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Designing with Artificial Intelligence: Reflections on Authorship, Intentionality, and Creativity in Contemporary Architectural Education /

Diseño con Inteligencia Artificial: Reflexiones sobre Autoría, Intencionalidad y Creatividad en la Formación Arquitectónica Contemporánea

The integration of artificial intelligence into design processes not only introduces new technical tools but also calls for a critical reassessment of the theoretical foundations upon which the discipline of architectural design has historically been built. This article explores how the concepts of authorship, intentionality, and creativity are redefined within a hybrid design context, where responsibility is shared between human actors and intelligent systems. The investigation focuses on how emerging technologies influence educational processes, reshaping the roles of the instructor, the student, and the design project itself.

The article reflects on a pedagogical model that, by proposing a structural rethinking of architectural education in light of ongoing transformations, considers how training can and must prepare new generations of designers to co-design with machines, without abandoning a critical ethical stance towards architectural practice.

La integración de la inteligencia artificial en los procesos de diseño no solo introduce nuevas herramientas técnicas, sino que también exige una revisión crítica de los fundamentos teóricos sobre los cuales se ha construido históricamente la disciplina del diseño arquitectónico. Este artículo explora cómo los conceptos de autoría, intencionalidad y creatividad se redefinen en un contexto proyectual híbrido, donde la responsabilidad se comparte entre sujetos humanos y sistemas inteligentes. La investigación se detiene en cómo las nuevas tecnologías influyen en los procesos formativos, redefiniendo el papel del docente, del estudiante y del propio proyecto.

El artículo reflexiona sobre un modelo pedagógico que, al proponer un replanteamiento estructural de la enseñanza de la arquitectura a la luz de las transformaciones en curso, analiza cómo la formación puede y debe preparar a las nuevas generaciones de diseñadores para co-diseñar con las máquinas, sin renunciar a una ética crítica del hacer arquitectónico.

Keywords: Hybrid Authorship, AI and Architecture, Design Education, Hybrid Learning Environments.

01. Authorship, Intentionality, Creativity

Humanistic origins of these concepts in design theory

The figure of the architect in Western tradition has historically been constructed as the embodiment of individual, rational, and intentional authorship. Since the Renaissance, the author-designer has been invested with an almost demiurgic aura, capable of translating ideas into form, intellect into matter. Leon Battista Alberti, in his De re aedificatoria, establishes a distinction between design (mental concept) and construction (material realization), attributing superiority to the former. In this paradigm, the author is the one who thinks and leads, embodying pure intentionality, control over the process, and the primacy of idea over technique.

This vision solidifies in the modern era, culminating in the heroic authorship of the twentieth century, from Le Corbusier to Frank Lloyd Wright. Architecture is conceived as the coherent expression of a singular, rational, ordering design intention. Even in architectural criticism and the historiography of the discipline, works are often read as manifestations of a strong authorial identity, a designing subject who gives meaning, form, and direction to the project.

Creativity, in this context, is closely linked to the individuality of genius: the capacity to produce the unprecedented through mastery of the disciplinary language. The creative act is an intentional gesture, inscribed within an ordering and sovereign will.

The crisis of the author's centrality in the post-digital era

With the advent of digital technologies, this monolithic vision of authorship begins to be challenged. Roland Barthes, in his seminal essay The Death of the Author (1967), denounces the illusion of a singular origin of meaning, shifting attention from the author to the reader, understood as a co-producer of meaning. Michel Foucault further deepens the theme, asking what it ultimately means to be an author: the author becomes a function, a cultural device, rather than a transcendent subject.

In architectural design, these reflections resonate in the progressive disintegration of the architect as the sole director of the process. The emergence of digital tools, ranging from CAD to BIM to parametric modeling, not only introduces new operational logics but also deconstructs the intentional linearity of the design gesture. The author becomes part of a broader, distributed system in which decisions often emerge from conditions of interaction, simulation, or iteration.

In this context, creativity is no longer solely an individual prerogative but an emergent quality arising from collaborative networks, computational environments, and nonlinear processes. Design intentionality fragments, losing its unitary coherence, dissolving into a weave of constraints, opportunities, and external suggestions. The project increasingly becomes a field of negotiation rather than pure expression (Roncaglia 2023).

Artificial intelligence as a co-authorial agent

It is within this scenario that artificial intelligence inserts itself as a disruptive element, accelerating, and at times complicating, the transformation of the notion of authorship. We cannot simply define it as a "co-authorial agent," because doing so risks neutralizing the tensions, resistances and uncertainties that emerge in the daily practice of designers (Wainwright 2023).

Anyone who has experimented with platforms like Midjourney knows that the interaction is neither linear nor smooth: it unfolds through cycles of frustration, surprise, adjustment, rejection of generated proposals. AI does not always expand the field of possibilities; sometimes, it narrows it, imposing standardized aesthetic codes derived from the datasets on which it was trained.

In the face of this, the designer must confront not only new opportunities but also new risks: the loss of critical control, formal homogenization, the illusion of an "enhanced" creativity that, in reality, can become dependence on algorithmic outputs.

In this scenario, the architect is no longer a demiurge but a curator of processes: selecting, guiding, interpreting, but not necessarily univocally determining. Creativity is redefined as human-machine interaction, where the machine is not a neutral extension but an agent endowed with generative capacities. Intentionality itself becomes distributed, emerging from collaboration rather than being imposed.

This perspective raises crucial questions: Who is the author of a project partially generated by an AI system? Where does the aesthetic, technical, and ethical responsibility of the design act lie? What are the boundaries of critical judgment in a context where form can be generated by a series of parameters, trainings, and stimuli that the architect no longer fully controls?

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Reflecting on AI as a co-authorial agent thus opens an ontological redefinition of the project: no longer the product of an individual but the result of a network of agents, both human and non-human, collaborating within a hybrid design ecosystem.

The New Role of Images Supporting the Representation of Ideas

Images hold extraordinary power in representing ideas, and when combined with AI's generative prompts, they become tools of communication and creativity capable of supporting an unstoppable re-signification of the world as we have known it until today.

In an ephemeral and digital world where AI-generated images increasingly assume the role not merely of visual representations but of tools for understanding and sometimes transforming reality, the development of generative AI, intended for broad audiences, will increasingly be understood as a means to access a deeper knowledge of the surrounding world, offering us all a tool capable of surpassing the limits of traditional language and logic.

Fields of inquiry already undergoing transformation include:

- Conceptual visualization: a textual prompt can generate images that give shape to abstract ideas, making complex concepts comprehensible.
- Artistic expression and design: AI can transform textual descriptions into visual works, allowing exploration of new styles and forms.
- Architecture and urban planning: AI-generated images help imagine urban spaces and innovative structures based on specific parameters.
- Visual storytelling: AI-created images can support narration, bringing to life evocative worlds, characters, and atmospheres.
- Narrative support: generating images from prompts can assist in story creation, giving shape to worlds and characters.
- Artistic expression: generative models enable the exploration of new visual styles and forms, offering infinite creative possibilities.
- Universal communication: images transcend linguistic and cultural barriers, intuitively conveying emotions and information.
- Intercultural communication: images can convey meanings beyond linguistic barriers, making messages more accessible.

New digital investigation tools based on AI will enable not only the exploration of simple visual representations but will become true cognitive tools of reality, increasingly opening up new possibilities for organizing and transforming thought, connecting abstract ideas to the sensible world, and facilitating the understanding and construction of knowledge.

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Analysis of Generative Tools and Environments

The integration of artificial intelligence (AI) into design processes is profoundly redefining the operational paradigms of architecture. AI-based generative tools do not merely accelerate executive operations but directly intervene in the ideation phase, influencing the production of forms, spaces, concepts, and narratives. In this context, the architect is no longer the sole author of the project but becomes part of a creative ecosystem that includes intelligent machines as co-agents in the process.

Among the most widespread tools, Midjourney represents a paradigmatic example of text-to-image systems (Betsky A. 2022). Based on deep neural networks, Midjourney generates images from complex textual descriptions. Its use in the architectural field is rapidly growing, especially in the phases of concept design and visual storytelling. Architects use these platforms to quickly explore atmospheres, scenarios, and alternative morphologies, laying the groundwork for an imaginative dialogue between text, image, and space.

The designer does not impose a form but defines constraints, objectives, and relationships, allowing the system to explore solutions autonomously or semi-autonomously. The concept of "co-creation" is fully realized in these environments, where design becomes an iterative, interactive, and open process. The interaction between architect and AI is based on continuous feedback logic: the human provides input, the AI generates outcomes, the human selects, corrects, redirects. This cycle produces unexpected, sometimes surprising, results that transcend the limits of individual imagination (Lubrano 2023).

Several didactic experiments were carried out in the academic context of the University of Cagliari involving the use of tools such as Midjourney and ChatGPT in architectural design. Among these, the international online competition Museum of Emotions was particularly significant: in this project, students developed museum concepts starting from textual prompts, combining AI-generated content with more traditional techniques such as sketching and digital modelling.

The outcomes revealed a wide range of approaches: some students retained strong critical control over the generative process, while others relied more passively on the proposals produced by the machines, resulting, in some cases, in formally and conceptually ambiguous outcomes.

This suggests that AI tends to function more as an amplifier of design intentions (or uncertainties) than as a neutral image generator.

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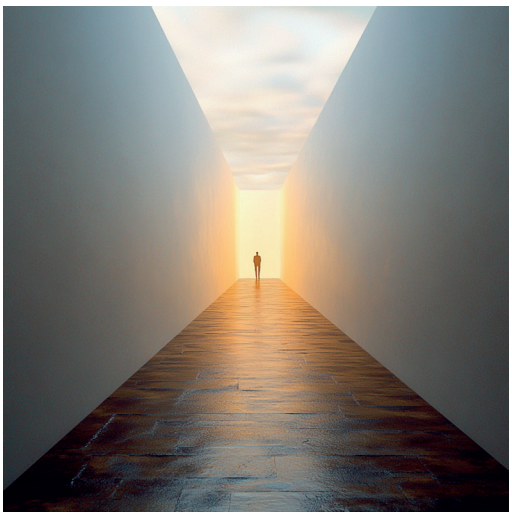
02. Architectural Design Education and Artificial Intelligence

Traditional Educational Models vs. Emerging Approaches



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The teaching of architectural design, historically anchored in an atelier-based model founded on the master-apprentice relationship, is today confronted with a radical shift brought about by the introduction of artificial intelligence into learning and design processes. Traditional educational models, based on the vertical transmission of knowledge and the idea of creativity as an individual expression, reveal signs of inadequacy when faced with a design context that is increasingly hybrid, distributed, and algorithmic.

In classical models, the design process is understood as a linear and intentional sequence, where the author is clearly identifiable, the form is the product of the designer's will and sensitivity, and critical reflection is entrusted to the dialogue between instructor and student. However, the rise of computational design environments and the availability of AI-based generative tools are challenging this structure. Authorship becomes shared, intentionality fragments, and creativity increasingly takes the form of guided exploration rather than ex novo invention.

Emerging approaches are instead founded on collaborative and adaptive logics, where learning is seen as a distributed process in which students, instructors, and machines interact as co-agents within the design process. AI does not replace the designer but becomes an interlocutor, a cognitive amplifier, a stimulus for lateral thinking. In this context, teaching opens up to an experimental dimension, where error is not a failure but a generative resource, and the process matters as much as (if not more than) the outcome.

Similar experiences are also emerging in other European contexts. For instance, ETH Zurich has launched experimental programmes focused on the integration of generative AI in design courses, as has the Bartlett School of Architecture in London, where ongoing research explores new models of co-design between students, educators, and algorithms. These initiatives reflect a rapidly evolving educational landscape, in which AI is increasingly understood not as an end in itself, but as a critical catalyst for pedagogical and epistemological inquiry.

The Role of the Instructor as Curator of Process and Learning

The transformation of the educational context today imposes on the instructor a far more demanding task than the perhaps reassuring role of the mere "curator" of learning environments. In reality, those who teach design increasingly find themselves having to manage a radical imbalance between technological acceleration and the slow pace of critical learning.

Students, fascinated (and at times overwhelmed) by the generative capacities of AI, risk replacing reflection with hyper productive exploration, conscious selection with

serial accumulation. The instructor, more than curating, often needs to slow things down, defuse automatic fascination, and bring the project back to an ethical and political plan: Why are we choosing a certain form? For whom are we designing? What social and environmental effects will our choices produce?

The educational challenge, therefore, is not merely to orchestrate resources but to teach how to question the tools, to pose uncomfortable questions, to practice a form of resistant slowness in a context that pushes toward automatism. The instructor-curator does not teach what to think but rather how to activate processes of thought. In a context where students can generate thousands of design alternatives in minutes thanks to AI, the real challenge becomes helping them to select, interpret, and reflect. This implies a shift from teaching content to constructing pedagogical frameworks capable of stimulating judgment, design ethics, and the capacity to navigate complexity. Moreover, the instructor must take charge of the critical and ethical dimension of integrating AI into the design process. They must raise questions about the meaning of formal choices, the social and environmental implications of automated processes, and the responsibility of the designer in a context where decision-making authority is distributed.

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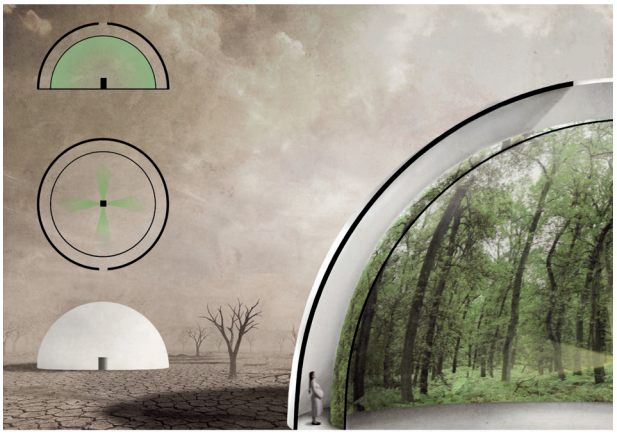

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A Practical Teaching Experience

An emblematic case useful for exploring the educational implications of using artificial intelligence in design education is represented by a university course/workshop held within the master's degree Program in Architecture at the University of Cagliari in 2024-25. The course was structured through a series of theoretical lectures and workshops and focused on experimenting with participation in the international competition "Museum of Emotions" promoted by Buildner. About twenty students participated in the initiative, structured around critical discussions, practical exercises, and a final examination, with six student groups presenting their projects for official competition submission.

The course was coordinated by a professor, an external architect, and two student collaborators, with the aim of reflecting on the use of artificial intelligence within the design process, from the conceptual phase to the production of graphic deliverables. Students were encouraged to freely use tools such as ChatGPT, Midjourney, Kreai, Gemini, Rendair, and others in every phase of the work: ideation, development, representation, and post-production.

We provide a selection of the final images and boards produced by students: the visual material includes, on the one hand, examples of outputs generated through text-to-image tools based on textual prompts (Fig. 1 to 5), and on the other, final design boards that combine algorithmic input and traditional disciplinary knowledge (Fig. 6 to 10). Among these, Fig. 8 was included among the "selected projects" by the competition jury, further demonstrating how AI-based tools can already support the development of valuable and compelling design outcomes.

The experience clearly demonstrated that while AI is not yet mature enough to fully replace traditional design tools, it is extremely effective as an auxiliary support, capable of stimulating creative processes, generating morphological alternatives, and opening new perspectives on the role of representation. The reflections that emerged highlighted the potential of artificial intelligence as a design interlocutor but also its vulnerabilities: the risk of aesthetic standardization, the reduction of critical distance, and the dependence on automated outputs.

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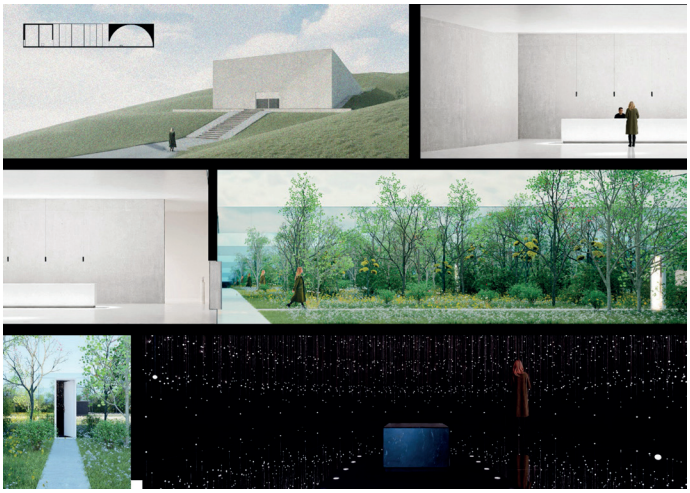

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The course fostered a collaborative learning environment in which students, instructors, and collaborators operated as co-agents within an open, adaptive, and experimental process. The collective discovery of the tools and their operative logic allowed the exploration of AI not merely as a technology but as an opportunity to question the very meaning of architectural design.

Ultimately, the experience suggests that artificial intelligence can be effectively integrated into university-level architectural education, provided that this is done gradually, through flexible, critically oriented teaching models. It is not an immediate revolution but a progressive evolution that must accompany the transformation of design knowledge in a conscious, ethical, and pedagogically structured manner.

Conclusion

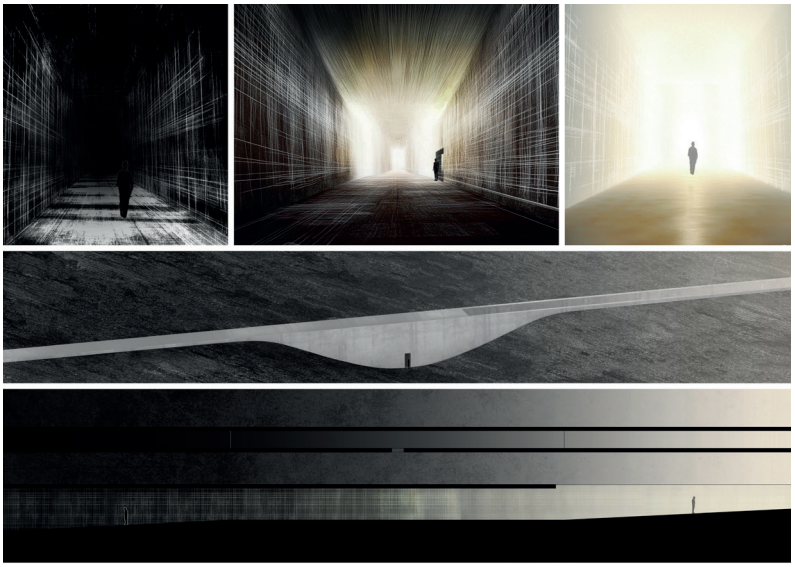
The evolution of architectural design, reinterpreted through the lenses of authorship, intentionality, and creativity, reveals not only the image of a transforming discipline but also that of an unsettled, restless field, exposed to new vulnerabilities. As educators and designers, we often ask ourselves: are we preparing our students to become critical partners of the machines, or are we leaving them alone before an abyss of automatic possibilities, devoid of human grounding?

In this perspective, the transformation of architectural education is not merely a matter of technical updating but of cultural resistance: maintaining space for doubt, for imperfection, for contradiction—elements that no artificial intelligence will ever be able to fully replicate. If architecture schools still hold a central role, it is precisely this: to continue being places where not only skills but also awareness is cultivated.

While the author of the past was the sovereign subject of the design process, today we face more fluid figures, capable of co-creating, interpreting, and negotiating meaning within complex systems. In this light, artificial intelligence does not represent merely a technology, but an epistemological catalyst: it forces design theory to

rethink itself, to question its own foundations and the new forms that architectural practice may take in the post-human era (Battelli et al. 2023).

The transformation of design education induced by artificial intelligence is not solely a technological matter; it is cultural and political. It requires a profound rethinking of pedagogical assumptions, roles, and educational objectives. We must build educational models capable of training critical, flexible, ethically conscious designers: professionals able to co-evolve with machines without renouncing their own humanity. In this challenge, the role of the architecture school is more central than ever: as a laboratory of possible futures, as a space for reflection, and as a place for radical experimentation.



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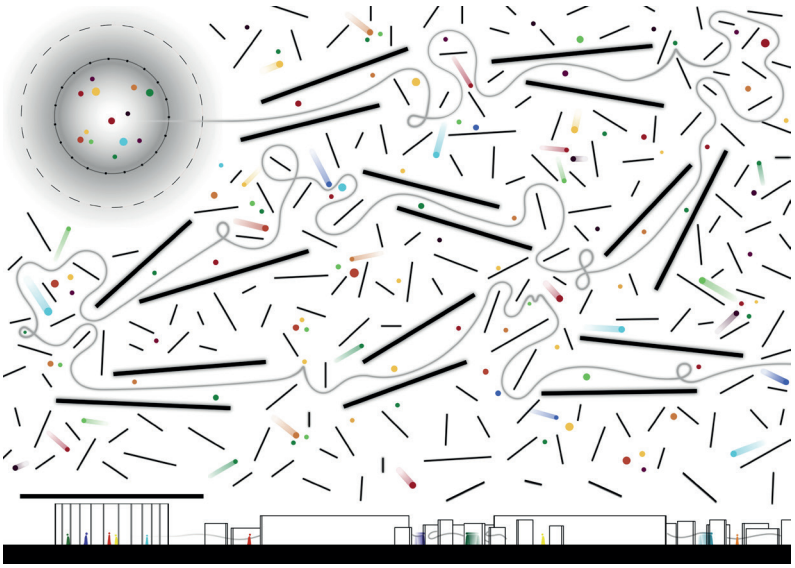

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