Quando è design   When is Design   Quand c'est du design
a cura di Michela Deni e Dario Mangano

Ethnosemiotics and Design
A Contribution to a Symptomatology of Design

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Abstract
Ethnosemiotics, a term included in the Greimas and Courtès dictionary, has been applied to various objects of observation in recent years. Ethnosemiotics does not simply consist in the semiotic analysis of ethnographic material; its ambition is rather to investigate the conditions of possibility of observation. Learning a method to observe objects in the context of everyday life, becoming aware of the planned and unforeseen relationships that occur between the actors that populate it, understanding the consequences of the project in the context in which the design will operate: this is the ambition of ethnosemiotics applied to design. The intervention presents the potential of the method and some preliminary results.

Contents

0. Art or Design?

According to Paolo Fabbri's suggestion, we should not try to provide a definition of 'what' design is. From a semiotic point of view, it is more interesting to ask 'when' it is design. The invitation refers to Nelson Goodman (1978,) who dedicated a chapter of *Ways of worldmaking*, his excellent book on constructivism, to a similar question: *when is art?*

A relevant answer to this question implies a short outline of Goodman's criteria. As we read in Goodman (1978), some symptoms enable us to understand when we are in the presence of art:

1) syntactic density, where the finest differences in certain respects constitute a difference between symbols — for example, an ungraduated mercury thermometer as contrasted with an electronic digital-read-out instrument;

2) semantic density, where symbols are provided for things distinguished by the finest differences in certain respects — for example, not only the ungraduated thermometer again but also ordinary English, though it is not syntactically dense;

3) relative repleteness, where comparatively many aspects of a symbol are significant — for example, a single-line drawing of a mountain by Hokusai where every feature of shape, line, thickness, etc. counts, in contrast with perhaps the same line as a chart of daily stock market averages, where all that counts is the height of the line above the base;

4) exemplification, where a symbol, whether or not it denotes, symbolizes by serving as a sample of properties it literally or metaphorically possesses;

5) multiple and complex reference, where a symbol performs several integrated and interacting referential functions, some direct and some mediated through other symbols.

Goodman (1968) had already proposed symptoms (1-4); symptom (5) is new. Since we are interested in Design, the point is not whether these symptoms are relevant to Design or not. Design is definitively not art, even though, from time to time, art is Design. Scholars who appreciate Design for its aesthetic qualities are interested in art, overlooking at the same time many important design functions in contemporary social life, and many cases in which good design does not claim to be art.

0.1 "Interruttore Rompitratta"

Let us consider, for example, Castiglioni's *Interruttore rompitratta*, 1968, which is an undisputed classic of Design, even if it is a simple, cheap switch. It is not syntactically or semantically dense; on the contrary, its semantic and syntactic dimensions could be defined as 'rarefied'. It is possible to discuss its 'repleteness': for example, its unmistakable sound when the light is turned on or off can be considered significant, but this is rather a sort of readiness to idiosyncratic meaningfulness than an actual articulated meaning. On the plastic plane, it is possible to distinguish an eidetic opposition between the

rectilinear cam and the curvilinear case, isomorphic to a categoric opposition between 'interactive' and 'non-interactive' on the content plane. However, semiotic categories fit every dimension of meaning, including the most trivial: it is debatable whether semiotic descriptions prove the 'repleteness' of the described phenomena in terms of aesthetic significance. As regards exemplification, Castiglioni's switch undoubtedly exemplifies the features of every switch: it is discrete, cheap, almost unbreakable, handy, easy to find in the dark, anonymous. Its anonymity in association with its success could be considered a symptom of Design. Yet, if we regard it as an aesthetic feature, we come to a sort of paradox, since this kind of 'exemplification' in the case of design concerns the genus-species relation: in the same way, Mona Lisa trivially exemplifies every oil on wooded panel. Finally, coming to Goodman's fifth criterion, I find it really hard to identify both direct and symbolically-mediated reference in a switch.

Obviously, all this does not mean that Castiglioni's switch could not work as an artwork. If placed in a museum on a pedestal, it would perfectly identify a period, an aesthetic, an idiolect, embodying the platonic idea of a switch, perfectly fulfilling the five criteria. However, this would prove, at most, that Castiglioni's *interruttore rompitratta* is a masterpiece, leaving the question as to whether or not it is good design unanswered.

0.2 Symptoms and Functions

It is more interesting to underline the semiotic relations between Goodman's criteria and artwork. First, all the proposed criteria concern semiotic features – and not historical, sociological, or psychological ones. The criteria imply that artworks depend on *systems of symbolization,* including a scheme of syntactic rules. From Goodman's nominalistic point of view, the system consists of a *characteristica* (not necessarily *universalis*) plus a form of *calculus* (not necessarily *ratiocinator*). Thus, symptoms (1-2) seem related to the features of the implied system, and not of the considered masterpiece, whereas symptom 3 represents a sort of principle of economy, referring to the symbolic use of the features that it is possible to discern on the expression plane. The fourth feature seems to refer to the relation between the artwork and its culture – a portion or a format of Encyclopedia, according to Eco (1984) – while the fifth criterion refers to the relation between artworks and a supposed, referenced 'reality'.

Thus, symptoms (1-2) recall Jacobson's metalinguistic function; symptom 5 obviously represents the referential function; symptom 4 is the phatic function at least in the original meaning that Malinowski attributed to this linguistic function, instituting the feeling of belonging to the community. Function (3) is comparable to the poetic function. Since, according to Jakobson, there are two other linguistic functions (emotive and conative), new symptoms of art could be discovered in the future. This is possible due to the symptomatic nature of the signification process: Goodman himself discovered the fifth symptom ten years after the first four. In fact, symptoms do not imply a par-

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Vol 21, No 24 (September 2020) • DOI: 10.12977/ocula2020-43

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ticular disease. For example, a fever does not imply the flu; the flu implies a fever in association with other symptoms (a syndrome). Furthermore, a certain symptom of a syndrome may be silent – I focused on the semiotics of medical symptoms in Galofaro (2007). Thus, if Goodman is right, art implies a variable number of symptoms, not vice-versa. This is to say that art, as a manifested configuration, establishes the features of its own manifesting plane.

0.3 A Meta-Meta-Semiotics

According to Hjelmslev (1961), a meta-semiotics is a semiotics whose content plane is the *R*elation between the *E*xpression and the *C*ontent plane of an object-semiotics:

$$ER(ERC)$$

In this light, Goodman's attempt to individuate art is a case of meta-meta-semiotics. The first meta-semiotic relation is represented by the statement of different criteria relative to syntax, semantics, etc. The relation between these statements and art is the object of a second-order meta-semiotic statement, according to which these conditions have to be considered symptoms (when something is art, one or more of them are present; since new symptoms can be discovered in the future, one should consider the possibility of asymptomatic art).

For this reason, if we are interested in the question 'when is (something) Design', we should look for meta-semiotic statements that work as a symptom. This is probably the most interesting feature of Goodman's work: it tries to define the intrinsic semiotic features of art, while a different discipline would be interested in other definitions: for example, sociology might study the organization which has the power to select and sell artwork; psychology might describe the cognitive and emotive a-priori conditions governing the aesthetic experience.

In a similar way, semiotics should try to define the intrinsic, immanent meta-semiotic relations that can be considered a symptom of design. In the second part of the paper, we will have a look at some good candidates and propose a possible symptom: the presence of ethnosemiotic relevance.

1. Possible Symptoms of Design

As a starting point, I will consider different attempts to define design. The first is proposed by the World Design Organization, and is relative to industrial design:[1]

Industrial Design is a strategic problem-solving process that drives innovation, builds business success, and leads to a better quality of life through innovative products, systems, services, and experiences. Industrial Design bridges the gap between what is

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and what's possible. It is a trans-disciplinary profession that harnesses creativity to resolve problems and co-create solutions with the intent of making a product, system, service, experience or a business, better. At its heart, Industrial Design provides a more optimistic way of looking at the future by reframing problems as opportunities. It links innovation, technology, research, business, and customers to provide new value and competitive advantage across economic, social, and environmental spheres.

Industrial Designers place the human in the centre of the process. They acquire a deep understanding of user needs through empathy and apply a pragmatic, user-centric problem-solving process to design products, systems, services, and experiences. They are strategic stakeholders in the innovation process and are uniquely positioned to bridge varied professional disciplines and business interests. They value the economic, social, and environmental impact of their work and their contribution towards co-creating a better quality of life.

Now, there are many reasons to be suspicious of this definition. The first is methodological: the scientific attitude in semiotics requires that we reject phenomena, to focus on deep structures – see Fabbri (2018 [1973]). The second concerns the lexicon used in this definition, related to marketing and to euphoric connotations, uncritically narrating a tale of success where Design is the magic wand, syncretically mixing different semantic fields to achieve the semantic effect of scientificity: economy (innovation, business success, products, systems, services, new value, competitive advantage), psychology (strategic problem-solving process, reframing problems as opportunities, empathy), sociology (trans-disciplinary profession, stakeholders). In other terms,

0) techno-bla-bla-bla: it is Design when it is bullshit theory

However, there is an element that can be interesting in this controversial definition, and it is connected to a phenomenologically-relevant attitude toward the future. In semiotic terms, the narrative structure of this 'definition' can be summarized with a homology:

$$present : future = problem : solution$$

Design is described as a *process* whose output is this homology. Temporal programming is an interesting feature, which emerges when we disassemble this ideological tale finalized to persuading companies to invest in Design.

1.1 More Serious Attempts to Define Design

In fact, according to Salvatore Zingale's point of view, Design is an ideational and operative activity that aims, starting from an intention, at the production of an artifact – or a system of artifacts, procedures, services or experiences – in view of a purpose.[2]

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2   See Zingale's contribution in this volume. Obviously, every misinterpretation of Zingale's point of view is my responsibility. However, it should be noted how, in

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As we can see, Zingale's definition is more philosophical, and less oriented to selling a product, thus it is more interesting to our purpose: in particular, it is relevant to the two features that have already attracted our attention (design as a process, temporalization). Here they are associated to the intentionality of a particular subject, the Designer, directed toward the future (*protention*). The same feature is underlined by Giampaolo Proni (2006), who seeks in Peirce's notion of abstractive observation a model of reasoning projected toward the future:

The faculty which I call abstractive observation is one which ordinary people perfectly recognize, but for which the theories of philosophers sometimes hardly leave room. It is a familiar experience to every human being to wish for something quite beyond his present means, and to follow that wish by the question, "Should I wish for that thing just the same, if I had ample means to gratify it?" To answer that question, he searches his heart, and in doing so makes what I term an abstractive observation. He makes in his imagination a sort of skeleton diagram, or outline sketch, of himself, considers what modifications the hypothetical state of things would require to be made in that picture, and then examines it, that is, observes what he has imagined, to see whether the same ardent desire is there to be discerned. By such a process, which is at bottom very much like mathematical reasoning, we can reach conclusions as to what would be true of signs in all cases, so long as the intelligence using them was scientific. (CP 2.227, 1897)

In this long fragment I am not interested in Peirce's usual obsession with scientific reasoning, but rather in the 'skeleton diagram', an interesting sketch that includes its author, a technology which allows the subject to operate on itself-an enunciational device.

On a similar line, Alvise Mattozzi[3] individuates a condition for design in the presence of a *drawing*. This drawing can be considered a *shifter,* introducing a detachment between the Designer and his/her work, allowing comparison and innovation. According to Mattozzi, the opposite of the Designer is not the Craftsman, but the gastropod, which produces its shell without any shift or innovation. Mattozzi makes a very good point, introducing the semi-

Zingale's perspective, this seems a general semiotic feature, with political consequences: 'thinking today of the social world of communication starting from Peirce perhaps means thinking of the same communication as the place where the present prepares its own overcoming. As if to say that every project of a possible society is to a large extent in what we are able to sow within the images, the discourses, the strategies we use in today's society. Because, Peirce tells us, after all it is the idea we have of the future that influences the way we act in the present.' This seems a rather optimistic point of view, open to the possibility of rational policies and rational overcoming of present inconsistencies. A possible objection concerns the radically contradictory nature of reality and of meaning itself, at a deeper level than the one which is referentially set up by rational reasoning and by political discourse. It is the dark side that we can appreciate, for example, in hostile design.

3   Mattozzi's conference, in Urbino, September 2018. Once again, every misinterpretation is my responsibility.

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otic dimension and offering a basis for reasoning in analogy with Goodman's symptoms. Good symptoms of Design are:

1) Shifting: it is design when the phenomenological coordinates of the subject-designer (me, here, now) and those of the project (not-me, not-here, not-now) are not coincident;
2) Temporalization: it is design when temporal programming is present as it presupposes protension;
3) Drawing: it is design when one or more semiotic systems (visual,[4] verbal) are employed together to allow comparisons.

These criteria are probably still too general: they do not allow us to distinguish an object of design from a symphony. The list is not complete. In particular, the first symptom suggests that spatialization is also an interesting discursive feature of Design to investigate. For example, Zinna (2009) differentiates between supra-objectual and intra-objectual design. When compared to visual semiotics, the formal properties of different materials seem to be relevant too.[5] However, we would like to focus our attention on the problem upstream of the design process, and not on the solution downstream, to suggest another possible symptom:

4) It is design when we find ethnosemiotic relevance.

In other terms, the individuation of the problem as a source of inspiration for proposing possible solutions implies an (even unconscious) ethnological point of view, capable of rejecting the idea that the system of the existing artifacts around us is optimal, 'natural', or necessary, and of understanding to what extent it is conventional and contingently constructed, as a first step to critically discussing it and possibly improving it.

In order to prove this, we must first define ethnosemiotics and construct its relation with other fields such as ethnology and sociosemiotics.

2. When is it Ethnosemiotics?

According to Greimas and Courtés (1979), the goals of ethnosemiotics are:
– to problematize the universality of cultural objects;
– to gather significant sets, i.e. meaningful portions of reality we assume as a whole before analysis;
– to focus on speeches and texts whose syntagmatic connections are not linguistic;
– to construct general models of significant behaviors;

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4   On visual semiotics see Greimas (1984). The way in which different semiotic systems are used to work on the meaning of design warrants a closer look which is outside the scope of the present paper. It should probably be analyzed in terms of theory of sign production – Eco (1976: 150-313).

5   Two different solutions have been proposed by Zinna (2009) and Mattozzi (2009).

Greimas' problem was to repay semiotics' debt to ethnology and folklore research, in particular to Claude Lévi-Strauss and Vladimir Propp. Aiming at general models, Semiotics seems to need ethnological research. It is true that Hjelmslev's principle of immanence requires the avoidance of extra-semiotic (i.e. psychological, sociological, historical) explanations of meaning – cf. Hjelmslev (1961[1943]). However, Hjelmslev (1935-37) himself took inspiration from Lucien Lévy-Bruhl when analyzing the sub-logical case system. Thus, Greimas tried to clarify the reciprocal relations between these two epistemological regions.

2.1 Ethnosemiotics and Sociosemiotics

Greimas opposes ethnosemiotics to sociosemiotics. This indication is useful. These two disciplines share a similar object, focusing on meaning in the light of social relations. However, ethnosemiotics is interested in social constants, whereas sociosemiotics focuses on social variables. Nevertheless, the two disciplines presuppose each other.

Figure 1. Entries in Greimas' dictionary connected to sociosemiotics (in red) and ethnosemiotics (in green).

Figure 1 represents the entries in Greimas' dictionary which are respectively connected to ethnosemiotics and sociosemiotics. Focusing on the differences, sociosemiotics is connected to connotation, sociolect, collective, culture, register, typology, veridiction, communication. Ethnosemiotics is instead connected to categorization, taxonomy, semic analysis, denomination, i.e. to the deeper levels of the generative trajectory, to metasemiotics, to a scientific object constructed according to Hjelmslev's empirical principle (formal coherence and material adequacy).

Thus, in Greimas' view, ethnosemiotics constructs or tests new parts of semiotic theory, connecting 'significant sets': the latter expression refers to the meaningful portions of reality we assume as a whole before analysis.

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2.2 Ethnosemiotics and Ethnography

According to Vincenzo Matera (2015) there is no definitive method for writing ethnographic research (participant observation, field notes, interviews, surveys). Even so, ethnosemiotics is not supposed to be the 'correct' method for collecting and analyzing ethnographic material: on the contrary, its research focuses on the conditions of possibility of Ethnography.

This needs to be stressed. For example, in Greimas' dictionary, the entry 'culture' is connected to sociosemiotics, not to ethnosemiotics. As Francesco Marsciani wrote,

Ethnosemiotics is not cultural anthropology; its center of interest are not cultural forms as such, nor their determinations nor their specificity. Ethnosemiotics tries to avoid a double risk that it sees in ethno-anthropological practice: on the one hand, the tendency to want or need to obtain exhaustive descriptions of anthropological facts (documentation, field notebooks, verification of information obtained, etc.), on the other the tendency to specify more and more in detail its own fields of interest (anthropology of pain, anthropology of kin, anthropology of the visible, anthropology of ritual, etc.). Ethnosemiotics does not believe in a supposed determinate and factual nature of its objects (although qualified as cultural). On the contrary, it willingly letsits objects self-organize, without prejudging with pre-constituted categories the possibility of their identification. (Marsciani 2014: 25)

In fact, the object of ethnosemiotics is constructed through analysis, starting from a significant set. To do that, Ethnosemiotic reconstructs the relationships between actors, spaces and times within a certain discursive scene: the result of the reconstruction is a certain *image* of the scene.

2.3 Reality or Construction?

A debated question among ethnographers concerns the epistemological foundations of their research practice. According to Ybema et al.,

Realist-objectivist narratives treat the evidence presented as a fixed-stage, univocal account that holds out the promise of mirroring social reality. Constructivist-interpretive narratives emphasize the contingency and multivocality of what is being reported, treating social realities as collectively or intersubjectively constructed in an ongoing interplay between individual agency and social structure, in and through which individuals and structures mutually constitute each other. (Ybema et al. 2010: 349)

Ethnosemiotics can help cast a different light on this problem. In particular, there is philosophical confusion in the way in which social sciences use the term 'intersubjectivity', as a sort of agreement between the subjects involved in the action. This is a naive point of view. Even if four people starving in a jail agree on the fact that their stool is a chicken, they will not eat it. According to a *relational principle of individuation*, subjects are the product of an indivi-

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duation process starting from their system of culture, and changing according to their position in a network of relations: there are strong limitations to their power to discuss and to change their relation to it. On the other hand, from a phenomenological point of view, subjects always construct the same, shared reality. Intersubjectivity is a disembodied, transcendental, structural, inhuman relation, producing humans (and stuff).

The notion of image can help us to understand this semiosic process:

a) images present themselves to our perception;

b) social actors grasp their meaning thanks to their organization;

c) images represent the way in which our experience captures the effects of the meaning we encounter in the world of life (*Lebenswelt*);

d) images are organized into transformation chains: they constitute moments of singularity in a background of permanence (Marsciani).

Some brief comments: points (b) and (c) are direct consequences of Greimas (1966), according to whom the natural world is a semiotics, whose figures are organized by a grid of abstract, sub-logical[6] relations. The observer is never located in a pre-meaningful world. Babies learn the world together with language or other semiotic systems. Point (d) introduces a non-static notion of meaning, suggesting another possible path to overcoming the disappointing, apolitical reading of many semiotic analyses.

2.4 The Observer

Constructivist-interpretive perspectives on ethnography require ethnographers to inquire into their own meaning-making processes, since the interaction between the observer and research participants generates ethnographic knowledge – cf. Goodman (1978) on "worldmaking". However, it is rather dubious whether the observer has the privilege of free will in determining reality. It is true that the ethnographer should not simply adhere to the native's vision, searching for the right "distance". However, free will cannot escape the principle of individuation formulated above (2.3): both the ethnographer's and the native's subjectivity and world of experience are co-determined in their relation. In the same way, a scientist can determine whether Schroedinger's cat is dead or alive by opening the black box, but he/she cannot choose between the two alternatives. Thus, from a methodological point of view it is important to become aware of the limits of one's perspective; to adopt different perspectives or to prefer teamwork to individual researches.

3. Ethnosemiotics and Design

In my experience as a semiotics lecturer at the faculty of design, I had the possibility to have my students use ethnosemiotics to analyze existing objects

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6   I have borrowed the term 'sublogical' from Hjelmslev (1935) since Greimas' examples clearly make use of the same categories to describe the abstract semes that organize figurativity in semantics.

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in their relation to their users and their social environment. In particular, during a summer course at Politecnico di Milano (2018) in collaboration with Salvatore Zingale, ethnosemiotics was used in a workshop on wayfinding, aimed at studying how users orient themselves in the metro-stations in Milan. In a similar way, in my summer course at Università di Bolzano, with the collaboration of Alessandro Mason and the creative direction of Harry Thaler, ethnosemiotics was employed to study public lighting. In both cases, the critical analysis was aimed at rejecting the idea that existing solutions are necessarily the best possible or the 'natural' ones. Let us consider street lamps: they are so integrated in the urban landscape that we no longer pay attention to them, yet they are pretty useless in the daytime. They can be used to perform different functions, depending on how people behave and what they need in a street, park or square, and which different thematic roles and action programs can be defined. Having observed objects in action[7], students enhanced lamps by adding new functions to them, such as musical instruments or birdhouses, or they implemented lights in different supports, such as bricks, drones, and portable and rechargeable sharing-systems. After an exhibition at the *Museion* in Bozen, the company bought all the prototypes produced by the students thanks to the labs at the UNIBZ University.[8]

3.1. Objections and clarifications

These are just two examples of how ethnosemiotics can be useful in encouraging ethnological awareness in young designers. Every ethnologist could rightly raise objections about the confusion between a scientific ethnographic study and the naive application of observation techniques outside ethnology to different purposes, such as creativity and design.

On the other hand, ethnosemiotics should not be confused with ethnography in so far as the first is interested in the conditions of possibility of the second: the conditions under which meaning is produced and reality makes sense to us and is transformed by us. In other terms, we are not saying that good design implies an ethnographic study, even if it would be very interesting to develop this kind of collaboration. We would rather suggest that it is Design when it has ethnological relevance, as we are going to show.

3.2 How to disassemble barracks

In the final part of this paper we are going to present a specific case-study: *Multiplo,* by GISTO, a studio based in Milan that works in design, architecture and craftsmanship. Presented at the 2019 Oslo Architecture Triennial, Mul-

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7 *Object in action* is the English translation of the Italian title of Michela Deni (2002). Deni's critical analysis of the train carriages can be considered a seminal work in relation to the purpose of the present paper.

8 See <https://www.ewo.com/it/ewolab/unibzewo-magic>, retrieved on September 30th 2019.

Figure. 2. Aerial View of Druso Barracks.

tiplo is an instruction manual on how to disassemble barracks. The project is the result of research that started in 2017 on behalf of BASIS Vinschgau Venosta, a new social activation hub set up in Silandro in the Druso Barracks (1937), a former military base – see fig. 2.

In fact, an interesting feature of barracks is their modularity. As the authors write in their volume, all rationalist military architecture is based on modular systems, repeated building sections that form a square. They are an assemblage of standard materials, objects, and relations – see fig. 6. This feature can be exploited for recycling purposes. A good project using some of these architectural elements (fig. 8) will produce a great quantity of objects.

Figure 3. Exploring the Barracks.

Figure 4. Disassembled Materials.

For example, MULTIPLO 1 is a table produced by recycling wooden tops, aluminium window frames, threaded pins, and a 3D-printed element – fig. 9. The production process implies a comparably simple action program:

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Figure 5. Transformation in Design.

1. to unmount windows;
2. to remove glass and fasteners;
3. to produce 3d-printed elements;
4. to fix the central pin;
5. to fix the adjustable feet and the wooden top.

Other projects recycle elements of furniture such as wooden beamsand carpeting – fig. 4.

However, the performance of these projects requires formidable competence. It is the result of the acquisition of blueprints (to be used as a map, fig. 7), historical data (mission briefing), exploration (fig. 3). As ethnologists, designers wander among the ruins, reflect, photograph, study mankind and the value it gives to things. This seems a necessary operation since the design process is not based on form, but on transformation (fig. 5). In other terms, the process through which designers acquire knowledge is relevant to ethnosemiotics: it is a promising research field, and ethnosemiotics aims to develop useful tools and categories for this purpose.

Conclusions

The present paper aims to demonstrate how ethnosemiotics can be useful to design from a theoretical and educational point of view. To this purpose, we asked ourselves 'when is it design?': in analogy to Nelson Goodman's attempt to underline the semiotic features of art, we searched for some symptoms of good design which may be present separately or together. First we suggested some conditions based on my esteemed colleagues' experience (shifting,

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Figure 6. Modular Elements.

temporal programming, drawing). Then, we suggested how these conditions require knowledge of the relation between the system of objects, users, and social environment, and the acquisition of awareness of its conventional, arbitrary, contingent nature. For this reason, it is design when the designer's research has ethnosemiotic relevance. To demonstrate this point, we had to define ethnosemiotics as an inquiry on the condition of possibility of ethnographic research. Finally, we presented some examples of ethnosemiotic relevance in Design research and teaching. In particular, the case of MULTIPLO by GISTO seems useful in suggesting another symptom of design. According to our analysis, the design process does not involve form, but rather transformation, which is – indeed – a transformation of the involved materials but, above all, a transformation of meaning. Thus, we can conclude that

1) Shifting: it is design when the phenomenological coordinates of the subject-designer (me, here, now) and those of the project (not-me, not-here, not-now) are not coincident;

2) Temporalization: it is design when temporal programming is present – as it presupposes protension toward the future;

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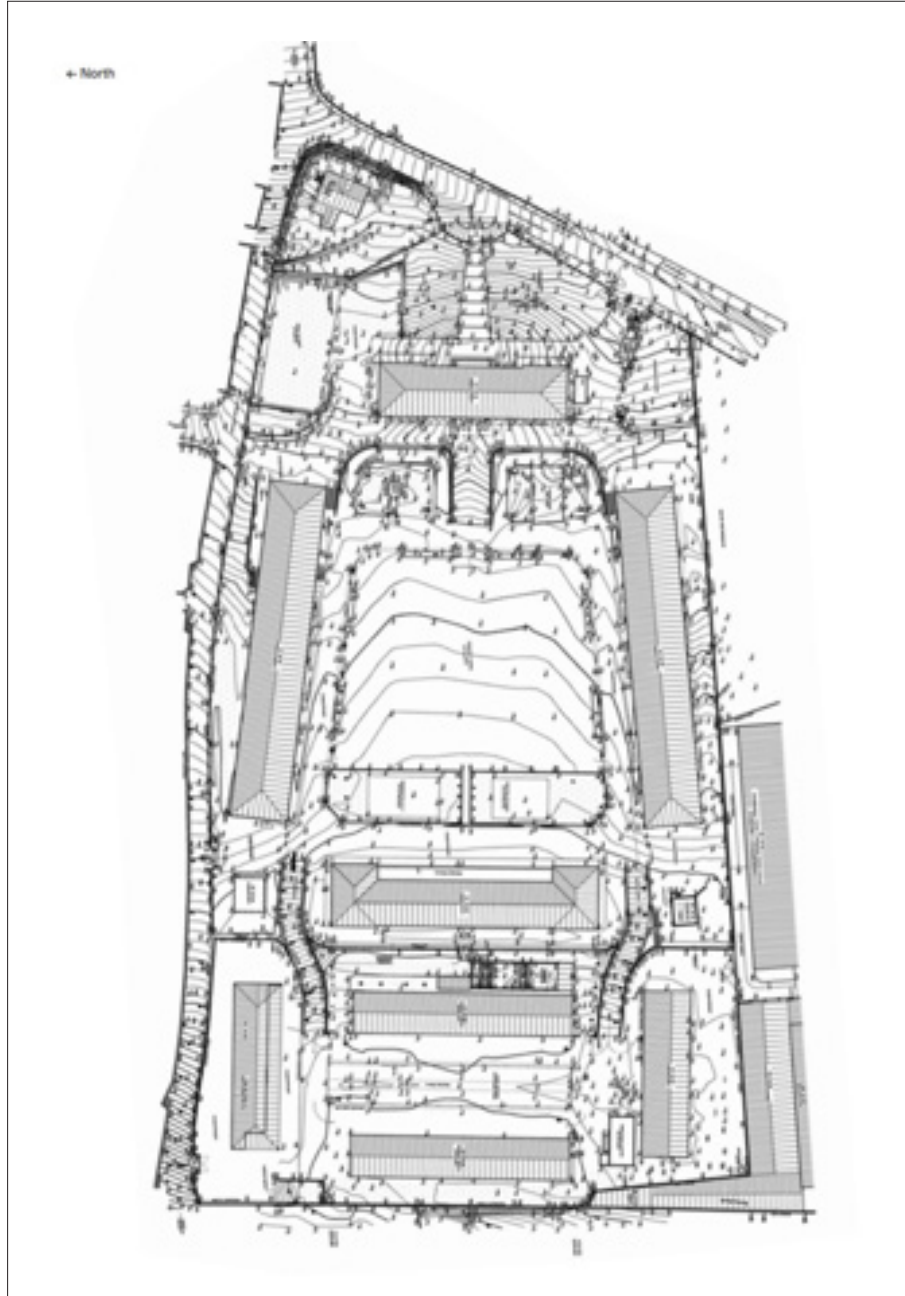**Francesco Galofaro** | *Ethnosemiotics and Design. A Contribution to a Symptomatology of Design*

Figure 7. Plan of the Barracks.

3) Drawing: it is design when one or more semiotic systems (visual, verbal) are employed together to allow comparisons;

4) Transformation: it is design when meaning is transformed together with materials, forms, and functions;

5) Ethnosemiotic relevance: it is design when it discusses the universality of cultural objects, helping construct general models of significant behaviors.

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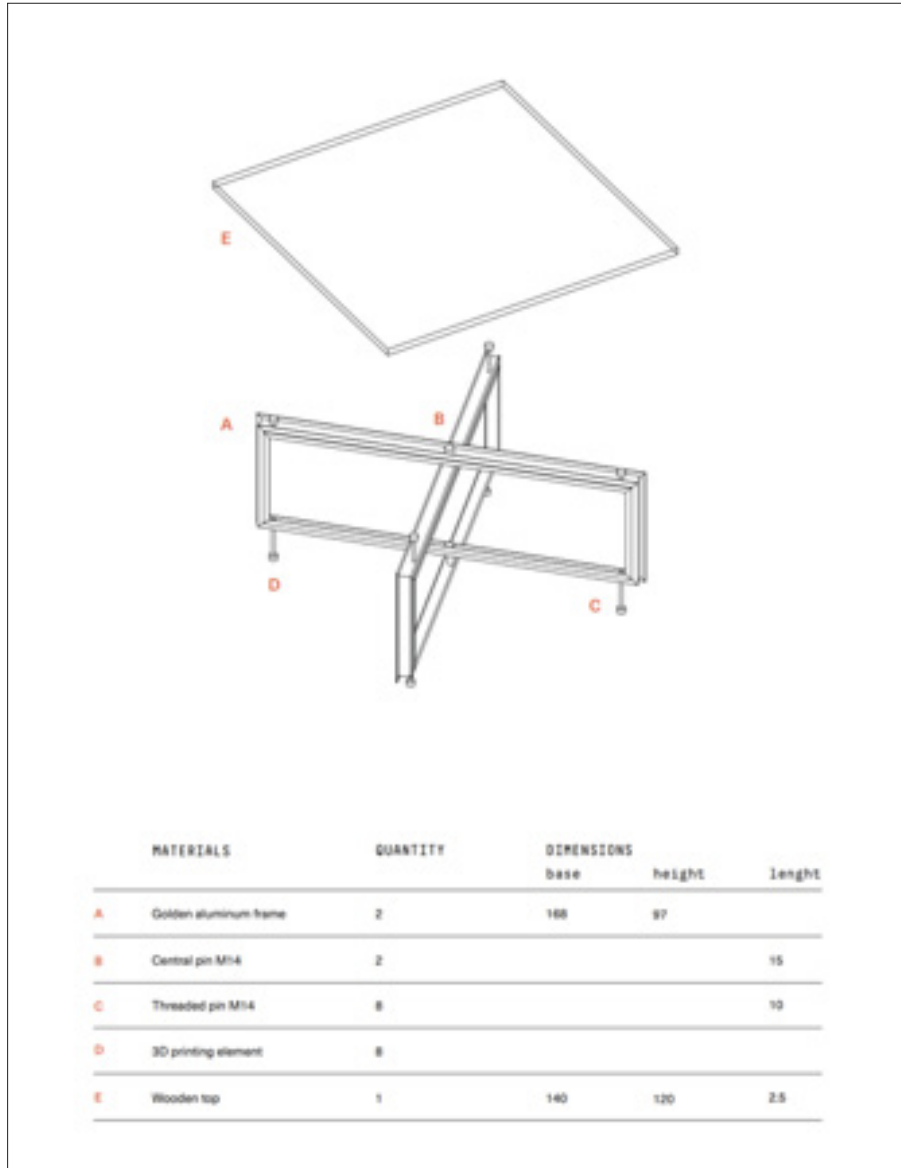| MATERIALS		QUANTITY	DIMENSIONS		
			base	height	lenght
A	Golden aluminum frame	2	168	97	
B	Central pin M14	2			15
C	Threaded pin M14	8			10
D	3D printing element	8			
E	Wooden top	1	140	120	2.5

Figure 8. Drawing.

Point 5 needs clarification. In particular, the reader may wonder how ethnosemiotics is employed as a tool during a semiotic analysis and how someone who would like to analyse a design project can recognize an ethnosemiotic symptom. In particular, while in the works of my students an ethnosemiotic analysis was required before the project, in the case of GISTO we simply know that the designers, consciously or not, behaved like explorers; finally, in the case of Castiglioni's *Interruttore rompitratta*, 1968, there are no reports of ethnographic work. Still, there is ethographic relevance since – as we wrote in 1.1 – the new object changed the existing system of objects, rejecting the idea

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Figure 9. Final Product.

that it was 'natural', or necessary, and improving it. A direction of research – with students and in cooperation with designers – is to let ethnosemiotics become operational, as a meta-projectual tool available for designers to carry out a first inspection of reality, to let problems and contradictions emerge, and to find inspiration for possible interventions and solutions.

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Vol 21, No 24 (September 2020) • DOI: 10.12977/ocula2020-43

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