

From the Spoon to the City



This lecture focuses on Italian design since 1945 in order to emphasise the designer's capability to deal with different scales of intervention.

Italian architect Ernesto Nathan Rogers famously declared that he wanted to design everything from "a spoon to a city", articulating the desire of many architects to design both buildings and their contents. This practice had already been applied between the end of 19th century with the 'Arts and Craft' and the 'Art Manufacturers' in the UK, later followed by the 'Deutsche Werkbund' and the 'Bauhaus' movement in Germany in the early 20th century. But it was in post-war Italy that industrial design had been fully explored and applied. In the rest of Europe and the United States, there started a reorganisation of the professions based on neo-capitalist concepts that aimed to divide the design realm into different spheres. Peculiar historical and economical conditions were at the base of the differences that Italy had compared to the other countries. We can summarise them highlighting the most important: the high quality manufacturing tradition that had evolved since the Medieval and Renaissance periods; the economic isolation during the fascist era and its consequent shortage of raw materials; the persistence of small, highly-skilled firms with the ability to switch production rapidly and take risks not possible in large multinational corporations. In this reality the architects and designers found an incredibly rich environment to develop their ideas and Milan became the world's Mecca of design.

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