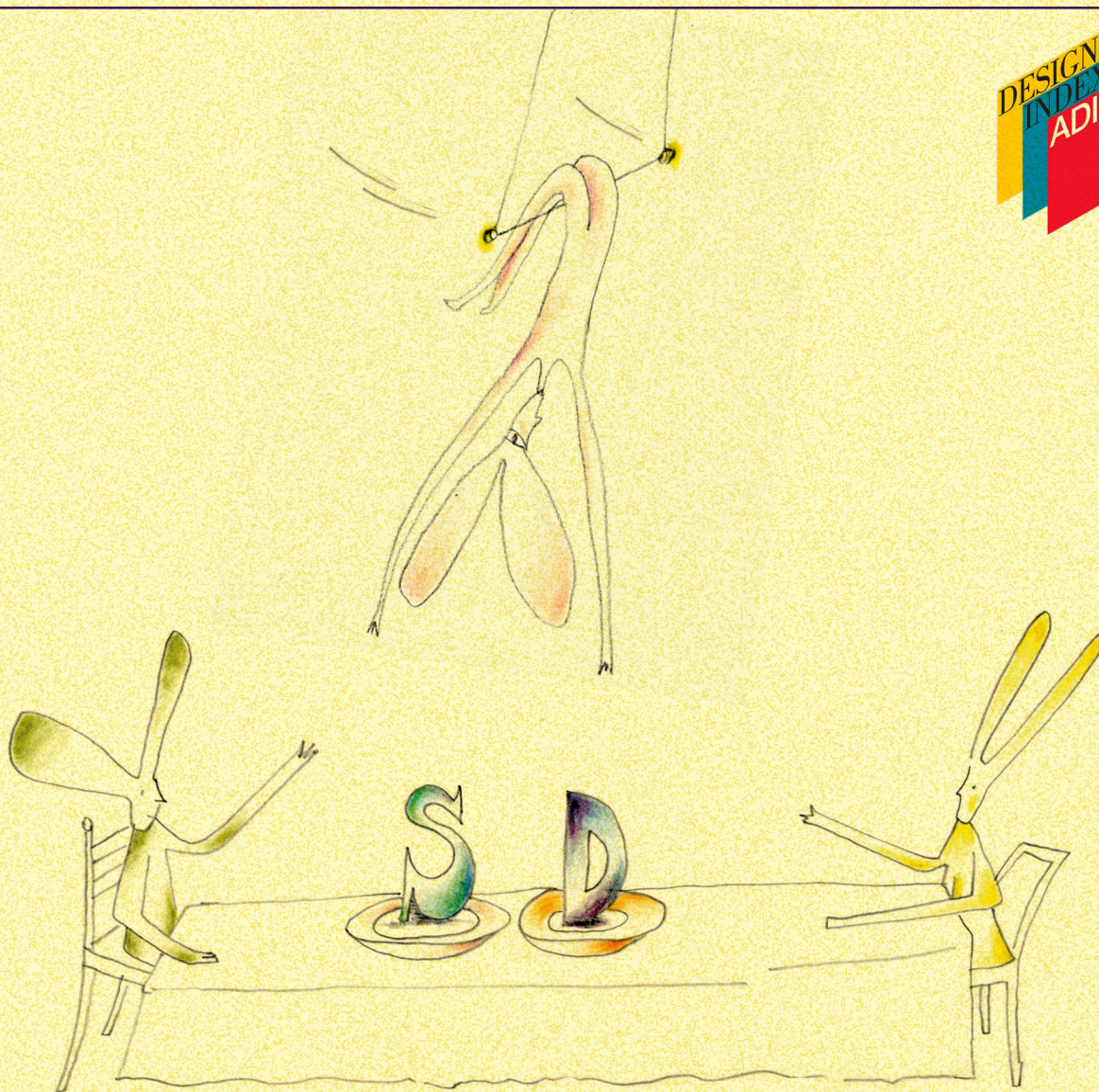


# Ais/Design Journal

## Storia e Ricerche



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<b>EDITORIALE</b>	<b>SOCIAL DESIGN. DESIGN E “BENE COMUNE”</b> Marinella Ferrara, Francesco E. Guida, Mario Piazza & Paola Proverbio	9
<hr/>		
<b>SAGGI</b>	<b>DESIGN PER LA COMUNITÀ: IL CONTRIBUTO DI GIOVANNI KLAUS KOENIG</b> Isabella Patti	19
	<b>PRINCIPLES OF GOOD DESIGN AND SOCIAL DESIGN</b> Alfonso Ruiz Rallo & Noa Real García	31
	<b>LA DIMENSIONE ETICA DEL DIGITAL DESIGN. ACCESSO E ACCESSIBILITÀ, TRA UTOPIA FONDATIVA E CONTEMPORANEITÀ</b> Letizia Bollini	51
	<b>SOCIAL DESIGN ON A SPECTRUM: WITH CASE STUDY OF ANNA BARBARA'S ETHOS OF CARE</b> Susan Yelavich	61
<hr/>		
<b>RICERCHE</b>	<b>GIANCARLO DE CARLO E L'ARCHITETTURA DELLA PARTECIPAZIONE</b> Sara Marini	75
	<b>ENVIRONMENT AND EMANCIPATION THROUGH DESIGN. AVANT-GARDE INTERVENTION AND EXPERIMENTS WITH SOCIAL DESIGN IN DENMARK AROUND 1970</b> Hans-Christian Jensen & Anders V. Munch	88
	<b>DESIGN SOCIALE, MILANO ANNI '70. GIANCARLO POZZI, IL LETTO D'OSPEDALE TR15 E IL SODALIZIO CON ACHILLE CASTIGLIONI ED ERNESTO ZERBI</b> Marinella Ferrara	110
<hr/>		
<b>MICROSTORIE</b>	<b>LA STAGIONE DELLA GRAFICA DI PUBBLICA UTILITÀ: WHAT ELSE?</b> Daniela Piscitelli	138
	<b>RICCARDO DALISI AL RIONE TRAIANO. IL RISCATTO SOCIALE ATTRAVERSO L'ESPERIENZA D'ANIMAZIONE</b> Susanna Parlato & Paola Salvatore	159
	<b>CAMPO URBANO 1969. INTERVENTI ESTETICI NELLA DIMENSIONE COLLETTIVA URBANA</b> Roberto De Paolis	179
	<b>BRUCE ARCHER AND DESIGN AS THE THIRD AREA OF EDUCATION. REFLECTIONS FOR PROJECT-BASED EDUCATION IN BRAZIL</b> João De Souza Leite & Cristina Cavallo	205
	<b>LA DEMOCRATIZZAZIONE DELLA COMPLESSITÀ. LA DIFFUSIONE DEI DATI NEI PROCESSI DI DIVULGAZIONE DELLA CONOSCENZA</b> Roberta Angari	215

---

<b>RILETTURE</b>	<b>“LO SCANDALO DELLA SOCIETÀ”. RILETTURE SU PROGETTO, BISOGNI E AMBIENTE</b>	233
	Raimonda Riccini	
	<b>DESIGN FOR NEED. INTRODUCTION, 1976</b>	237
	Christopher Cornford	
	<b>AHMEDABAD DECLARATION ON INDUSTRIAL DESIGN FOR DEVELOPMENT, 1979</b>	240
	<b>INTERVISTA A MALDONADO, 1986</b>	244
<hr/>		
<b>RECENSIONI</b>	<b>THE SOCIAL DESIGN READER DI ELIZABETH RESNICK</b>	257
	Gianni Sinni	

# OLTRE LA NORMA HANDICAP ED EMARGINAZIONE SUL PICCOLO E GRANDE SCHERMO

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# Riletture

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# Design for Need, 1976

## Introduction

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**CHRISTOPHER CORNFORD**  
Symposium Organiser

*Dall'11 al 14 aprile 1976 presso il Royal College of Art e l'Imperial College of Science and Technology di Londra si svolge il convegno "Design for Need. The Social Contribution of Design" organizzato dall'ICSID (International Council of Societies of Industrial Design) di concerto con altre organizzazioni inglesi e internazionali. L'anno successivo viene pubblicata dalla Pergamon Press una selezione di 24 contributi, dei 52 presentati durante il convegno, curata da Julian Bicknell e Liz McQuiston. Qui a seguire si riporta l'introduzione a cura di Christopher Cornford, organizzatore del convegno.*

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The event of April 1976 at the Royal College of Art should be seen as part of a continuum. None too soon, but possibly just in time, members of the learned and skilled professions are waking up to an understanding of the disaster-course the world is set on by those who at present control it, insofar as anyone can be said to do so.

Scientists and technologists, increasingly since the Pugwash Conference of 1955 and the foundation in Britain in 1969 of the Society for Social Responsibility in Science, have been asking themselves: is it a good use of our knowledge and skills to devise nuclear bombs, defoliants, bacteriological weapons, counter-ecological pesticides, techniques for psychological coercion or genetic control and other such inhumanities?

The design and environmental planning professions, perhaps because their operations, when noxious, are less obviously so than those commissioned from science and technology by military-industrial complexes, have arrived somewhat more recently at the equivalent examination of conscience. Should they deploy their talents on the design, styling or promotion of products that are a superfluous pampering of the already over-provided; that waste non-renewable resources; that destroy amenities; that pollute cities and country-



Cover of the symposium brochure, symbol made by Roy Williams, 1976.

side; that exacerbate acquisitiveness and status-seeking; that alienate man from nature and man from man; that poison, enfeeble or distort our bodies and debase our minds — whilst simultaneously and by default allowing those devices (and advices) to go undesigned, unmade and undistributed that might help ‘the wretched of the earth’ (who far outnumber the even moderately provided) to grapple some way out of their misery?

More and more designers are answering no. As the invitation brochure to Design for Need put it:

There is a worldwide concern that, despite the material benefits arising from advanced technology and industry, there is a deterioration in the quality of life and failure in the provision of many essential needs. This is accompanied by an increasing awareness of a waste of resources and a despoliation of the environment.

And we went on to speak of:

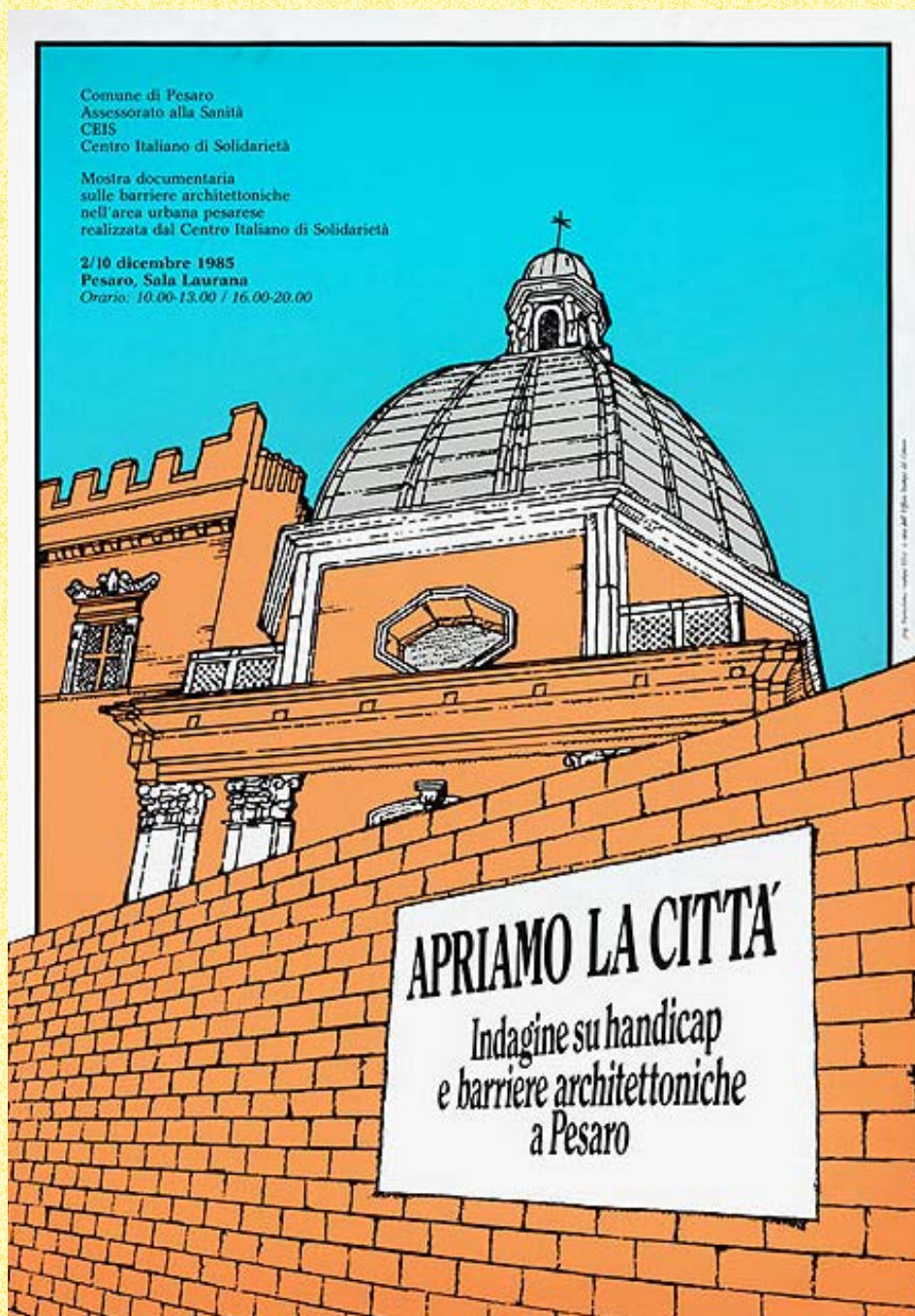
...a return to the earlier ideals of the profession of industrial design which aimed to meet the needs of the modern world by designing in human terms where social purpose combined with aesthetic expression and symbolic value.

All too obviously, given the way the world is heading, what will be needful if these counsels are to prevail, is a vast, long-drawn-out campaign on many simultaneous fronts, of which the Design for Need symposium and exhibition was an engagement on the way. It gathered together men of goodwill amongst designers from all over the world: the warmth of their presence, the fertility of their ideas, the urgency of their vision and enthusiasm.

Obviously, too, the problem is not restricted to ‘design’ in the ordinary usage of that word. It is not only new kinds of things that need to be invented: for if our systems and institutions as found, fail to make the new things or actually prevent them being made and/or distributed to those who need them, why then it is the systems and institutions that call for redesign as much as their characteristic products. In other words, the campaign must be fought in the educational and political spheres concurrently with the technical, as indeed was stressed by many speakers at the symposium.

For one participant at least, the single most heartening feature of those three memorable days was the presence (to say nothing of the quality of his contribution) of an activist from a Trade Union whose members are among the most





Massimo Dolcini, *Apriamo la città*, poster, Comune di Pesaro, 1985 (courtesy of AIAP CDPG).

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