

Events

The P(r)o(bl)em. *Studying, Processing and Communicating Wicked Problems*

Adriano Magliocco

On 6 March 2026, the international symposium *The P(r)o(bl)em. Studying, Processing and Communicating Wicked Problems* was held at the Department of Architecture and Design of the University of Genoa, within the framework of the PhD Programme in Architecture and Design (fig. 1).

Curated by PhD candidates Elena Benedetto, Elena Geria, Tiziana Iorio, and Alessia Segalerba, under the scientific coordination of Enrica Bistagnino, Cristina Cándito, Maria Linda Falcidieno, Giovanna Franco (ADD - University of Genoa), and Valeria Menchetelli (Unione Italiana per il Disegno), the event provided an interdisciplinary forum for discussing the role of research and design in addressing contemporary challenges.

The symposium received the patronage of the Unione Italiana per il Disegno (UID), the Interdepartmental Centre for Visuality (ciVIS), and the Order of Architects, Planners, Landscape Architects and Conservators of the Province of Genoa, confirming the cross-disciplinary relevance that complexity currently holds within the fields of representation and design research.

The symposium's theoretical orientation was evident from its very title. *The P(r)o(bl)em* draws inspiration

from *The Solution* (2020), a work by artist and visual poet Anatol Knotek in which the word 'problem' transforms into 'poem'. This semantic shift suggests an alternative understanding of the relationship between problems and solutions, highlighting how many contemporary issues cannot be reduced to purely solution-oriented logics but instead require new forms of interpretation, narration, and design imagination.

The call for papers and images was structured around three main trajectories – *Studying*, *Processing*, and *Communicating* – conceived as complementary ways of engaging with complexity. The *Studying* trajectory focused on how problems are observed, described, and interpreted; *Processing* explored design as a device for mediation, transformation, and knowledge production; while *Communicating* addressed forms of representation, visualization, and narration of complexity. These trajectories were complemented by six cross-cutting themes: accessibility and usability in architecture and design; care and responsibility in communication practices; education and training; archives, memory, and contemporary heritage; material and cultural ecologies; and intersections

between the analogue, the digital, and artificial intelligence. Rather than defining separate domains, these thematic clusters functioned as an open framework, encouraging connections among contributions from diverse disciplinary contexts.

The symposium unfolded through two complementary moments. The morning session, held online and open to the public, featured three international keynote lectures; the afternoon session, held in person at the Department, engaged authors and participants in a collective experiment entitled *The Problem Atlas*. The overall structure proved effective in linking theoretical reflection and discursive practice, connecting the conceptual frameworks proposed by the keynote speakers with the representation of the issues emerging from the selected contributions.

The three keynote lectures offered distinct yet converging perspectives on complexity. In *A Medium that Thinks: Generative AI, Media Cognition and Artistic Creation*, Lev Manovich proposed an interpretation of generative AI as a new cultural medium endowed with its own forms of cognition. Artificial intelligence was described not as a passive tool, but as a system capable of participating

THE PROBLEM

studying
preventing
contemporary
wicked problems

We live among complex problems. Some are even wicked problems (Rittel & Wubbe, 1973). "malicious" challenges that escape linear solutions and require new perspectives. In this scenario, design is once again called upon to assume its role as a critical and relational practice: a tool for interpreting uncertainty and generating visions. The symposium *The Problem Becoming Poem* (2026) is a title that reworks Anatoli Knotek's artwork *The Solution* (2020), where problem and solution coincide in a linguistic gesture - opens a space for transdisciplinary dialogue. *Poem problem to poem*. Studying, Elaborating, Communicating: three ways of engaging with complexity.

1. 18-19-2026 - Welcome and Registration

1. 18-19-2026 - Institutional Overview

Adriano Bignardi (Director, Department of Architecture and Design)
Alessandra Bignardi (Associate Professor, Department of Architecture and Design)
Alessandra Bignardi (Associate Professor, Department of Architecture and Design)
Alessandra Bignardi (Associate Professor, Department of Architecture and Design)

Guests' Introduction

Adriano Bignardi (Director, Department of Architecture and Design)

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in creative and epistemic processes by suggesting configurations and relationships within a statistical space constructed from cultural data. The tension between creativity and control emerged as a central issue: while generative models expand possibilities for exploration, they simultaneously reduce the predictability of outcomes, challenging notions such as originality, authorship, and the uniqueness of the work.

In *Everything Not Saved Will Be Lost*, Tiziana Alocci examined the relationship between data, memory, and perception, showing how many of the phenomena shaping contemporary life remain invisible to ordinary experience. Through projects based on data sonification and multisensory translation, the lecture highlighted the role of design as a mediating practice capable of making informational flows, environmental processes, and technological infrastructures perceptible. Particularly compelling was the reflection on digital archives: what is preserved or forgotten increasingly depends on algorithmic infrastructures that influence the construction of collective memory.

In the lecture *From What to How: Investigating the Nature of Problems*, Silvio Lorusso critically questioned the very notion of the 'problem', distancing himself from the problem-solving rhetoric that has characterised much of twentieth-century design culture. Problems were presented not as objective and universal entities, but as cultural constructions emerging through processes of definition, selection, and representation. From this perspective, design is called less to produce optimal solutions than to make explicit the conditions through

which problems are formulated, bounded, and rendered visible.

The afternoon session translated these reflections into a workshop-based format through *The Problem Atlas*, a collective mapping device for the selected contributions (figs. 2, 3). At the centre of the space, a matrix generated by the intersection of the symposium's three trajectories and the six cross-cutting themes of the call was projected. Each author was invited to position their contribution within this coordinate system, identifying relationships, affinities, and tensions with previous interventions. The *Atlas* functioned as a process of shared knowledge construction, making thematic concentrations and transversal trajectories visible.

The analysis of the contributions revealed that complexity was rarely interpreted as a problem to be solved and more often understood as a condition to be explored, represented, and navigated. From the visualization of relational systems to the creation of living archives, from participatory practices to multispecies experimentation, the selected papers showcased a plurality of approaches united by the search for interpretative tools capable of making phenomena resistant to linear perspectives more intelligible. In this sense, the symposium confirmed that complex problems do not appear as stable objects but rather as dynamic configurations of relationships, temporalities, and viewpoints. The event concluded with the exhibition *The Problem Becoming Poem*, which gathered the images associated with the submitted contributions into a continuous visual sequence. The exhibition transformed the multiplicity

Fig. 1. Poster of the Symposium.



Fig. 2, 3. *The Problem Atlas*: collaborative mapping activity conducted during the symposium's participatory session. Authors were invited to position their contributions within a matrix structured around the three thematic trajectories and the six cross-cutting themes of the call.



of issues addressed throughout the symposium into an open narrative capable of stimulating imagination, interpretation, and dialogue. The transition from 'problem' to 'poem' thus did not correspond to the resolution of the problem itself, but rather to the possibility of making it shareable, narratable, and generative.

The keynote lectures, contributions, *Atlas*, and exhibition collectively presented complexity as an open, relational, and constantly evolving condition. The symposium's main achievement lay in shifting attention towards the problem as a shared space of exploration, suggesting that design can contribute not so much by closing open questions as by generating new possibilities for understanding and critical imagination. From this perspective, visualizing, narrating, mapping, archiving, and representing emerge as fundamental design practices for inhabiting contemporary complexity.

Author

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