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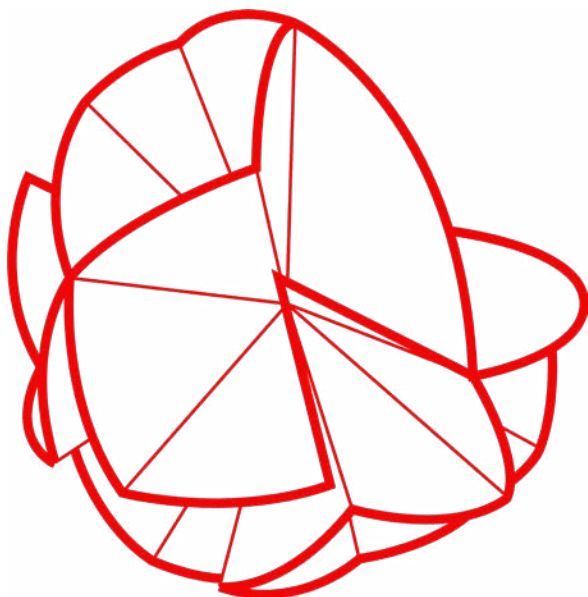
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1

Disrupting Geographies in the Design World

Proceedings of the 8th International
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Alma Mater Studiorum — Università di Bologna



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Contents

Contents

14

**The Latin Network for the Development
of Design Processes**

16

8th Forum Main Partners

18

**Disrupting Geographies
in the Design World**

20

People

26

Impact

Track 1

There's No Plan(et) B: Sustainable Transitions to Systemic Planet-Centric Design

30

**There's No Plan(et) B.
Sustainable Transitions to
Systemic Planet-Centric Design**
Erik Ciravegna, Clara Giardina, Davide Pletto

40

**Beyond Collaboration: A Network Analysis
of Local Stances and Global Frameworks
in the Collective Design of the City**
Francesca Sabatini, Martina Massari,
Saveria Olga Murielle Boulanger

50

**Alter_Azioni: Designing
between Biological and Artifactual.
Scenarios for a Short-Term Future**
Pietro Costa, Raffaella Fagnoni

62

**(Systemic) Design for Sustainable
Territorial Transition: A Literature
Review of State of the Art**
Asja Aulisio, Silvia Barbero, Amina Pereno

72

**Dasein ist Design:
An Ontological Discussion of Design
in the Ecological Crisis Time**
Sabrina Lucibello, Carmen Rotondi

80

**The More-Than-Human Trend
in Design Research: A Literature Review**
Annapaola Vacanti, Francesco Burlando,
Isabella Nevoso, Massimo Menichinelli

90

**Being and Nature.
The Aesthetic Ecocentrism**
Adriano Pinho, Francisco Providência

102

**Forward to the Primitive.
New Sustainable Design Processes
Characterized by Primitive Aesthetic**
Jurji Filieri, Elisabetta Benelli

110

How Long Does It Take For a Paradigm Shift. A Design-based Critical Essay on Materials and Fabrication Processes

Guilherme Giantini, Lígia Lopes

118

Sustainability Needs Service Efficacy

Chiara Olivastri, Giovanna Tagliasco

126

Systemic Design Applied to Medtech. Guidelines for Corporate Training on Sustainable Healthcare

Enrica Ferrero, Giulia Ferrero

138

Reducing Waste in Healthcare: A Systemic Design Approach for Sustainable Disposables Manufacturers

Gabriele Maria Cito, Angela Giambattista

150

A Framework to Design Appliances for the Circular Economy Scenario

Chiara Battistoni

162

Digital Fashion Technologies & Practices: Design Driven Sustainable Transition in Fashion Industry

Ludovica Rosato, Alberto Calleo

170

Material Resources as a Contextual Complex System

Michele De Chirico

180

Diffuse Micro-Factory: Circular Distributed Production System for Microbial Nanocellulose

Lorena Trebbi

190

From Sea to Fashion. Seaweeds as Material for a Sustainable Transition

Paolo Franzo, Clizia Moradei

198

The Sound of Sustainability. Biomaterials and New Sensory Frontiers

Giovanni Inglese, Sabrina Lucibello, Carmen Rotondi

208

Unpacking Ceramic History in Asia and Europe: Contribution to New Reusable Packaging Design

Raquel Gomes, Cláudia Albino

Track 2

Intersectional Design for an Accessible and Empowering World

220

Intersectional Design for an Accessible and Empowering World: Views from the 8th Forum of Design as a Process

Valentina Gianfrate, Lígia Lopes, Margherita Ascari, Simona Colitti

226

Viva! Colinas. Service Design for Tourism and Reconciliation in Communities of Former Colombian Guerrilla

Beatriz Bonilla Berrocal

238

The Digital Archive as an Inclusive Tool for Knowledge Construction Through Design Practices

Alessandra Bosco, Fiorella Bulegato, Silvia Gasparotto

248

Intercultural Design Approach. Narrative Design for a Multicultural Society

Irene Caputo, Marco Bozzola, Claudia De Giorgi

258

**From Wayfinding to Placefinding.
Orientation and Alterity in Urban Spaces**
Daniela D'Avanzo, Salvatore Zingale

268

**A Meta-Analysis for an Interactive,
Intersectional and Inclusive
Exhibition Based on the SDGs**
Sergio Degiacomi, Francesca Zoccarato,
Simone De Pascalis, Pietro Crovari,
Fabio Catania

278

**From Empathy to Inclusive Design:
Multisensory Solutions for (Not Only)
Socially Sustainable Projects**
Federica Delprino

288

**Etnography in Sever Do Vouga:
Reality<>Change First Step to Engage
a Creative and Rural Community**
Pedro Fragoso Lopes, Gonalo Gomes

298

**The Implementation of U.D. in a Metal
Processing Plant of the Metropolitan
Zone of Guadalajara (MZG)**
Luis Erik Hernandez Sanchez, Enrique
Herrera Lugo, Jaime Francisco Gomez
Gomez, Francisco Javier Gonzalez Madariaga

312

**Towards Better Public Sector Innovation.
Co-designing Solutions to Improve
Inclusion and Integration**
Ilaria Mariani, Francesca Rizzo, Grazia
Concilio

322

**Creating Methodological
Design Processes for Empowering
Artisans of Cali, Colombia**
Edgar Andres Martnez Muoz,
Diana Marcela Giraldo Pinedo

332

**Empowering Through Design:
Regional Development Strategy
of Los Lagos as an Intersectional Case**
Daniel Moreno, Katherine Mollenhauer,
Arturo Orellana

344

**Inclusive Merchandising.
A Storyteller for an Accessible University**
Monica Oddone, Marco Bozzola,
Claudia De Giorgi

354

**Geopolitics of Fashion. Glocal Power
Evidence and Design Activism for Leading
Disrupting Textile Debris in Chile**
Barbara Pino Ahumada

366

**Intersectional Design in Practice: A Critical
Perspective on Sustainability for All**
Alessandro Pollini, Pilar Orero,
Alessandro Caforio

374

**Empower to Care or Care to Empower?
The Theory Behind the Practice
That Transforms**
Marcia Santos da Silva, Gustavo Severo de
Borba

384

**Perspectives of Sound: Promoting
Social Inclusion Under the Principle
of "Access for All" in Museums**
Yi Zhang, Raffaella Trocchianesi

Design and Responsive Technologies for Human Wellbeing

396

Design and Responsive Technologies for Human Wellbeing

Mirko Daneluzzo, Michele Zannoni, Giorgio Dall'Osso, Silvia Gasparotto

406

Counterpoint. Are We Sure That All These Data Are Good for Us?

Antonella Valeria Penati, Carlo Emilio Standoli

418

Sustainable Data-Driven Strategies and Active Well-Being: A Case Study

Giuseppe Mincoletti, Gian Andrea Giacobone, Michele Marchi

426

Are You Me? Re-Embodiment Process for Telepresence Robots

Lorenza Abbate, Claudio Germak

440

From Applications to Implications: Design as a Process for Humanising Future Robotics

Christiam Mendoza, Roberto Íñiguez Flores, Ruth León Morán

450

Data Driven Design: From Environment to the Human Body

Elena Cavallin

458

IF THIS THAN THAT Broken Linear Logic. Rethinking and Representing the Design Process

Margherita Ascari, Andrea Cattabriga, Simona Colitti, Ami Liçaj

468

Responsible Tech Innovation Through Design: A Participative, **Reflective, and Systemic Approach**

Jane Vita, Tiina Mäkelä, Teemu Leinonen

478

(Re)Active Materials. Well-Being's Concept Evolution and Advanced Material Innovations

Noemi Emidi

490

Mixed Reality as Activator of Collaborative Processes for Transcultural Future

Alessandra Miano

500

Exhibitions as Hybrid Environments. Exploring Situated & Embodied Interaction in Cultural Heritage

Letizia Bollini, Marco Borsotti

512

Ethnographic Study: Finger Food Systems, Contribution to a Project Program in Food Design

Lígia Afreixo, Francisco Providência

522

PASSO Project: Design of a Smart System Using Biofeedback to Train People with Parkinson's Disease

Silvia Imbesi, Giuseppe Mincoletti

532

Pathos: A digital service to improve women's hospital experience

Elisa L'Angiocola, Angela Giambattista

544

Brain Training, Mindfulness, and Wearables: Empowering Employee Wellbeing Through Neurotechnologies

Francesca Bonetti, Giorgio Casoni

554

The Augmented Body: Technological Contamination in the Fashion-Tech Paradigm

Elisabetta Cianfanelli, Margherita Tufarelli, Elena Pucci

564

Health Communication as Apo-Mediation. The Impact of Communication Design on Health Prevention and Perception

Daniela Anna Calabi, Alice Maturo

Design Values Out of the Mainstream: New Geographies of Influence

578

**Design Values Out of the Mainstream:
New Geographies of Influence**

Qassim Saad, Andreas Sicklinger,
Lorela Mehmeti

588

**An Analytical study to develop
the traditional craft in the field
of creative industries in Egypt**

Hoda Aman

600

**Enhancing social well-being through
social innovation approach and design
expertise: a case study for social
innovation in a local district in Turkey**

Yagmur Gizem Avci, Ece Cinar, Cigdem Kaya

610

**Cultural Factories: Conversion of Industrial
Areas into Cultural Hubs**

Eva Vanessa Bruno, Beatrice Lerma,
Doriana Dal Palù, Claudia De Giorgi

620

**Bahrain Knowledge Bay. Using Design
Thinking to Establish an Infrastructure
Towards Knowledge Economy**

Halim Choueiry

630

**Culture and creativity as assets
for inclusive growth in small
and remote places: a design-led process**

Annalinda De Rosa, Davide Fassi

640

**Culture-based Innovation:
A Localized Approach for Designing**

Alaa El Anssary, Ahmed Wahby

650

**Burning approaches to tensing
the present: a new political
dimension of design**

Fabiana Marotta

658

**Design Resistance. Material
Solutions for local remoteness**

Martina Taranto, Barbara Pollini,
Valentina Rognoli

668

**How Should Technology Follower
Companies of Developing Countries
Innovate Through Design Capability?**

Bilgen Tuncer Manzakoğlu

680

**Subjectivation and cities: relationships
between local independent fashion
and Possible Future Scenarios**

Paula Visoná, Mágda Rodrigues da Cunha,
César Kielling

New Education Pathways for Future Designers in a Changing World

696

New Education Pathways for Future Designers in a Changing World

Valentina De Matteo, Elena Formia,
Roberto Iñiguez Flores, Laura Succini

706

Decolonizing the Design Process: A Case Study in Authorship, Power, and Control

Scot Geib

714

OpenMind Handbook. A System of Design Tools and Processes to Empower Democracy Culture in Primary Schools

Valentina Facchetti, Laura Galluzzo,
Ambra Borin

724

Architecture, Design and Community in Colombia. More Urban, More Rural, More Social: The Workshop Experience

Sasha Londoño-Venegas,
Adriana Jaramillo Botero

736

Creative Community for Generation Z Teachers in Brazil Through Strategic Design

Lara Maria Luft, Debora Barauna,
Gustavo Severo de Borba

746

Design Thinking and Career Development: A Comparative Study

Clio Dosi, Eric Guerci, Jacek Jakieła,
Joanna Świętoniowska, Eleni Vordou,
Maria José Varadinov, Matteo Vignoli,
Gastão de Jesus Marques, Joanna Wójcik

760

Design Processes: From the Historical Perspective to the Application in Startups Companies

Isabela Moroni, Amilton Arruda

772

Design and Innovation: Where Do We Want to Play? Inquiry Into Some Design's Strengths and Weaknesses in Innovation

Marco Limani

782

Design Ecosystem in Portugal. Education, Research and Entrepreneurship

Marlene Ribeiro, Francisco Providência

790

The Design Posture: A Collaborative Learning-By-Doing Approach

Rita Duina, Marco Berni, Andrea Del Bono

798

Advanced Manufacturing for Sustainable Fashion. Developing Interdisciplinary Educational Experiences

Daria Casciani

810

Co-designing Contents With Situated Stakeholders: An In-Field Process in Nolo (Milan)

Davide Fassi, Francesco Vergani

820

Creativity and Mirror Effect: Teaching Creative Skills Through Non-traditional Pedagogies

Alejandra Amenábar Alamos

830

How Design Thinking Could Benefit Future Educational Environments in a Post-Pandemic Era?

Yuqing Zhu, Yunyu Ouyang

840

How a Technology Identity Can Enhance the Diffusion of Good Design Practices in Product Sound Design

Daphne Degiorgis, Marco D'Addario,
Beatrice Lerma, Doriana Dal Palù

852

Learning and Teaching From and by Social Media. Instagram to Support Blended Learning Models

Vittorio Linfante, Andrea Manciaracina

864

Education & Practice in Open Design. Improving the Learning Experience Through Knowledge Connections

Fabrizio Valpreda

876

**You Can Never Solve Problems With
the Same Mindset That Created Them.
How Can We Change the How and the
What We Teach to Enable Our Students
to Become Truly “Terrestrial” Designers?
A Proposition Following Bruno Latour's
“Terrestrial Manifesto”**

Angela Grosso Ciponte, Evelyne Roth

884

**Good for Good. Designing
Packaging in the Era of Deliveries**

Loredana Di Lucchio, Ivo Caruso

896

**Onboarding Future Systemic
Innovation Designers Through
Informal and Collaborative Activities**

Leonardo Moiso, Sofia Cretaio,
Cristina Marino, Chiara L. Remondino,
Paolo Tamborrini

908

**Material Practices in Transition:
From Analogue to Digital in Teaching
Textile and Fashion Design**

Delia Dumitrescu, Martina Motta

918

**Designing for the Future of
Education Through Cultural Heritage**

Nour Zreika, Daniele Fanzini

928

**We Need to Talk About Learning Design.
A Proposal for Critical Conversation**

Suzanne E. Martin

938

**Collaborative Learning of Ph.D.
Candidates in Design on Emerging
Scenarios in Scientific Publication**

Eleonora Lupo, Sara Radice

948

**Scenarios, Networks and Systems:
An Alternative to Dichotomous Patterns**

Liana Chiapinotto, Fernando Guimarães
Horlle, Tássia Ruiz, Celso Carnos Scaletsky

The Latin Network for the Development of Design Processes

The Latin Network for the Development of Design Processes is a group of researchers, academics, students and business professionals of Latin languages and cultures who study and operate in a particular field of design known as design processes. They meet in a Forum, conceived as an international specialised conference, to engage in lively discussions and debates about their studies and experiences.

The Network was founded in 2008 with the “Carta di Torino” manifesto. Since its very beginning, Professor Ph.D. Flaviano Celaschi has been leading a team that, over the years, guaranteed the cultural and scientific focus of the members of the Network, fostering inter-institutional cooperation. Since 2015, the Network has been hosted by the Alma Mater Studiorum – Università di Bologna, within the Advanced Design Unit (ADU) of the Department of Architecture, coordinated by Professor Ph.D. Elena Formia.



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June 23, 2020

Disrupting Geographies in the Design World

8th Edition

Alma Mater Studiorum — Università di Bologna, Bologna, Italy

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The Advanced Design Unit is a community of professors, researchers and experts who deal with design cultures and their continuous innovation. It operates in the University of Bologna through teaching activities, research, and the third mission.

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8th International Forum of Design as a Process

Disrupting Geographies in the Design World

Alma Mater Studiorum — Università di Bologna

Bologna, June 20-22, 2022



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(Re)Active Materials. Well-Being's Concept Evolution and Advanced Material Innovations

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Abstract

The article aims to read the transition of material design approaches identifying an evolutive models with major principles and contribution into the health improvement through material innovations. The analysis follows a bottom-up approach, using a case-based reasoning methodology to study well-being concept evolution and identify new material experimentations frontiers within three approaches: *Imitative*, *Augmentative*, and *Mutational*. The contribution of the article reflects and suggests the introduction of new material design approaches to manage the design of advanced materials' behaviours in their future development, highlighting their potential impact on user satisfaction and acceptance, collective welfare improvement, performance optimization, and environmental concerns.

Keywords

Advanced materials

Performative materials

Hybrid processes

Interdisciplinary research

Material design

Introduction

“Understanding the interaction between the individual and the systems / objects that surround him [...] is fundamental to carry out projects “on a human scale” (Sicklinger, 2010, p. 223).

In the last 50 years, technological progress and the change in economic conditions have fueled a (un)balanced global prosperity. In today's society, there is a growing need to overcome established standards and models that are no longer working (United Nations, 2015), imagining new ways of prospering without compromising future developments (WCED, 1987). The future must be interactive and smart (Ferrara et al., 2018), and advanced materials are crucial in enhancing human conditions. Through an interdisciplinary approach, innovative technology can be integrated into advanced materials fostering a more sustainable and symbiotic relationship between the environment and matter for the well-being of individuals and communities (Tosi & Rinaldi, 2015). This analysis aims to read the transition of material design approaches, identifying evolutive models with major principles and contributions to health improvement through material innovations. The contribution reflects on and suggests new material design approaches to managing the design of advanced materials' behaviours in their future development. The article discusses three approaches (*imitation*, *augmentation*, and *mutation*) by providing case examples.

Behavioural materials

Technological progress has offered to innovate materials and conceive tools to address human needs for progress (Ashby & Johnson, 2010), improving the performance and quantity of newly available substances over time. These rapid advancements enable flexible and intelligent materials – with programmable properties (Oxman, 2010a; 2010b; Gilbert & Ellis, 2019) – to achieve versatile abilities and organic growth, too (Langella & Santulli, 2017). The increase in the significance of innovation studies in various fields contributes to designing upgradable and performative materials' behaviours, overcoming human limits and narrowing the relationship between individuals' and artefacts' surfaces. The alteration of materials has led to evolution from a general characterization of mechanical, physical, thermal, electrical, and chemical performances (Cornish, 1992; Ashby & Johnson, 2010) to wholly controlled and more sensitive properties (Ferrara, 2016; De Giorgi et al., 2020; Lerma et al., 2022). Following this progress, increasingly eco-efficient strategies inspired by natural resilience are spreading and exploring transversal properties and realms linked to the *Material Experience* (Karana et al., 2015). Biological resilience and natural efficiency have once again become good quality indicators (McDonough & Braungart, 2002; Franklin & Till, 2018), stimulating designers and manufacturers to refer to this pool of resources to develop consistent alternative solutions.

In ancient society, well-being was often equated with wealth, power, and material possessions representing unsustainable patterns. Over time, the concept of wellness has evolved (Vezzoli & Manzini, 2007), and a holistic perspective has been advocated in contrast with past values and assumptions (Ceschin & Gaziulusoy, 2016). The human factors, as a part of a complex ecosystem, have become the focus of current design practices (Germak, 2008), with a growing emphasis on mental health, emotional well-being and evolution of wellness in equilibrium with contexts, ethics, and cultural aspects (Tamborini, 2009). Despite scientific and technological ameliorations, new development is still necessary to meet evolving needs (Tamborini, 2009), given the rapid expansion of the population. Multidisciplinary collaborations and systemic approaches are achieving centrality in pursuing sustainable strategies of development to address societal challenges (Ceschin & Gaziulusoy, 2016). In that sense, the article highlights the crucial role of design in promoting interdisciplinary exchange between technical-scientific and social-humanistic disciplines to re-design sensitive, augmented, and experimental solutions towards new human experiences of the world.

However, the design of a balanced relationship between individuals' needs and external ecosystems remains a significant challenge for design practitioners in fostering a shared ethic of care for all beings (Tosi & Rinaldi, 2015) and all the systems involved. Some interesting case studies differing in terms of goal and time can be read crosswise to intercept connections from a design point of view to understand how the well-being concept has evolved around specific methodologies.

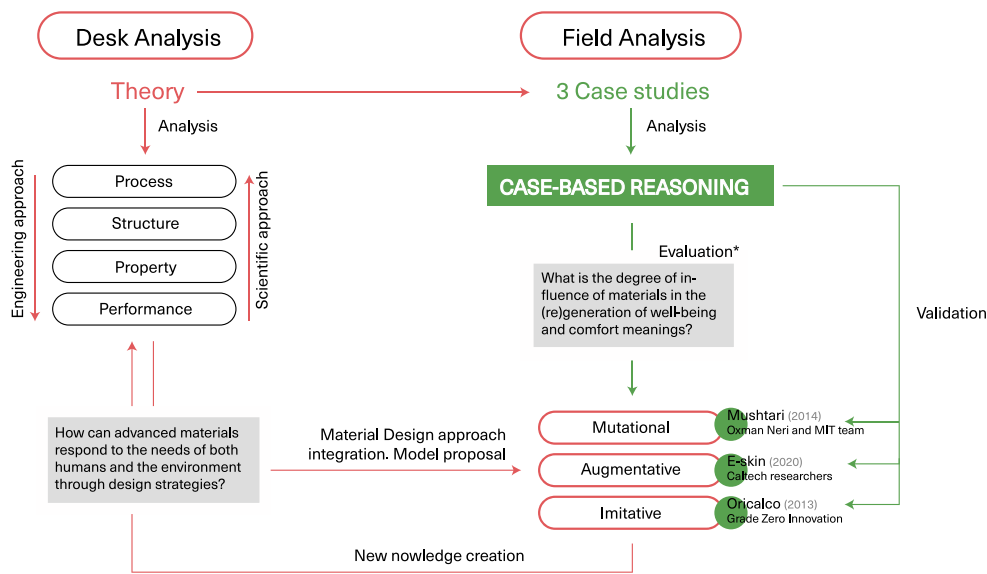
The article intends to answer these questions: How can advanced materials respond to the needs of both humans and the environment through design strategies? What is the degree of influence of materials in the (re)generation of well-being and comfort meanings? The influence of materials on the human experience below three approaches interpreted from the literature analysis: *Imitation*, *Augmented*, and *Mutational*, have been discussed and analyzed in the following sections.

Materials and method

According to the literature, the article proposes an ongoing development study focusing on material design approaches that can be integrated into the engineering and scientific ones (Olson, 1997) towards a shift of focus on a more symbiotic relationship between humans and matter. The analysis follows a bottom-up approach using case-based reasoning methodology (Zambelli, 2022) to study the well-being evolution explained through three material innovation examples Fig. 1. The article introduces three hypothetical approaches interpreted by authors both from the literature review analysis and case study observation, which symbolize the degree of material influence on human perceptive experiences. The goal is to read an evolutive transition in material design approaches for the health improvement towards new strategic ways to manage the design of advanced mate-

rials' behaviours. The first section focuses on imitative practices that draw inspiration from natural models and biological mechanisms to design efficient artefacts – known as mimicry design (Benyus, 1997; Langella, 2019). The second concerns augmented systems utilizing advanced technologies to expand human sensory limits and provide more sensitive solutions integrating intangible features (Ferrara et al., 2018). The last section advocates for a shift in design priorities through foresight advances in materials hybridization, as the pioneer Oxman (2013) pointed out, by exploring speculative scenarios with high technological development where the integration of living and evolving materials can optimize human bodies.

Cases' strategies have been explicated to highlight principles and effectiveness in the problem-solving approaches proposed. Finally, the methods have been summarized to open a discussion and promote further research areas of inquiry.



* Through case studies the new approaches proposed have been explored, expliciting their contribution in the well-being improvement

Imitative approach

The assumption of natural models for design inspiration has ancient origins. It focuses on the biological problems related to the life of natural organisms (Langella & Santulli, 2017), whose evolution offers correspondences and analogies with modern industrial processes. Nature offers an inexhaustible source of design inspiration, providing models of efficient biological mechanisms that can be reproduced in artefacts through *imitative* approaches (Salvia et al., 2009; Bengisu & Ferrara, 2014; Franklin & Till, 2018). Technological and scientific advancements have led to hybrid materials with complex structures, properties, and behaviours that can be programmed on microscopic and nanometric levels to respond to specific problems and design needs (Langella, 2007). *Oricalco* by Grade Zero Innovation (Grado

Fig. 1
The cycle of the research analysis. Credits: Author.

Zero Innovation, n.d.; Langella, 2019), a thermosensitive smart shirt, is an example of a self-adaptive garment inspired by biological adaptation mechanisms to extreme climatic conditions. Thanks to the super-elasticity of shape memory metal alloy, the controlled alteration of materials' shape (sleeves) to external variations (temperature) improves the efficiency of ordinary artefacts, making them capable of exchanging forms of energy with the external environment (Salvia et al., 2009) and provoking active performances. Material advances through *imitative* strategies have led to the following:

- Draw from ecosystems' functional, engineering, chemical and electrical solutions (Langella, 2019).
- Actively modelling hybrid matter
- More effective properties and behaviours.
- Microscopic and nanometric manipulation towards wider needs (Langella, 2007).

Augmentative approach

In addition to the manipulation of the material – as seen previously with the *Oricalco* project – advanced technologies allow expanding the human sensorial limits, providing designers with more sensitive solutions and tools (Lerma et al., 2022) and performing multiple activities – monitoring, communicating, stimulating, and so on (Tosi & Rinaldi, 2015). Thanks to miniaturization, augmented materials are slightly introducing multi-sensorial characterization in artefacts which can meaningfully affect the emotions and interactions of individuals. The California Institute of Technology (Caltech) and the Graduate School of Engineering in Japan are international research centres experimenting with *E-skins* devices with flexible electronic biosensors. Their researches reveal the exciting development of artefacts with capabilities of self-regenerate and self-feed¹ (Yu et al., 2020). From robotics to the health care of physical disabilities – assisting in simple contact without the request of specialized experts – intelligent materials may supplement human capacities. However, challenges remain in terms of power, for example, fueling directly by human bodies interference, without comfort loss, and using sustainable resources due to unrenovable, rare and critical materials involved (Zou, 2018). The major contributes of this approach to well-being improvement are:

- The possibility to collect and analyze personal health conditions remotely.
- Collection of data for customized, effective intervention
- Accuracy prediction mechanism for diseases' detection and treatments (Tosi & Rinaldi, 2015).

1

The cathode of the E-skin's biofuel cell is composed of a network of carbon nanotubes coated with nanoparticles containing platinum and cobalt. The anode is a nanocomposite material containing an enzyme capable of breaking down the lactic acid of sweat, which is processed to power the system.

The last section focuses on “next” materials in which genetic mutation responds to human needs in speculative scenarios with high technological development (Ferrara, 2004). It is referred to ageing and living materials which can offer solutions that intersect and shape an indefinite and fluid future (Oxman, 2010a). Such performative materials can be integrated into the human body, like living extensions, changing its physical and chemical processes according to the new scenarios. The Material Ecology theory and the *Wanderers project* by Neri Oxman (2014) triggered designers to become alchemists and experiment with alive materials through the cross-fertilization between built, grown, and augmented matter (Oxman, 2013). The wearable device project represents an artificial exoskeleton generative designed to perform an artificial anisotropy (Oxman, 2010b), and it is filled with living and evolving matter – bacteria selected to perform functions like absorbing nutrients, digesting biomass and generating energy. Concerning synthetic solutions based on natural processes and biological systems, new research frontiers overcome “terrestrial” barriers and try to break down traditional canons of design practices towards:

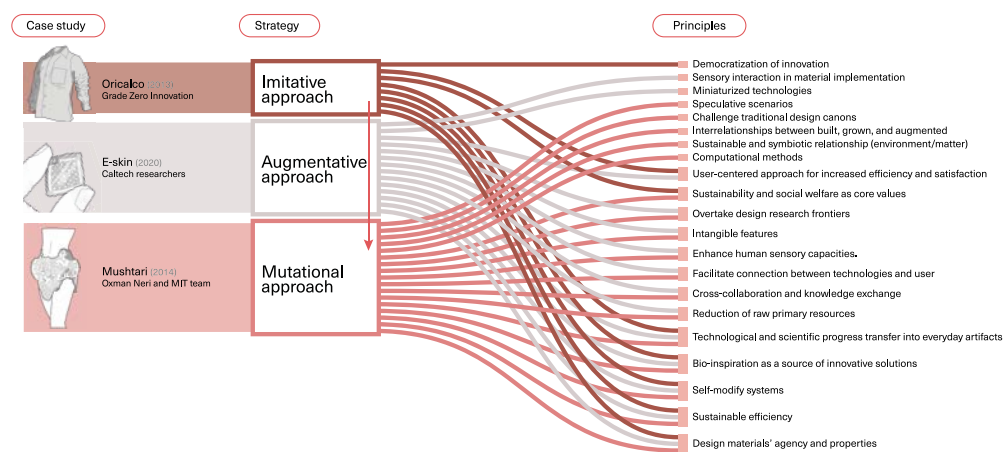
- Define future matter identity (Oxman, 2013)
- The study of material's performative capacity to optimize human bodies
- The analysis of reciprocal mutations between synthetic biological systems and individuals.
- Advancing in mutation metrics and control.

Results

The assumption of *Imitative, Augmentative and Mutational* approaches aims to encourage design practitioners to (re)consider fundamental archetype models (Ferrara, 2016; Franklin & Till, 2018) related to the capacity of biological entities to evolve and adapt in different contexts based on open systems² procedures (Mancini, 2018). Integrating new approaches in material design practices involves primarily drawing inspiration from nature at different levels of technologization to convey material innovations towards social welfare needs no less than environmental requirements. As virtuality and physicality slightly left products, designers focus on the cultural significance and sensorial aspects to create more adaptive and responsive environments (Ferrara, 2016).

Concerning the models proposed, Fig. 2 shows set of principles assumed by case studies processes analysis. Case study principles have been developed from the comparison between other cases' theory and goals to support provocative interpretations (Cunningham, 1997). The variables highlighted in the figure depict the efficiency, technological advancement, interdisciplinary design approaches, and sustainability, as prioritized principles among others due to their multiple connection with all the strategies involved. In particular, a relevant insight come from bio-inspiration and user-centred methods, such as core values in driving technological and scientific progress that transfers into everyday artefacts,

implementing new intangible features thanks to sensory interaction and self-modify systems. Moreover, experimental projects like Wanderers make it possible to visualize alternative preferred scenarios, offering concrete directions and strategies to work on. In that sense, the design mediation between advanced technologies, speculative projects and users is essential to facilitate the democratization and dissemination of innovative research discoveries, supporting the scale-up of ideas from laboratory experimentation to mature and appreciated forms. By facilitating the connection between technologies and users, designers can create systems that enhance human sensory capacities and promote broader social welfare in terms of space and time. The principles identified through case studies seek to overtake design research frontiers and challenge its traditional canons, stimulating designers to shape the agency and properties of materials in unprecedented ways. However, due to the growing complexity of cross-contamination and merging realms, interdisciplinary collaboration is essential to manage appropriately and shape materials' behaviours, achieving sustainable efficiency.



Conclusion

The analysis identifies innovative nature-based material design approaches to optimize the performance of artefacts towards future scenarios and needs. The combination of nature's wisdom and efficiency allows designers to read in the complexity a generative opportunity for a redefinition of the concept of well-being and creating emotional and (intrinsically) more sustainable experiences. The article shows how advanced materials have expanded the boundaries of design towards the hybridization of entities, fields, and systems, allowing them to react to changes and respond to human and environmental needs with higher sensitivity. As highlighted, design practices are crucial in developing open systems of experiences, supporting collective welfare, optimizing the artefacts' performance, extending the sensory limits of the human body, and addressing new environmental concerns. The evolving models of material design, including *Imitative*, *Augmentative*, and *Mutational* approaches, have

Fig. 2
The case-based reasoning analysis and the principles extrapolated. Credits: Author.

shown significant contributions in addressing societal challenges. Due to the assumption of new approaches, further studies may focus on the following:

- Promoting a symbiotic relationship between humans and the environment
- Identifying new needs and challenges
- Exploring these material design approaches and their potential to address societal challenges and advance well-being.

According to Oxman (2013), the rise of new materiality can establish symbiotic extra-deep interconnection between humans' and artefacts' skins, emphasizing values not directly tangible with senses and influencing – or changing – the way of conceiving the world. Advanced, synthetic, and organic hybrid resources profoundly affect well-being meanings establishing new forms of comfort, caring and adaptation. New forms of material behaviours (Cardillo & Ferrara, 2008), increasingly performative, living and ageing – as they have their own agency and emotional experiences – led to generate more sensitive artificial entities with effective reactions. However, restoring the ethical responsibility that will play a crucial role in designing intangible attributes embedded into them (influencing feelings and emotions) and in planning new sustainable conditions suitable for the life of both natural and artificial systems is fundamental.

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NEW MATERIAL DESIGN APPROACHES FOR THE WELL-BEING IMPROVEMENT

Strategic objective

Assuming natural models to improve the efficiency of artefacts provoking active performances.

Expanding the human sensorial limits, providing designers with more sensitive solutions and tools and performing multiple activities

Materials with genetic mutation integrated into the human body like living extensions, changing its physical and chemical processes

Perspective

Draw from ecosystems functional, engineering, and even chemical and electrical solutions

Develop intelligent materials to supplement human capacities

Analyze reciprocal mutations between synthetic biological systems and individuals

Key activities

- Mimicry research
- Product design

- Remotely analysis
- Product design
- Health treatments

- Speculative research
- Symbiotic systems design

Main challenge

Microscopic and nanometric manipulation towards wider needs

Collect data to foresee and predict diseases' detection and treatments

Advancing in mutation metrics and control to optimize human bodies

Imitative approach

Augmentative approach

Mutational approach

SUITABLE AND SUSTAINABLE CONDITIONS FOR THE LIFE OF BOTH NATURAL AND ARTIFICIAL SYSTEMS

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Fig. 3

New approaches for well-being improvement and evolution of Material Design practices. Credits: Author.

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