

**“ETHICS? DESIGN?” BY CLIVE DILNOT IN STANLEY TIGERMAN (ED) *THE ARCHEWORKS PAPERS*,  
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BOOK REVIEW BY EDUARDO CÔRTE-REAL**

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“Ethics? Design?” is a 46, 000 word text resulting from a lecture by Clive Dilnot to the audience in Archeworks a School founded by Eva Maddox and Stanley Tigerman in Chicago. The author explains in an introductory note that he decided to preserve the lecture format because of pedagogical reasons. So the reader may expect to sometimes hear the lecturer. However, those not familiarized with the School of Frankfurt style mastered by Theodor Adorno, for instance, may expect some difficulties in reading it.

Only during the twentieth century the concept of “Design” gained its full global meaning, a century in which the human actions especially challenged the millenary notions of Ethics.

Clive Dilnot faces this demanding coincidence: When Design as a concept inflated up to the dimension of encompassing all of the artificial production, no longer being innocent in the existential drama, a century of unexpected methodic destruction and suffering occurs. Therefore, a reasonable number of thinkers about Ethics have something to say, or to be read, about design. On the other hand the particular audience of Archeworks is related with architecture by disciplinary institution linked to Ethics.

One must not expect in Dilnot’s text a simple engineered structure of arguments; the text has a complex musical structure, almost symphonic even though if only with two greater movements: The first digresses through the Ethical thinking of the past century ending with some chords, through the notion of *Heterotopia* that announce the second part, propositional in its structure. It can also be described as the confection of the *mille-feuilles gateaux* with arguments being folded and pressed, folded and pressed on and on.

The grand themes come from Giorgio Agamben and Herbert Simon in a permanent confrontation of content and form respectively. Agamben last exhortation about art becoming the *artness* of Design, in Dilnot’s argument, is consecutively constructed by a myriad of authors ramifying from Theodor Adorno and Martin

Heidegger. But it is Simon who delivers the pretext for all this with the “Sciences of the Artificial”. With the compromise of Design with Technique and *Productive Production*, the discipline becomes one of the “goodfellas” of the Faustian Artificial Mob.

The Holocaust, suffering, political insufficiency, cruelty and spectacle, all concur to a Moral of Design deriving from the ethical investigations of the author and the authors he confront.

Nearly five hundred years ago, Leon Battista Alberti wrote a dialogue in which he used the recently built dome of S. Maria dei Fiori in Florence as a metaphor for Virtue responding to a previous dialogue about the hazards of *Fortuna* beholding the ruins of Rome by Poggio. The echoes of the *Stoa*, the city gate-door where the Stoics met in Athens, revived in Florence inaugurated the Modern age afterwards crumbled in Auschwitz.

Apparently, *Apatia*, the Greek state of calm wisdom gave by the *Arete*, Virtue, is no longer enough. The Moral detachment of rational humanism present in the beginning of modern architecture, and consequently design, is no longer possible.

Victor Margolin in a responding piece in the same book notes that Dilnot pays little attention to a community of design thinkers only dialoguing with Gui Bonsiepe and Tony Fry (and Margolin himself, we might add. And apart from the fact that Giorgio Agamben teaches Philosophy at the *Istituto Universitario Autonomo di Venezia, Facoltà di Design e Arti*). As others did, Dilnot tries to build first hand theory from, mostly philosophy (political and social philosophy, ethics, philosophy of science, philosophy of art) playing the predatory game of collecting from the acclaimed (and not so acclaimed) authors the bits and chunks for a world vision. Dilnot’s recent interventions in ThRAD, DRS Wonderground and at the EAD 07 reveal a constant work in progress (*a mon a vis* to be resolved through a conclusive exploration of the issue of configuration, as the author acknowledges in page 111).

Dilnot’s text must be read, therefore not as a source book for designers interested in Ethics but as multiple door and window edifice to the vast realm of contemporary ethics where designers and design researchers should enter.

Nevertheless for those interested in the author’s sources and since the edition does not provides one, here is a list of references:

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