

A New Era

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EDITORIAL

It is hard to argue against the fact that we are witnessing the dawn of a new era. Philosopher Massimo Cacciari has aptly observed that “AI is a technological revolution that is incomparably more profound than the industrial revolution of the nineteenth century... What is unfolding before us, is precisely a destiny.”¹ The massive change that AI is bound to bring into our life is simply difficult to fathom. From the sciences, the medical fields, education, work and domestic environments, the arts (obviously, including architecture, design and urbanism), AI will more than expand our technological capabilities: it will change our life-style and impact our ethical world. Concerning predictions and dystopian scenarios have created some anxiety about the negative outcomes resulting from the booming of AI. These concerns should not be disregarded. However, as Roy Bahat, Head of Bloomberg Beta, has noted, “in the industrial revolution everything was not fine...[similarly] we need to take those worries seriously, but get savvy about them, as opposed to reacting from a place of ignorance...”² That is why, for example, Sam Altman, CEO of ChatGPT, in May of 2023, was on a month-long, international goodwill tour to talk to policymakers about the technology. Because the issue requires a global approach, indeed a global governance, as Cacciari pointed out.³ And Bill Gates agrees: “...the world needs to establish the rules of the road so that any downsides of artificial intelligence are far outweighed by its benefits, and so that everyone can enjoy those benefits no matter where they live or how much money they have. The Age of AI is filled with opportunities and responsibilities.”⁴

Therefore, the matter is timely and we need to know more about it, particularly, of course, as it relates to our design fields. That is why we launched a call for submissions for this themed issue:

... “from threat to opportunity” is the thrust of this forthcoming issue of *The Plan Journal*. What are the possibilities that AI can

disclose for architecture? To include more comprehensively clients and communities in the design process? To simulate more effectively alternative scenarios? To help designers in making more informed decisions? To test more accurately building performance and the environmental impact of designs? To advance an architecture based on reasons and a communicative rationality, thus furthering the “Modern Project,” rather than relying on esthetic caprice, creative egos, or subjective taste?

It is also clear, as it emerges from the articles of this themed issue, that current research indicate a hopeful path, which our field needs to intentionally take without wavering and with vision. AI will dramatically expand our design power and the role of architecture into our life. But we, designers/humans, need to remain in control of means and goals of these intelligent “machines.” We are quite often at the borderline between unexplored and unimaginable design solutions and the disturbing banalization of the design process with embarrassing results. Once more, it will depend on designers’ insights. As Phil Bernstein, in the position paper for this themed issue, has observed:

The sources of those insights—whether digitally generated or otherwise—will evolve, but the human ability to create will expand along with, rather than be replaced by, new technologies, including these newly capable AI bots. And much like the tools that came before—be they precision measuring instruments, CAD, or even the internet—they will be absorbed into the discipline and eventually put to their best use. Let us hope today’s designers can guide that trajectory well into the future.⁵

It is no minor task, because the pace of technological advancements is unprecedented. We will need our design intelligence more than ever, if we want to enter this new era not by creating more disparity between those who know and those who do not, rather with the most benefits and advantages for all, as AI has the potential to contribute to the liberation of humanity from unrewarding labor and to the enhancement of human creativity to levels never experienced before.

Notes

1. Massimo Cacciari, “L’intelligenza artificiale è una tecnologia pre-potente,” interview by // *Sole 24 Ore*, November 28, 2023 – <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=5eyr4pFc8F0&t=217s>.
2. Roy Bahat, Head of Bloomberg Beta, “Thinking of Using AI More? Here’s What You Actually Need to Consider,” interview by Simone Ross, TED Tech Curator, November 1, 2023 – <https://www.linkedin.com/video/event/urn:li:ugcPost:7123797331749007361>.
3. Cacciari, “L’intelligenza artificiale.”
4. Bill Gates, “The Age of AI has begun,” *GatesNotes* (blog), March 21, 2023 – <https://www.gatesnotes.com/The-Age-of-AI-Has-Begun>.
5. Phil Bernstein, “AI Time, Timing, and Timelessness,” *The Plan Journal* 8, no. 2 (2023): 207-213.