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### **Thomas Fisher, *Designing Our Way to a Better World***

Minneapolis, University of Minnesota Press, 256 pp. - May 2016

**Edoardo Fregonese**

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# Thomas Fisher, *Designing Our Way to a Better World*

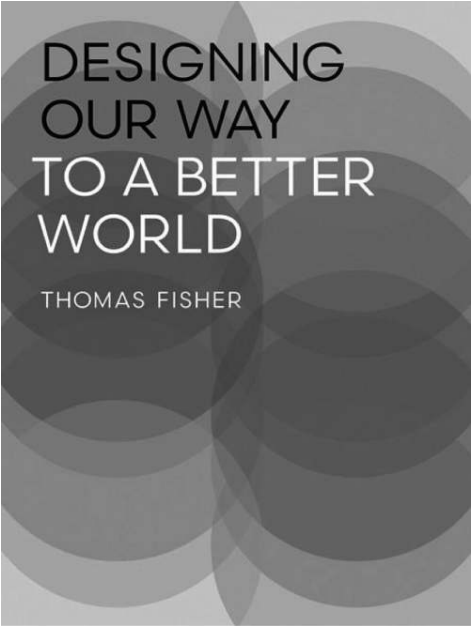
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Thomas Fisher, *Designing Our Way to a Better World*, Minneapolis, University of Minnesota Press, 256 pp. - May 2016 – Hardback: \$105.00 - ISBN 978-0-8166-9887-5 / Paperback: \$29.95 - ISBN 978-0-8166-9888-2

- 1 We usually consider that an object like design and a person like the designer have to deal with a very precise set of things: building, skyscraper, square, landscape, furniture and artifacts in general. In this book Thomas Fisher, Professor and Dayton Chair in Urban Design and Director of Metropolitan Design Center at Minnesota University, proposes a thesis which is contrary to the commonsense: design – and with it the work and way of thinking of designers – can apply not only to the “visible systems”, those structures which are actually tangible, as buildings and streets, but also the “invisible systems” can be subjects to the process of designing. The “invisibles” are the economic system, the political one, the educational, the information system and the health service. Fisher asserts that all of those systems are designed like the “visible” ones. He is telling us that a substantial part of our institutional reality (Searle, 1995; Ferraris, 2012) is designed, it has been put in place through a design: it exists because of a design.
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- 2 Thomas Fisher is not new to this kind of argumentations: in his previous book, *Designing to Avoid Disaster: The Nature of Fracture-Critical Design* (London, Routledge, 2013), the urbanist already showed the high degree of interconnections between structures and systems and the potentiality held by design in avoiding, literally, disasters which our commonsense makes us feel as “natural” or “unavoidable”. It is the case, for instance, of the episode of the Fukushima nuclear power plant in 2011, where the disaster has been caused by a violent tsunami. Here Fisher argues that it would be completely avoidable if and only if the system “nuclear power plant” had been designed by considering also exogenous factors, as the tsunami.
  - 3 The problem presented by Fisher in *Designing Our Way to a Better World* is that «too many systems have the same hierarchical rigidity and organizational inflexibility, and too many people suffer» (p. xi), and rigidity and inflexibility make the systems unable to adapt to changes, and this increases the suffering. For instance, the economic crisis a few years ago: a system, the economic one, had damaged millions of people and institution linked to it, and even today the effect of this collapse is still visible as well.
  - 4 In this field design can, for Fisher, intervenes. Given the fact that those systems are designed, they can be also subjects to re-design. Here we can find the power of the design in the construction of what surround us: through this instrument, Fisher argues, we can create our own way to a better world.
  - 5 The book presents those arguments non only from a theoretical perspective – Introduction and Part I are devoted to this purpose – but, from the second to the seventh part, Fisher applies what he sustained theoretically to the practice. For instance, in Part II, which is dedicated to the educational system, Thomas Fisher shows that in school there are not sufficient – or not at all – rooms for design thinking and

there is a missing link between the school, as institution whose main purpose is to educate people, and the community, the group whose citizens are part of and constitute it. The solution – or better, one possible solution – is to renew ties right through the design: schools, if they adopt specific educational program in design, could be the bearers of an added value which can be used within the community – within the same people who learn design thinking.

- 6 Final remarks. Fisher's book has two fundamental positive aspects. The first one relies on his writing, easy and far away from academia mainstream, the book – besides the fact that it could become a manual for policy-makers – is a collection of articles appeared in different editorial places and revisited for the publication in a single volume; the second great merit is the (successful) attempt to go from theory to practice. *Designing Our Way to a Better World* demonstrates and shows the importance and social utility hold by design. In fact, Fisher argues, only designing a better future would make this very future a real thing.
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