

A renewed poetic practice. Rethinking the role of packaging design to boost New Normality

*Original*

A renewed poetic practice. Rethinking the role of packaging design to boost New Normality / Remondino, CHIARA LORENZA. - ELETTRONICO. - 1:(2022), pp. 531-535. ((Intervento presentato al convegno Beyond All Limits. International Conference on Sustainability in Architecture, Planning and Design tenutosi a Caserta nel 11,12,13 Maggio 2022.

*Availability:*

This version is available at: 11583/2974879 since: 2023-01-22T10:13:53Z

*Publisher:*

DADI PRESS

*Published*

DOI:

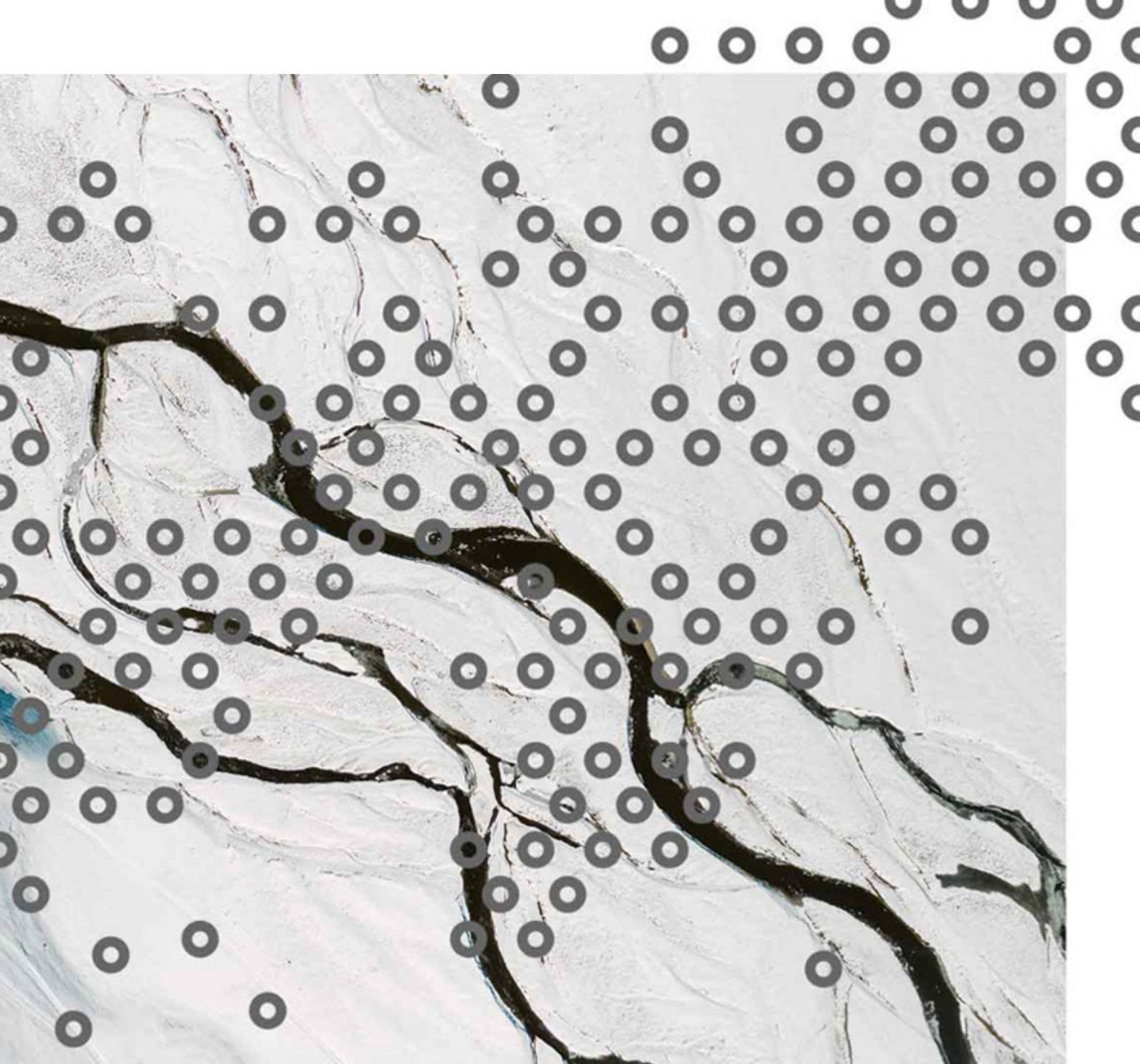
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BEYOND  
ALL LIMITS

INTERNATIONAL CONFERENCE  
ON SUSTAINABILITY IN ARCHITECTURE,  
PLANNING, AND DESIGN  
11-12, 13 May\_2022

*edited by  
Claudio Gambardella*

V: Università  
degli Studi  
della Campania  
*Luigi Vanvitelli*

*Dipartimento di Architettura e  
Disegno Industriale*  
DADI \_ PRESS

Proceedings Book of Extended Abstracts

# BEYOND ALL LIMITS

International Conference  
on Sustainability in Architecture,  
Planning, and Design

edited by Claudio Gambardella

DADI\_PRESS

Università degli Studi della Campania "Luigi Vanvitelli"  
Department of Architecture and Industrial Design (DADI)

11-12, 13 May 2022

Monumental Complex of the Real Belvedere of San Leucio, Caserta – Italy

<https://beyondallimits22.com>



Università  
degli Studi  
della Campania  
*Luigi Vanvitelli*

*Dipartimento di Architettura e  
Disegno Industriale*

**RR**

**Research activity report**

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ISBN 978-88-85556-23-2 (electronic version of the PDF format)

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# A renewed poetic practice. Rethinking the role of packaging design to boost New Normality

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## Abstract

*Packaging is a complex artifact characterized by the subtle balance between safety, protection, innovation, communication, and sustainability. There are different perspectives from which this artifact can and must be considered, first of all, the traditional meaning that considers it an object with specific operational and performance features.*

*From these brief premises, this contribution stems from a reflection of the controversial relationship between form and function, investigating the contemporary need - New Normal - to totally rethink action-research and design practice, in favour of a more communicative, experiential, and poetic design. A design that today must also take advantage of technology and digital resilience to pro-actively respond to the emergency.*

## Keywords

*Packaging, Design, Technology, Poetics, New Normal*

## 1. Introduction and scenario

Whether it is definitively the so-called New Normal, we still cannot know.

The complex contemporary scenario has distinguished a packaging sector particularly prone to growth and innovation; particularly resilient especially given the recent regulatory updates relating to the introduction of specific environmental labels, or given the new environmental investments through so-called corrective taxes. Among the key points of the discussion, then, we must mention a specific attention for the conversion of the economy in a more circular sense - green economy - taken as a supporting objective, to be translated into a skillful mix of provisions regarding the availability of necessary resources and infrastructures, incentives and measures to contribute to the reduction of pollution of the terrestrial and marine environment, and last but not least, all the strategies and action lines on social inclusion and accessibility policies starting from an intersectoral approach.

At the same time, statistical surveys qualify the packaging artifact - from the point of view of the final consumer - one of the discriminating factors when purchasing a product, to the point that approximately 60% of Italians will increase the choice of products with sustainable packaging and 28% believes it is necessary to have devices capable of informing oneself correctly and changing daily consumption habits in a greener perspective. This is because, the post-lockdown consumers are already recalibrating their lifestyle, requiring that most of the services of the pandemic era become - officially and definitively - the new normal (Nomisma 2021).



Fig 1. Black-figured amphorae (The British Museum, 2022)

## 2. Form and function: a controversial relationship

At this point, the question arises spontaneously. The sector in question has shown to own a particularly proactive attitude and thus be able to deal with global restrictions and difficulties that go beyond the design of a simple container. This sector has seen and often has been able to manage the opening to unprecedented opportunities, in the direction of a new literacy that is involving the entire packaging sector as well as the role of the project in the strict sense. But in the new normality, is the concept and the intrinsic meaning of the packaging function (Ciravegna, 2010) - in its most traditional sense - still a value that can distinguish us, as designers? Isn't it outdated, as it is anachronistic, to consider packaging as an operational aid in the first place? Wouldn't it simply be unusual to buy or receive a packaging not able to contain?

The controversial relationship between form and function, between content and container, is very ancient history. There are actually many cases in which the packaging has failed, for one reason or another, to perform its primary functions, namely those of protecting, maintaining, and containing. One among them is the striking case of the Franklin expedition. We are in 1845 when the British officer J. Franklin started the expedition aimed at discovering the controversial north-west passage. Two ships, *Erebus* and *Terror*. Two sturdy, well-equipped, state-of-the-art ships. Inside there was canned food sufficient for years, and for all the crew. The decision to supply the ships from a discounted supplier, however, was fatal. The more than eight thousand packs ordered were sealed with lead solder, solder later defined as "crude and coarse", to the point that some of the lead-contaminated the food, causing illness and death of practically all the crew. Little is known about the two ships, or rather the disappearance of the Franklin expedition. However, much richer is the scenario that has seen – over the centuries - poetic performance as an element, perhaps an anthropological tool, fundamental to living and habit. Think of the vases of ancient Greece: they were designed to narrate the myths of the gods, to bring people together - through the spontaneity of religious sentiment. Only later they were used to safely store the olives [fig. 1]. This contribution - based on concrete practices and best practices - is



Fig 2. Her / She campaign for International Women's Day (BETC Sao Paulo Agency, 2021)

proposed as a reflection and review - in a broad sense - of the Sullivanian legacy, highlighting the contemporary need to rethink the overall practice of the project, in favor of a more - however not exclusively - poetic, experiential and technological design. A conversion in favor and also in support of the emergency.

### 3. A renewed and technological poetic practice

But what does it mean to reconsider the continuous research and above all the design practice towards the exploration of what we can define the new forms of technological poetry?

Thus we come to talk, in the setting of the New European Bauhaus (NEB), of exploration in the field of storytelling and historytelling, research of social impact, qualification of new ways of interaction and augmented reality, of multiverse and creativity. Furthermore, of the birth of e-commerce services increasingly oriented to the final consumer, simple and at the same time experiential (from social commerce to voice shopping, to name a few), of the importance of traceability in terms of accessibility, authenticity, and safety, and the upstream application of the design of the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) (Shopify, 2022). Recalling that what has really changed today is the level of consumer expectations; increasingly critical, demanding and resilient consumers, who will ask for sustainable experiences and artefacts no longer as a passing phenomenon, but as a basic rule. As a convention (Bucchiatti, 2020).

From these opportunities, the packaging sector today finds itself appealing to the intrinsic and characterizing capacity of digital and environmental resilience on the one hand, and of the "new normal customers" on the other, qualifying a systemic approach applied to sustainable innovation which sees the new technological possibilities as a fundamental design input. Hence the importance of a "naturally" qualitative output; an output that finds its answer in the creative capacity as an aid to enable new





**Fig 3.** Sustainable Sports Drinks and packaging with integrated AR experience (Barcode, 2022)

educational practices, tangible and shared. Practices fundamental to inclusion as opposed to exclusion, in favour of uniqueness in response to diversity [fig. 2]. Practices helpful to create a sense of belonging, to create community [fig. 3].

#### 4. Conclusion

In conclusion, taking up what was stated in the book "La costruzione dell'interazione: il ruolo della narrazione nel processo dell'interaction design" (The construction of interaction: the role of narration in the process of interaction design): "The process of construction of the interaction is based on a relationship capable of understanding the needs of the person and the implications of the use of technologies, opens the way to a visible narrative that becomes an integral part not only of the use but of the very relationship that is established with artifacts and services" (Di Salvo, 2020).

In this scenario, design is proposed as a flexible and dynamic tool for interpreting the transformations of today's society and today social challenges: cultural value, a tool for enhancing skills, a mediator of needs, a tool for always tracing new routes in terms of sustainable innovation, inclusion and accessibility. Still, a tool for exploring new contexts and for reading social and cultural changes (Germak, 2008). A design capable of renewing the value of human connections as a primary need for people in the New Normal. As a tool and method to bring the person back to the center of design practice - also - through technology. Still, as a process mediator, able to use technology to democratize the project - the packaging - and to establish value creation processes based on aggregative dynamics (Ranzo & al., 2017).

We thus speak of a renewed centrality of human beings enclosed in the assumptions of digital humanism, as the only and discriminating way to qualify the transdisciplinary approach useful for facing the challenges that this historical moment presents to us. A way to re-embrace a design process in the context of – once again – poetic packaging.



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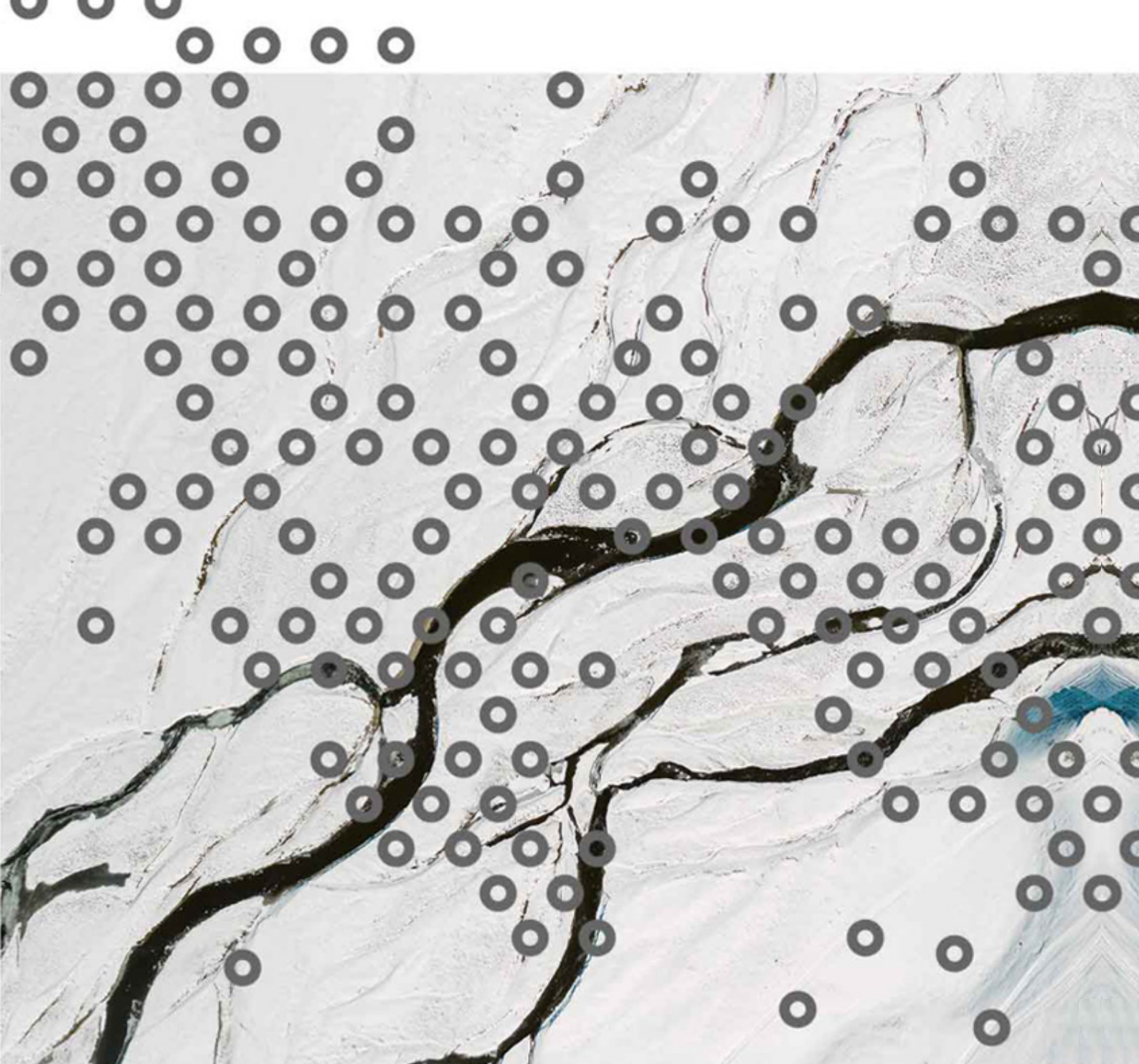
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ISBN 978-88-85556-23-2