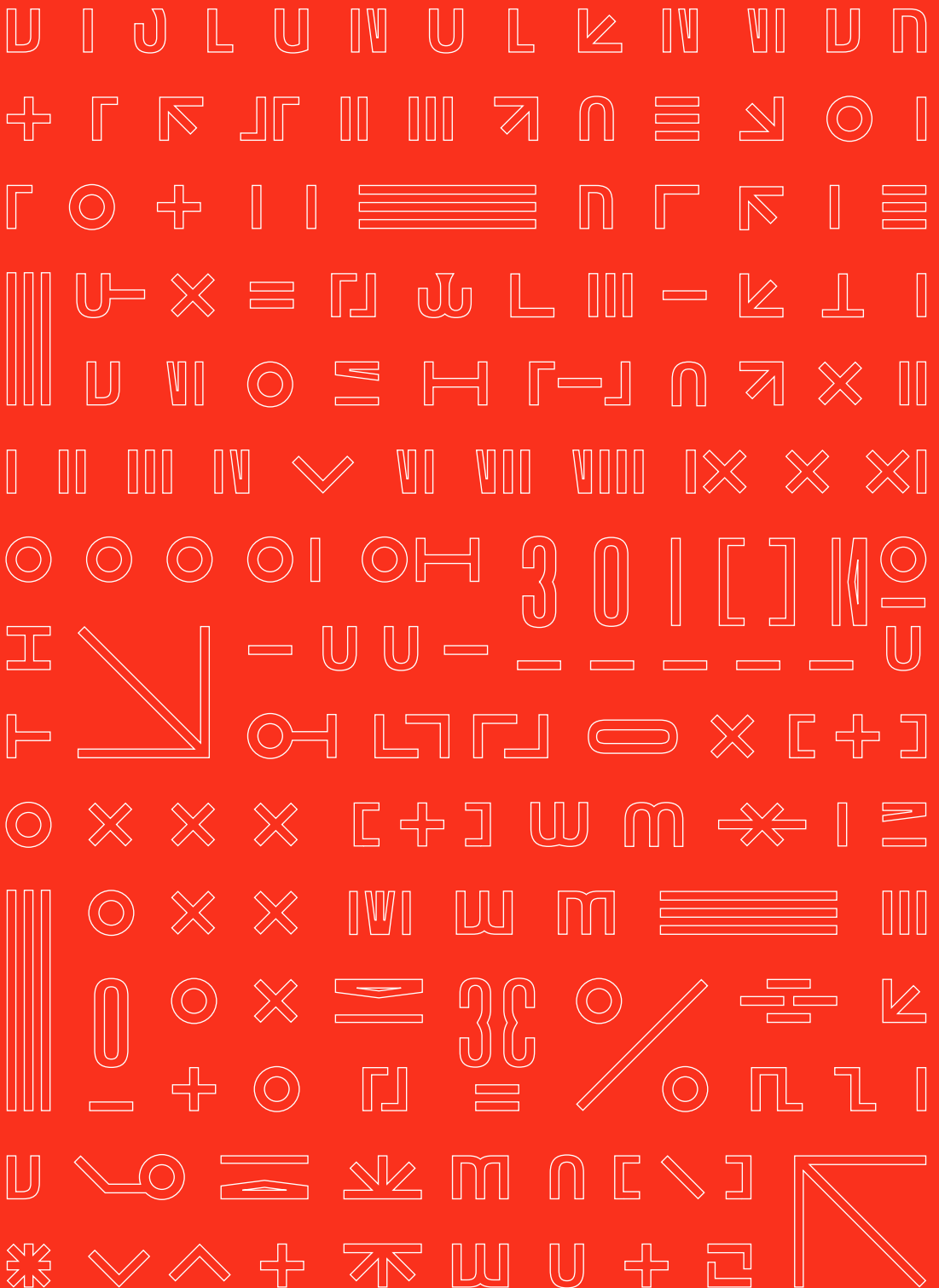
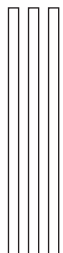
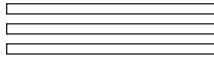


D I C E C N O

VI/02

journal of design culture  
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# Disegno

JOURNAL OF DESIGN CULTURE

Double-blind peer-reviewed, open access scholarly journal

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## Aims and Scope

Disegno publishes original research papers, essays, and reviews on all aspects of design cultures. We understand the notion of design culture as resolutely broad: our aim is to freely discuss the designed environment as mutually intertwined strands of sociocultural products, practices, and discourses. This attitude traverses the disciplinary boundaries between art, design, and visual culture and is therefore open to all themes related to sociocultural creativity and innovation. Our post-disciplinary endeavour welcomes intellectual contributions from all members of different design cultures. Besides providing a lively platform for debating issues of design culture, our specific aim is to consolidate and enhance the emerging field of design culture studies in the Central European academia by providing criticism of fundamental biases and misleading cultural imprinting with respect to the field of design.

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# “FABRICA” AND “RATIOCINATIO”

## INTRODUCTORY NOTES ON DESIGN AND SEMIOTICS

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Although Vitruvius' *De architectura libri decem* is generally regarded as the most ancient remaining piece of some sort of architectural theory, it is better to think of it as a book devoted to ancient design culture *mutatis mutandis*. We can do this retrofitting or intended retrospective anachronism with good conscience since a book on *architectura* written more than two thousand years ago can hardly be described as an example of the theory of architecture, since the concept did not exist at the time. A quick look at Vitruvius' masterpiece brings to attention, for example, that its tenth book is on *architectura organica*, which has naturally nothing to do with the mod-ern style and phenomena of organic architecture, but with the design and building of machines, tools, and instruments (that is, *organa*). Etymologically speaking, *architectus* (or its Greek equivalent, *architektōn*) means someone who designs and creates the principal structures of any designed environment. In order to do so, one applies *fabrica* and *ratiocinatio* at the very same time. On the one hand, therefore, the *architectus* is well versed in crafting basic structures, but he is equally capable of inventing, imagining, or designing these environments, objects, tools, and instruments, as well as clearly explaining and instructively interpreting their structure and executing process. Hence, according to Vitruvius, a designer who strives only to manual practice without written culture (*sine litteris*) cannot be successful at all.

This is the clear context into which he introduces his rather laconic proto-semiotics, according to which, and as in everything else (and especially in designing) there are two fundamental parts. First, things signified (*quod significatur*), then, things that signify (*quod significans*). The things signified are those of which we discourse, signifiers in turn are discursive explanations based on scholarly principles. The designer must be well-versed in both aspects. Natural talent (*ingenium*) is not enough, scholarly discipline (*disciplina*) is also very much required. On the following pages of *De architectura*, therefore, one can read the famous encyclopaedic model of Vitruvian education, which can be seen as a

telling precursor of the more recent interdisciplinary models of design culture studies (Alsted 1630; Hearn 2003). As Vitruvius explains in Book 1, Chapter 1 of *De architectura*, the good designer, in turn, is trained in (among other things) drawing, geometry, history, philosophy, music, medicine, jurisprudence, and astronomy to a level that guarantees fruitful dialogues between different stakeholders of a given project to build truly liveable environments and beautiful, good, and just worlds.

However, not everyone is happy with this primordial constellation of design and semiotics. Although the real decay of semiotics in the Humanities began sometime after the heydays of structuralism, post-structuralism, and postmodernism, which, although initially provided a highly popular view of design as a natural language, in the end it also resulted paradoxically in a decadent hypertrophy of semiotics, especially in postmodern architecture, in which half-baked theories blossomed. This happened to such an extent that influential critics such as Klaus Krippendorff—whom we published in translation in a previous issue, and who kindly provided academic support to *Disegno* thanks to Péter Wunderlich’s acquaintance with him—began to try to “transcend semiotics” and introduce a certain “semantic turn” in design culture as a new foundation for design (Krippendorff 1992, 2006.). Even more powerful criticism came from exponents of “theory after theory” such as Hans Ulrich Gumbrecht who underlined the importance of “producing presence” versus creating meaning, thus symbolically ending the era of the hermeneutic or the semiotic that began during the Reformation with the transformation of the Catholic Holy Mass into the Reformed Lord’s Supper in which the original magical presence of the substance of Christ’s body and blood in the accidents of bread and wine were transformed into pure symbols by means of eliminating the good old Aristotelian idea of transubstantiation (Gumbrecht 2003). Later, the emergence of somaesthetics, theories of atmosphere, or the return of aestheticism proved equally important to this process, to mention only a few examples of new currents in cultural studies that have seemingly overshadowed semiotics in the last decades (Shusterman and Veres 2023; Böhme 2017; Joughin and Malpas 2003).

Despite all critical tendencies, design semiotics can still be quite relevant to design culture studies. From Renato De Fusco to Matthew Holt, many distinguished scholars clearly regard semiotics as the best means of understanding designed phenomena and hence design culture (De Fusco 2005; Holt 2017). De Fusco claims that design has a particular role in the continuation of the “unfinished project of modernity” (Habermas) and semiotics is eminently important in this endeavour. Matthew Holt on the other hand argues that “any theory of the sign is [...] a theory of constructed meaning—of designed meaning.” (2017 S333)

Correspondingly, given that the broadest understanding of semiotics in Morrisian terms can be best represented in the so-called “semiotic cube” by Józef Maria Bocheński, which comprises semantics along with syntactics and pragmatics (Bocheński [1954] 1986), we can still regard

Krippendorff's theory as an advanced design semiotics. As once he put it, "design is making sense (of things)." (Krippendorff 1989, 1) This is still a reliable common denominator of different attitudes of design semiotics as the famous Italian designer Michele De Lucchi so perceptibly expressed it when he referred to his beard as his first design that differentiated him from his twin brother. (Szentpéteri 2013). This semantic act can easily be grasped both in syntactic and pragmatic terms as well, and this combined analysis would provide a quite plausible and truly palpable understanding of the Italian's ultimate design intervention.

In the following contributions, there are new papers devoted to the topic we collected from a conference held in December 2021, at the Moholy-Nagy University of Art and Design, in the Doctoral School on the 6<sup>th</sup> PhD Day titled *Design Culture, Semiotics, Education*, alongside papers we received for our open call.

Beyond these semiotics-focused writings, this issue proudly includes two papers on different subjects: one by Joana Meroz, on what life/non-life differentiations can mean in the widest sense of design, and one by Maressa Park, on the radical restaging of the revolutionary musical, *Oklahoma!*

**Márton Szentpéteri**

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